HISTORY AND TOUR OF

PALM DESERT HISTORICAL SITES

APRIL 27, 2007
CITY OF PALM DESERT
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMITTEE
CITY COUNCIL BUS TOUR
APRIL 27, 2007

COMMITTEE (BOARD/COMMISSION) PURPOSE
The INTENDED purpose of this Committee (Board/Commission) is outlined in the newly developed Ordinance, which follows closely upon the purposes described for the BOARD, in the original Historic Preservation Ordinance No. 401: Chapter 29.05.010.

Rewritten Chapter 29.10, of Title 29, page 1, is as follows:

A. Foster civic and neighborhood pride and a sense of identity;
B. Safeguard and enhance the City's cultural, historic and architectural heritage;
C. Encourage and promote public knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the City's past and unique sense of place;
D. Promote private and public stewardship and use of cultural resources for the education, enrichment and general welfare of the people;
E. Promote and enhance the City's attractions to residents, tourists and others, thereby stimulating business and industry;
F. Stabilize and enhance property values and increase the economic benefits of cultural resources preservation to the city and its residents;
G. Promote public awareness of the value of rehabilitation, adaptive reuse, restoration, and maintenance of cultural and energy resources;
H. Identify and resolve conflicts between the preservation of cultural resources and alternative land uses;
I. Encourage new development that will be aesthetically compatible with cultural resources; and
J. Implement the cultural resources goals and policies of the General Plan.
PALM VILLAGE

Arthur Marion Thomas, eldest son of David and Matilda Thomas of Coachella, and his wife Susan Howell Thomas, "...with their Aunt and Uncle Charles and Susan McDonald..." were, in 1903, the first to receive a land patent north of Highway 11, "...one mile square...between Portola and Monterey." They sold this ranch in 1930 for $30,000.1

Settlers and homesteaders such as the McDonald family, joined county and federal governments, and the Southern Pacific Railroad as area land owners. King Gillette and his son King Jr., began to assemble land holdings from these owners in 1929. After they acquired various parcels they cleared desert growth and drilled wells for irrigation, built a large water reservoir and began to farm grapefruit and dates.

William A. Johnson, a long-time President of American Pipe and Construction Company, was the first developer. He acquired 440 acres of farmland from Gillette as repayment for a loan and about 1935 or 1936 Johnson began to subdivide, probably 50 lots, and he built about six homes. He hired landscape architect Charles Gibbs Adams to design the village area. The plan followed Adams’ earlier design, for the city of Beverly Hills, with curving streets. Such street served both beautification and a concept for residential streets, that continues to be utilized, called safe streets. (For example: De Anza Way, a grand beautification curve, is mirrored, slightly offset, across Highway 111 by Tommy Tomson’s, El Paseo built ten years later. Tomson was developer Clifford Henderson’s brother-in-law, and his landscape architect. Both from Los Angeles, they had opportunity to be knowledgeable of Adams style). Shorter internal residential street such as San Jacinto, San Juan, San Luis Rey curve northward. The village was about a mile long and one-half mile wide. The reservoir served as a swimming pool and there were tennis courts before 1943. A one story, stucco, wood framed building with a shingle hip roof, the Palm Village Tract Office, became the center of activity in the 1930’s and 1940’s. In the 1960’s realtors Hal Knapp and Ted Smith acquired it, removed a covered porch on the west and added a concrete office building.

In 1938 the Mollin Investment Company “purchased a half-interest and assumed management. In 1942 Johnson sold his interest to the Mollin Company and they named the area Palm Village.

Little sales or building activity occurred during the war years. In 1943 Marcus L. Godfrey, Jr. became part owner. The 1944 sales were up and by 1948 the entire 440 acres was subdivided. Two years earlier an additional 60 Gillette acres, facing Highway 111, was purchased. In March 1948 Mollin sold their interest, including the Palm Village Water Company, to I.C. Sterns of Palm Springs (and, Robert Hoffman?).2 The Palm Village Land company bought the remainder of the King Gillette-T. H. Rosenberger “Largest Date Garden In America”. In 1945 Southern Commercial Corporation filed a tract map for Palma Village Groves, east of San Pablo; Mollin Investment filed the Palm Village Garden tract in 1946; Amos J. Odell began Palm Dell Estates west of Monterey and Clifford Henderson formed the Palm Desert Property Owners Association, both in 1946. After four failed efforts in the 1960’s Palm Village was incorporated into Palm Desert.

More historical survey work remains to be done on this early area of what is now Palm Desert but, it is clear that an historical site sign must appear at a significantly visible public site.

Current use: Commercial and residential.

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1 Francis McCall Pearson - Special to the Indio Post "Early Coachella Residents built First Two-Story Home In Valley", n.d., n.p., found in the archives of the Historical Society of Palm Desert; see also Palm Village files
2 Letter. Christopher Hendra to Mr. Randall Henderson, December 19, 1969, in the archives of the Historical Society of Palm Desert. Much of the information in this description of Palm Village history is from the Hendra letter. Other information can be found in the archives of the Historical Society of Palm Desert.
Gillette Ranch
Home Site: Corner of Royal Palms Drive and San Anselm
Parcel: 627-061-035-2
Built 1932
Former: McDonald Ranch
Later: Palm Village

The Gillette Ranch of 480 acres was purchased in 1929. Owner is listed as King C. Gillette and his son King C. Gillette Jr.

‘Big Development by K.C. Gillette’
“Date Palm”, February 15, 1929

It is announced by Thomas H. Rosenberger, who is closely associated with King C. Gillette, that the property known as the “Old McDonald Ranch” on the Palm Springs highway and west of the Cook Date Gardens is to be highly improved by Mr. Gillette who is now the owner. It is stated that five new wells and six new houses are to be constructed at once. The wells are to be supplemented by seven and one-half miles of twelve and sixteen inch irrigation pipe line. The property has a frontage of one and a half miles on the highway and is a mile deep containing 480 acres.

It is also announced that 4500 grapefruit trees have been ordered for planting on the Gillette-Rosenberger tract near Indio. It is expected that these improvements will cost $500,000.
Diagram of Location of
First Palm Desert Market
As Described by Bob Keedy
To Jan Holmlund
Bergen Ranch and House
43-301 Portola
Parcel: 622-160-005-6
Built 1937

Clifford Henderson Stayed in this Home After World War II

Grapes and Alfalfa were grown on this working ranch that also served as the vacation home of the Bergen family. Edgar Bergen, a renown ventriloquist, was an early settler in the Palm Village area (north of Highway 111). The ranch was located along the southern edge of the Whitewater drainage. His California ranch house has a low pitched gable roof with wide overhangs. A porch, supported by 5 posts, extends nearly the entire length of the 3000 square foot wood frame and stucco structure. The morning room and family room are features of the 3 bedroom, 3 bath home. Formal gardens with date and orchid trees and roses were located around the home and nearby pool.

Bergen was one of the backers of the Palm Desert Corporation. Clifford Henderson was a guest at this ranch in the fall of 1944, when he returned to the state following his military service, before the founding of Palm Desert. In 1965 Bergen wrote his old friend that he had recently flown over the ranch and was surprised to see it subdivided with a trailer park in back; and, in the letter, he recalls Henderson accompanied him to some shows he gave for Patton’s soldiers “...across the highway which is now Palm Desert? At that time you said the land had great possibilities and went on to prove it.” He thought a plaque of Clifford would be an appropriate way to celebrates Cliff’s vision and his risky use of their money.¹

Current use: Private residence on one acre of land

¹Letter. From Edgar Bergen to Clifford Henderson, November 23, 1965; and “Press Enterprise” February 13, 1983
Bergen Ranch and House  
43-301 Portola  
Parcel: 622-160-005-6  
Built 1937

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This structure is an historic candidate for a wall or site plaque.
Current use: Private residence on one acre of land.

¹ Letter: Edgar Bergen to Clifford Henderson, November 23, 1965; and “Press Enterprise” February 13, 1983
George "Gabby" Hayes Home Site
44-853 Portola
Built 1939

A Known Early Palm Village House Site

There is much more to be learned about the six vernacular ranch houses that were located in Palm Village (north of Highway 111), prior to World War II. The builder was the Palm Village Land Company (Mollin Investment Company). Several of these homes were rented to wives of soldiers stationed at Camp Young, in 1941.¹ With some research, chapters of local history could be written about the early period of this area of Palm Desert; such as the short history recalled below.²

According to George Hayes' friend Lillian Phillips, he sold the house when Mrs. Hayes, actress Dorothy Earle, died in 1957. Other names associated with the Gabby Hayes house are Dorothy Thompson, Clarence, and D. Burdon. Dick Myhres built a concrete block addition to the house at some point. Phillips recalls that before George "Gabby" Hays took on his well known role, as an old-timer with his trademark beard, in popular Western movies, featuring Hop-Along-Cassidy, and Roy Rogers, he began his career on the stage where he sang and danced in a burlesque troupe. He made his first movie in 1929. He was a sportsman, very intelligent and had a great sense of humor. He liked wine--good wine--and he would drive to New York, get on a ship bound for France, buy a stock of wine, return to New York and drive back to California with his cargo. He enjoyed eating out at the local resorts with friends like Bill Boyd (Cassidy), and his lovely wife Grace. After he sold his home he lived in one, then the other, of the apartment houses Lillian managed for Bill and Grace Boyd.³

The address or locality of the six homes is an historical candidate for a site plaque commemorating the first housing development in Palm Village.

Current use:

¹ Riverside County Historic Resources Survey, January 1, 1981; Archives of the Historical Society of Palm Desert, California
² Letter, Christopher Hendra, Mollin Investment Company to Mr. Randall Henderson, December 19, 1969
³ Interview, Lillian Phillips by Jan Holmlund, April 2007
Old and Tall Palm Trees

One tree, commonly referred to as the “Tallest Tree in the World” is located on the Northwest corner of Portola and Highway 111. It was planted in front of what was then the Palm Village Inn (at other times named Angelos, Sunshine Fish & Liquor Restaurant, and Paar Five Restaurant). It is now the site of the Arco Mini-Mart and Service Station. The tree, planted by Millard Wright on the Portola side, was intended to draw the attention of passing motorists. At the time the former “Angelos” building was demolished three other tall palm trees, some of the first planted in the area, were also on the site. A plaque was requested of the city, in July of 1980, for the site, by the Historical Society of Palm Desert.

The Society was advised they would receive a letter from the City attorney (letter referred to by the Director of Public Works), and received a letter from the Director of Public Works in August 1980, referencing the property lines, and drawing a sketch of the proposed plaque site. But, in March 1981, the Society notes in its newsletter that it had joined with Desert Beautiful to ask the city to save the three tall palm trees.¹

The tallest tree is still in its original location. The other three trees and the plaque have not been discovered at this time.

A site plaque recognizing the height of the tall palm, and the absence of the palm groves that formerly lined Highway 111 would be appropriate.

Current: The tall palm stands where it was planted, now surrounded by concrete.

¹ Letter: Anne Carpenter, President of the Historical Society to Mayor Wilson, July 1, 1980; Letter: L. Clyde Beebe, P.E., Director of Public Works, August 27, 1980; Newsletter/Membership Application, Historical Society, February, 1981; Archives of the Historical Society of Palm Desert
Palm Village Market
Opened 1946
East Half of Gillette Reservoir Pump Shed
Owner: Mollin Investment Company
Manager: Bob Keedy

First Original Village Market

The original market, in Palm Village, opened in February or March 1946. It was located near the Gillette Ranch irrigation reservoir that used a gravity flow northward toward the grape, date and grapefruit orchards. The reservoir was built both 3 feet above ground and 3 feet under-ground and was used as the local swimming pool. A well that supplied water to the reservoir was back of the (now) Circle K on the north side of Highway 111, at San Luis Rey. Opened next to the reservoir, the grocery was in one-half of the long established pump building. Mollin Investment Company owned the store (and, the subdivision of 12 homes nearby, at the time Keedy came to Palm Village in December 1945). Bob’s friend Bud Godfrey owned a part of the business (Godfrey Food Company) but Keedy was not an owner. Godfrey sold out to a party by the name of Hughes (Hughes Markets?)

Mollin provided a freezer and an evaporative cooler for the full service store. Keedy had fresh produce and meat packaged in a store in Huntington Park or at a Santa Anita Oaks store. He always had bacon and butter when other groceries in the valley were out of those products. This first market was open and operated for a year.¹

The location of this first grocery along the frontage road north of Highway 111, between Portola and San Luis Rey is deserving of an historic site plaque.

Current use: Commercial

¹ Interview, Bob Keedy by Jan Holmlund August 14, 1993
Second Palm Village Market
74-104 Highway 111
Built: 1946
Owner: Mollin Investment Company
Manager: Bob Keedy

New Market Building

This was the first structure built to serve as a grocery market in Palm Village. Sometime in 1946 Mollin Company began construction. Other names Keedy associated with the building were Bud Godfrey and W. Andrews.

The investors wanted a big grocery store to serve the village. Bob Keedy helped move his small grocery operation from the reservoir pump house nearby to the new building that opened about 1947. Keedy remained as manager of the new Palm Village Market for 3 years. It was, as Bob liked to point out, a full service grocery market.¹

This location should be nominated for an historic building or site marker as the first structure built to serve as a grocery market.

Current use: Commercial (Wacky Wicker Furniture)

¹ Interview. Bob Keedy by Jan Holmlund August 14, 1993
Desert Magazine Building.
74-221 through 74-225 Highway 111
Parcel 652-112-007-0.
Built 1948
Owner Randall Henderson.

This Is The Single Most Important Historic Structure In The City of Palm

Desert

Pueblo Revival architecture. Architect: Harry Williams, of Williams and Williams. Palm Springs. Builder was R. P. Shea of Indio. T. Franklin Holifeld of Townes and Funk, of Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Martin Brothers of Brawley, California, Fred C. Smith of El Centro, California may have been involved in some part of earlier (probably pre-war) design influence. The architecture was deliberately selected following a very extensive and detailed investigation of pueblos and pueblo ruins throughout the southwest by Randall Henderson. Vigas project from the one story stuccoed exterior covered by a flat roof. Small windows carried heavy timber lintels. A huge entrance held a massive wooden door (since replaced). Carved above the entry portal ‘Friend or Stranger, You Are Welcome Here’ was typical of Randall Henderson, his love of the desert, and his renaissance personality.

Desert Magazine Building was the first commercial structure to be completed on the south side of Highway 111. At its official opening in October 1948 it housed the printing and publishing offices of “Desert Magazine”, and Desert Printers; an art gallery, gem shop and a book store were located near the entrance. John Hilton painted a mural in the office and the exhibit room. Evonne Riddell, daughter of Randall Henderson, managed the bookstore. Occupying 17,000 square feet, the imposing structure served not only as headquarters and publishers of the prestigious “Desert Magazine” but for other national publications and, the first local newspaper. The first federal post office authorized for Palm Desert resulted from heavy delivery to and from the Desert Magazine. “The Lapidary Journal”, Leland Quick, editor, joined the publishing house in October 1951; and, the first local bank (branch of Bank America) opened in the spacious quarters. Many groups, and community organizations including the local choir, and little theatre met in the welcoming interior.

This structure is an historic and architectural candidate for a wall plaque and a site plaque to be shared with the Randall Henderson Apartments (now Jillian’s) next door.

Current Use: Commercial.

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Randall Henderson Apartment Building
74-155 El Paseo
Parcel 625-112-005-8. Built 1948
Owner Randall Henderson

The First Apartment Building In Palm Desert: A Companion Structure To The Desert Magazine Building

William (Harry) G. Williams is credited with the architecture and R. P. Shea of Indio, California built the apartment structure. The pueblo revival architecture unifies the structure with Desert Magazine Building just to the south. Proximity in space and design was important: the big new publishing house and new apartment building stood imposing, but alone, together on the empty sandy site of the promising village.

Residents-to-be, the owners and staff of the "Desert Magazine" required housing and housing was not available in the newly found development of Palm Desert. Five apartments, each two bedrooms with bath, were arranged around a pool in the center courtyard.¹ A low wall of native stone, set in concrete, originally bordered the complex. The grounds were landscaped with date palms and native plants.

The Los Angeles Times of October 8, 1946 reported that Henderson originally acquired 40 acres on which he planned to locate two colonies: the first for 40 employees and the second for artists, writers, and photographers.

This structure is an historic and architectural candidate for a wall plaque and a site plaque to be shared with the Desert Magazine building next door.

Current use: Restaurant

Palm Desert Lodge
74-527 Highway 111
Built 1955
Subsequent Building 1967
Architect: John Moyer
Builder: Charlie White

A Period Sanctuary for the Motoring Public

Located on well-traveled Highway 111 connecting the many cities of the Coachella Valley with the west, east and south the ‘Pink Motel’ announces its mid-century lineage. Drawn in by the neon sign, itself a product of the period, motorist have found undemanding comfort in the informal motel that was designed for relaxation and simple ease.

Diagonal lines, v-shaped pipe supports, the shape of the sign and the glimmering neon symbolize the Googie style so new and important to road side business in a world suddenly unencumbered and free to speed along in their after-war automobiles. This particular sign serves as a calling card for the Lodge, and the city.

A motorist would drive-in and park near the single story structures, set back from the Highway, across cool green lawns set with a sparkling pool and swaying palm trees. Some families would stop at the local market and buy supplies to make a meal in the units with kitchenettes, other with the thought of having a barbeque after a cool swim. Local families registered out of town guests at the comfortable quarters.

In 1967 a new, two story concrete block structure was added to the northeast front corner. The pink colored building features ‘ding-bat exterior light’ fixtures and, decorating the walls are protruding blocks. Alan Hess, in “Palm Springs Weekend” notes ‘The clean symmetrical lines of a vernacular motel like the Palm Desert Lodge Motel in Palm Desert shows how widely acceptable modernism became in the 1960’s’.

This building has been offered for sale and may soon be destroyed to be replaced by a common commercial building surrounded by pavement and lights. It should be compared with the adaptive manner in which the Mojave Motel, 73-721 Shadow Mountain Drive, with its 24 guest rooms and suites has retained its 1940’s heritage, and continues to be an asset to the community in which it is located.

The Historic Preservation Committee is working toward an acceptable salvage agreement for period materials, including the road signage.

This area might be served by a site plaque, but that is dependent upon its future use.

Current use: Motor Lodge

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1 Palm Desert Historic Preservation Subcommittee Findings. Available at the City of Palm Desert
Greco House  
74-540 Monte Verde Way  
Built: Late 1950's  
Interior Currently Under Renovation

This is One of Two Cliff May Prefabricated Homes in Palm Desert

Cliff May and his partner Chris Choate created and patented the design for a prefabricated California style ranch house that was used in large tract developments. More than 15,000 of these houses were built in the United States. The architects used the modern, single story ranch house with post and beam construction, a low pitched roof, and a free flowing interior at one continuous level. "Sunset" magazine championed the post-war mass production and the style.

It is rare to discover an individual home using the building system; but, at the Greco home in Palm Desert, architect Bob Pitchford has discovered internal panels contain stencils proclaiming the design is protected by patent pending of Cliff May and Chris Choate. The original house was 22 by 46 feet and is located on the eastern half of the present structure.

It may be even more of a rarity to discover two May homes in the same small community. The Pritzlaff House, 73-493 Joshua Tree Street, built in 1949, by builder R. P. Shea is also a Cliff May home. Herbert Pritzlaff, the original owner, lived within a ranch-like compound that has since been altered. The U-shaped compound included extensive overhanging, roofed patios on the south, and was originally surrounded with a split-rail fence. A wall has been erected on the street side of the property.¹

The architects, the patented style, and the early date listed on these two properties allow them to easily become nominees for site or wall plaques.

Current use: Private residence.

¹ Information gathered by the Historic Preservation Committee of Palm Desert, 2006
Palm Desert Community Church  
74-020 Chicory  
Then  
45-630 Portola  
Parcel: 625-172-004-3  
Cornerstone Laid 1950

Original Name of Church: Shadow Mountain Community Church

Clifford Henderson donated one city block and financial help to build the mid-century desert modern church. Dr. John Robertson Macartney, founder and Pastor, officiated at the first service held at the site on Thanksgiving Day 1948. Mrs. Macartney provided the music. Members hauled rock, built pews, and landscaped the grounds. Bake sales were held to finance furnishings. A stone altar and large window framed the beautiful view of the San Jacinto Mountains. Early members were proud to have former President and Mrs. Eisenhower attend the church when they were in residence.

Some of the land was later repurchased by Clifford Henderson and sold to the Retarded of the Desert organization. Due to growth in attendance and with the aid of both Mamie and Dwight Eisenhower a new church was constructed off of Highway 74, south of the city, in 1968.¹

This structure is an historic candidate for a wall or site plaque.

Current use: The Religious Science Church of the Desert is now located on the original site.

¹ Historical Society of Palm Desert California. Archives.
Palm Village Vehicle Pool
Office of 243rd Ordinance Battalion
Built 1942  Destroyed 1944

Located on both sides of Portola, south of Highway 111, and extending into the mountains in the area of Deep Canyon. The vehicle repair was established shortly after an initial use of Deep Canyon as a practice area for deployment under air attack (bombs were dropped).

A total of 6000 vehicles and wheeled weapons arrived from the railroad distribution point in Indio, and from the far flung desert training areas in southwestern California, Nevada, and Arizona. Field guns and tanks, trucks, all the motor vehicles required by the Desert Training Center were maintained by this pool. The vehicles and weapons were ultimately disbursed to training units and divisions overseas.

The administrative office consisted of two large tents directly across Portola from present day Washington School. Most of the personnel stationed at the vehicle pool stayed in Cathedral City. The army ordered the entire Desert Training Center closed in April of 1944. The installation site was dismantled in 1944: east, south and north tent units, all well shafts, pumps, and other facility materials were removed as were administrative offices west of Portola. Some huge concrete emplacements for tank repair were left standing, west of Portola and south of Shadow Mountain Drive, after the army withdrew its occupation.\(^1\)

General Patton was given orders in February 1942 to establish the Desert Training Center, and two months later his headquarters, Camp Young, was operational. There were 11 camps located on the Colorado and Mojave deserts. Twenty-seven separate divisions were trained, both infantry and armored. General Patton left the Desert Training Center three months after headquarters were established and six months after he received his original orders. He left Camp Young, July 1942, to plan and command "Operation Torch" the North African campaign.\(^2\) Although the Center was huge with operations, airports, camps, and hospitals all over Riverside County, even bigger myths have developed around the General Patton presence in the area. Much like Gen. Washington he is (or his wife is) said to have stayed, slept, or maintained a primary office or home in numerous localities throughout the valley. The army gives credence to Camp Young (California Registered Landmark #985), and the Hotel Indio (recently demolished by fire) as quarters used by Patton or his wife.

The vehicle repair station was extremely important to the total war effort. Officers and soldiers, especially those in maintenance, who needed testing and training with equipment in a desert environment, were assigned and the equipment was brought in by rail and truck. Knowledge of actual use-time of vehicles, new and quick repair methods, and supply quotas was required by battlefield commanders. That information was quickly gained through the Palm Village Vehicle Pool.

Photographs of the motor pool site are on exhibit and in files at the Historical Society of Palm Desert; and, a plaque of questionable correctness, is located on a rock at the original Palm Desert Library, 45-480 Portola. Other, better site information should be supplied by one or more historical site signs along Portola.

Current use: Commercial, educational and residential.

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\(^1\) See Manuscript by Col. Robert Reid, responsible for the clean-up of the vehicle pool and other army installations in the area. He retired in Palm Desert and described his home as being the second house away from the old entrance to Shadow Mountain Club. This would be about the fourth house on Joshua Tree. Reid said the home was the seventh house built in Palm Desert. The manuscript and other material are located in the archives of the Historical Society of Palm Desert

On July 16, 1962 a 3700 square foot slab was poured to begin the library structure designed by architect John Outcault. The land, donated by Randall and Cyria Henderson, was offered in 1956, with the stipulation that it remain in perpetuity as a site for community activities. Cyria, as President of the Palm Desert Women’s Club in 1954, had sought pledges to support the part-time operation of a library (with books and librarian supplied by the county). She was successful in raising enough donations to pay monthly rental, and shelving expenses. By 1957 Riverside Public Library began to pay the rent on the growing “Palm Desert Branch”.

In 1958 a larger facility was planned for the donated site. An architect was named; a non-profit organization formed; and, once again the Women’s Club came forth with a heavy donation. The community divided over the issue of funding, voters refused to support a county service district. This led to several years of inaction until Outcault presented the complete architectural plans to the Palm Desert Community Library Association Inc. At this point the Board adopted Richard C. Kite’s recommendation of 1960, that the library be financed by a bank loan obtained through subscription. The loan was authorized and funding was obtained by signatures of guarantors; eleven guarantors were needed, twelve responded. Three years after it opened only $4,000.00 of the $40,000.00 loan remained.

Within seven years an addition was necessary. In 1972 John Outcault designed a wing addition to the east side. Cyria Henderson was generous, through gifts and loans, in the financial arrangements that named the annex for her deceased husband Randall. Upon completion of the Randall Henderson Memorial Wing, and with all debts paid, in March 1977, the transfer of deed for the Palm Desert Community Library was authorized and, within a year, the City of Palm Desert took ownership. The library moved to a new, larger location at the College of the Desert on March 9, 1996

This structure is an historic, and an architectural candidate for a wall and/or site plaque.

Current Use: Community Multi-Use Building

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1 See “Palm Desert Community Library” by Jan Holmlund, 1997, in Archives, Historical Society of Palm Desert.
Maryon Toole Home
Also Known As the Shindler House
44-870 Cabrillo Avenue
Parcel: 625-083-001-5
Built: 1947-1948

This Mid-Century Desert Modern Home was Designed by Renown International Architect Rudolph M. Schindler

Carefully landscaped and enclosed by a high wall this very modern home pulses with the feel of the surrounding desert and mountains. It is extraordinary to experience the beauty and comfort of this simple, elegantly conceived home built of concrete block and native stone.

In the evening, seated in the cool garden, one can gaze through the high triangular clerestory plate glass windows and watch the sun set over San Jacinto peak. The roof is supported by very large beams and an imposing, high entrance is shadowed in recess. A building that fits into the landscape so well it could be a garden room, guest house or garage, built apart from the house, balances the structural look of the property and offers protection from street noise. A full description of the house is attached to this introductory statement.¹

For many years the architecture of this house was credited to the genius of Frank Lloyd Wright, built and supervised by his associate Rudolph Schindler, and was listed in that manner on the Historic Resources Survey completed in January 1981.² The adjusted designation was determined by the Palm Desert Historic Preservation Committee in March 2005. It is hoped, that in the near future, more can be learned about this house from the archives of Rudolph Schindler.

This home and property must be nominated as an historic and architectural candidate for wall or site plaque.

Current use: Private Residence

¹See Sources on attached page. “Summary prepared by Jim West and the Palm Desert Historic Preservation Committee - March 2005
² Archives of the Historical Society of Palm Desert, California
Edith Eddy Ward home – Sun and Shadows Lodge
45350 San Luis Rey
Built: approx. 1950, later expanded
Architect: Herbert Burns

Terrific example of adaptive reuse of a building

This may be the first home noted Palm Desert realtor Edith Eddy Ward built in the city. She lived here prior to her home on Joshua Tree. Distinctive Arizona flagstone was used on planters and vertical privacy walls, which pierce the low, flat roofed structure. The building was expanded to become the Sun and Shadows lodge. It was considered deluxe for the time, with Pullman kitchens, air conditioning, heated swimming pool and television. The “V” shaped complex allowed for convenient parking along Larrea. In the 1990s the property was rehabbed by Fedderly Construction, who then used it for their office.

Current use: art gallery
Shadow Mountain Club
45-700 to 45750 San Luis Rey.
Parcel: 627-370-003-8
Club Opened December 1948

Shadow Mountain Resort Was Critical To The Development of Palm Desert

Designed by Tom Douglas of Hollywood, the original vernacular brick club house was surrounded by a lake, polo field, race track, and 18 miles of paved road. It was home to cottages, a golf course, tennis courts, stables and a famous figure 8 swimming pool. The long, low structure with an impressively large stone fireplace wall, restaurant, and bar has wide windows looking out on the pool below. Cabanas flanked each side of the pool that was enhanced with high diving boards and slides. The Board of Governors included many of the illustrious names on the Palm Desert Corporation: Justin Dart, Edger Bergen, Frank W. Biveley, Earl Coffman, E. L. Cord, Leonard K. Firestone, Emmett H. Jones, Henry Kink, Harold Lloyd, Dr. John. P. Lordan, Alden Roach, Stephen W. Royce, Donald Russ, Carl B. Spuier, William Lyman Stewart Jr., and Oscar A. Trippett. September 1963, Shadow Mountain Club sold to James M. Wenck for one-half million dollars. The largest stockholder was Clifford Henderson. That same year the Club had 20 cottages on site, each with 2 bedrooms, 2 baths, a living and dining area, and kitchen.¹

Shadow Mountain Club provided the single best source for immediate visual recognition of the benefits available to new residents of Palm Desert. It became a potent real estate exhibit, as well as the most popular, and exciting entertainment destination for movie stars, politicians, and families from the surrounding community could be found there on a daily basis.

The Club House and Resort are historic candidates for a wall (Club House), and a site plaque.

Current use: Resort

¹ See Los Angeles Times November 21, 1948; December 13, 1948; September 12, 1963; October 27, 1963; and. archives of the Palm Desert Historical Society.
William and Grace Boyd Home
Mid-Century Desert Modern
73-495 Joshua Tree
Built: Early 1950’s
Owners: William and Grace Boyd

This is the Home of the Famous Hop-A-Long Cassidy

William “Hop-A-Long” and Grace “Trip-A-Long” Boyd gave their house the characteristic black and white signature used by “Bill” Boyd; not only the exterior but the interior matched the color trademarks of this movie star cowboy. The one story dwelling retains its original color presentation and many of its original features, even within the remodeled interior. It is a single story vernacular wood frame and stucco residence so common to the desert environment. The roof is flat, and decorative concrete screens shadow the structure. An original low wall fronts the desert landscaped front yard.¹

Bill and Grace Boyd invested in other properties, such as two separate apartment complexes in Palm Village, and business structures in Palm Desert. Bill Boyd would often visit Ed Mullins, at the local pharmacy, and hand out his profiled metal nickels (about the size of a quarter) to youngsters at the soda fountain.² Not only was Boyd a national screen hero, he was a loved and respected local celebrity. The affection for his memory is continued in the hiking trail named for him by the City of Palm Desert.

The Boyd home should be compared environmentally and visually to the new dwelling next door.

This structure is an historic candidate for a wall plaque.
Current Use: Private Residence

¹ Archives, Historical Society of Palm Desert
² Discussions: Jan Holmlund with Ed Mullins (1990’s) and Lillian Phillips (2002 - 2007)
Ritter House
73-345 Juniper Street
Architect: George Ritter of Johnson and Ritter
Built: 1972

This home is distinguished by the extremely unusual circular dining room that rises out of the floor. The striking architecture of the house and its protective wall, as well as the sculpture within and on the grounds make this modern structure a rare and important candidate for historic preservation. Additional information is required before a completed survey becomes available.¹

The house is expected to meet local architectural criteria for a plaque. At its present age of 35 it will meet federal criteria in fifteen years.

Current use: Private residence.

¹ Historic Preservation Committee of Palm Desert, California
Monrad C. Wallgren Home
73-510 Pinyon Street
Parcel: 627-331-003-7
Built 1950

Vacation Home Of President Harry S. Truman

This California style ranch house was built by Jim Ramsey in 1950 for Governor (and Senator) Wallgren of Washington State. The house was built slightly below the street level. A tiled gable roof is broken by a huge fireplace chimney. Floor to ceiling windows and a recessed entrance supported by very large posts are features of the front view. The structure reflects the style of homes built in the early years of Palm Desert. It gains fame as a member of a list of homes visited in Palm Desert by Presidents of the United States. Wallgren was host to President and Mrs. Truman on two visits to the desert.¹ This structure is an historic candidate for a wall or a site plaque.

¹ Historic Resources Inventory, recorded by John Kennedy, May 5, 1982. File located in the archives of the Historical Society of Palm Desert, California
Walter White Designed House
73-199 Pinyon Street
Built: 1950's
Mid-Century Desert Modern

Walter White Is An Important and Prolific Palm Desert Architect

Now owned by a landscape architect this owner holds the original plans. It is a large single story with numerous windows and a large stone fireplace. It is an important and beautiful representative of the work of Walter White, a Mid-Century Desert Modern architect, who could easily be named the Community Architect or “Architect to Palm Desert”.

White came to Palm Desert and designed many homes in the 1940’s and 1950’s. During his early career in Detroit he became known as an industrial designer, inventor and architect. He worked in several architectural offices including those of Rudolph Schindler, and Albert Frey. His knowledge of engineering and experiments with strengths of steel and wood informed his local designs. One of his Palm Springs buildings was featured in the November 1957 issue of National Geographic.

A house built by White, referred to as ‘Walter White’s Experiment’ and ‘Walter White’s Dream House’, and now called the Miles Bates House located 73-697 Santa Rosa still retains its curved roof protecting the brick and stucco structure. There is another large house built by White at 72-925 Shadow Mountain Drive; it appears to be original. A smaller example of his homes is located at 73-325 Grapevine. The former Ole and Lillian Olsen home at 73-487 Grapevine burned, but the guest house built by White remains. Gloria Swanson, and Fred Waring are known to have occupied the house; and, Olsen’s son-in-law Bill Lear (inventor of the Lear Jet) was the second owner. White was the architect for Sun Lodge Colony, 73-535 El Paseo, now demolished. The count of his remaining buildings in the city currently stands at 24 and others may yet be counted.

Walter White’s contribution to the established style of Palm Desert living deserves, at the very least, an architectural historic district overlay zone honoring his numerous buildings, and their owners along Fairway, Joshua Tree, Hedgehog, Grapevine, Pinyon, Toro Peak, Peppergrass, Candlewood, Santa Rosa, El Cercado, Guadalupe, Las Palmas streets, Shadow Mountain Drive and Old Prospector Trail.

Current use: Most structures are private residences

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1 Reference “Current Investigation Site Listings” Palm Desert Historic Preservation Committee; and Architect Robert Pitchford
Outcault House
73-061 Joshua Tree Street
Built: 1968
Architect and Designer: John Outcault
Owner: John Outcault

**A Mid-Century Desert Modern Home**

The architect designed and lived in this home while he was engaged in the creation of numerous other important buildings in Palm Desert. The flat roofed wood and glass structure is located at the front apex of a large corner lot. The house bracketed by trees and fronted by a green landscape.

Among the many buildings Outcault designed were the original Palm Desert Library building and its addition; and, in 1959, the Palm Desert Christian Science Church. He designed an addition to the Joy house, at 73-355 Grapevine, the work of architect Albert Frey, and in 1970 placed a second story addition on the El Paseo building of Edith Morre. This architect was a very civic-minded person. He served on the board of Trustees for the College of the Desert; became involved in the task of the city incorporation; and was active in the development of the Living Desert.

Outcault accompanied his parents to Palm Springs in 1945. They purchased and operated the Estrella Inn and he joined the navy. John later attended USC, and then sought his fortune in New York City before he returned to live in Palm Desert in 1956. His papers and architectural plans are located in the archives of the Historical Society of Palm Desert.¹

This house deserves further survey information but it is probable it should be plaqued for the related architectural history.

Current use: Private residential

¹“Palm Desert Art and Architecture”, City of Palm Desert, April 2006 and Historic Preservation Committee, City of Palm Desert
Leonard Firestone Estate
73155 Fiddleneck
Built: 1950's

Firestone was one of the original investors in the Palm Desert Corporation

In 1945 Leonard Firestone joined Cliff and Phil Henderson, Edgar Bergen and others to form the Palm Desert Corporation. The Firestone estate features beautiful redwood beams and surfaces and a large circular driveway. The large 1.3 acre lot fronts Fiddleneck on two sides of the winding street. Singer Tony Orlando later owned this property.

Current use: private home
Pelletier House
73-297 Grapevine
Built: 1951 Remodel 1998
Owner: Adrian C. Pelletier

This is an Albert Frey Mid-Century Desert Modern Residence

The original chimney and standing wood-lined roof façade is visible on the pitched roof from the neighborhood street. Wood frame and stone support the horizontal design of the modern ranch house built for the founder and president of Purex Corporation. A garage has been added on the street side.

This structure is not only important for the early date of construction but for the design by an established and renowned architect. Frey came to New York in 1930 from the studios of Le Corbusier in Paris. He established a partnership with A. Lawrence Kocher, and, in 1934, he went to Palm Springs to supervise construction of one of their buildings. Five years later he decided he liked the desert. He became a permanent resident and formed several new partnerships. Palm Springs Modern Committee cites him with the design of the Palm Springs City Hall (1952); Tramway Valley Station (1949-1963); Tramway Gas Station (1965); and, numerous commercial, governmental and residential homes throughout the valley. He was one of the many prominent architects who were involved in the original 9 buildings begun in 1961, in Palm Desert, at the College of the Desert. The “Joy” house located at 73-355 Grapevine, built in 1952, is also an Albert Frey house with later additions by Palm Desert architect John Outcault. Numerous changes have occurred at the Joy home.

Survey investigation will reveal the extent of changes but the probability is that, at minimum, this house and perhaps others mentioned will be nominated for a site plaque.

Current use: Private residential.
This road that entered the Silver Spur area continued all the way up to Bing Crosby’s house, which was located at the southern end of Silver Spur. Crosby purchased 16 acres there in 1957 and moved into his home in 1958. President John F. Kennedy visited the Crosby home on three occasions. The Crosby home is now surrounded by Ironwood Country Club.
Palm Desert Fire Control Station
72-861 El Paseo
Original (Western) Two Bays Constructed 1950
Land Donated By: Clifford Henderson
In 1950 This Was The Only Building West of Highway 74
It Is The First Permanent Firehouse In Palm Desert
Building Plaqued: March 3, 1983

The first volunteer fire company was organized in 1949. Bob Keedy, was Chief of Volunteers and Kay Olesen served as Captain. The very first station/apparatus room was an abandoned real estate office and construction shed on the parking lot of East Prudential Plaza.

Clifford Henderson donated land on El Paseo for this, the first permanent fire house. Builders were fire fighters, both volunteers and county paid employees. Two bays were built: the most western served as an office and ready room; the second, with a high roof, was the apparatus (engine) bay. An addition built by fire fighter Larry Weingariner and Butch Harris added a two bedroom, single bath, kitchen, dining room and living room for the family of the employed fire fighter (Weingariner). A hose rack along the back of the property was built by Pat Walling.¹ The building has been structurally preserved by the City of Palm Desert.

This structure is an historic candidate for wall and/or site plaque.

Current use: Leased as Headquarters and Archival Center by the Historical Society of Palm Desert.

¹ Interview, Jan Holmlund with Larry Weingariner; files at the Historical Society of Palm Desert.
Sandpiper Condominiums
72-785 El Paseo, Gates A-G
Built: 1958-1965 (Phases 1-12)
Individual Owners: 306

Mid-Century Desert Modern Condominium

This early appearing condominium project was developed by Western Land and Capital Company, and designed by architect William Krisel, of Palmer and Krisel, who also was the landscape designer for the entire 45-55 acres. First structures were built by George M. Holstein and Sons, and, later, the firm of Kemp and Osburn. The original concept was of a resort hotel service with residential privacy; the hotel was never built.

Post and beam construction featured exposed ceiling beams supporting a flat roof that extended out over the patio. Lath and plaster walls incorporated clerestory windows, and sliding glass doors. Each home was designed to offer an unique exterior. Concrete block walls with patterns and cutouts provided privacy. All utility lines were underground. Indoors each owner of the larger 2 bedroom 2 bath (extended after 1960 to 3 bedrooms in offerings in Unit 5), enjoyed the finest technology: full refrigerated cooling, electric range, oven, refrigerator, and garbage disposal. The intent was to provide carefree and elegant neighborhood living in full view of the surrounding mountains and desert. Nighttime lighting was held to a low level to insure visions of sky and earth. The initial design “… incorporated 8 three-unit, single story pin-wheel shaped buildings clustered around a common area.”, after 1960, 8 single story buildings each containing two units.¹

William Krisel was the original architect of the “Alexander” homes. His firm Palmer and Krisel designed projects for the Alexander family, builders in the 1950’s.

The development has been featured in high profile magazines, photographed by equally high profile photographers, and provided the architect with important awards from his peers. The new city of Palm Desert gained fashionable and convenient housing; and, also, the original Sandpiper sales building, on the southwest corner of Highway 74 and El Paseo, once the first city hall, now an historic site.

The project provided the owners and the community with well conceived and beautiful homes that continue to furnish a substantial and fitting example of excellence in urban housing and landscape planning.

This condominium project is a candidate for a site plaque.
Current use: Private residential.

¹ Historical Narrative and Exhibit developed by Jim West, located in the Archives, Historical Society of Palm Desert
Sun Lodge Colony
73-535 El Paseo
Parcel 627-621-002-0 Built 1949-1950
Owner: Palm Desert Corporation

**Sun Lodge Colony of Individually owned Dwellings was the First Condominium Type of Development Built in the Entire Cove Area**

Sun Lodge Colony site occupied 10 acres bounded by Shadow Mountain Drive (S), San Pablo (W), El Paseo (N), and Larkspur Lane (E). Thirty-five cottages were constructed under the direction of Clifford Henderson and his financial backers by 1953. Walter White is credited with the architectural style. Ultimately there were 60 units of one story vernacular wood frame and brick or wood frame and concrete block, with gabled roof and attached garage placed on leased land. Wide picture windows and decorative concrete block walls gave variety to the simple structures that were carefully situated within the expansive landscaped area of lawns, pool, and drives. The pool became a gathering spot for owners who used the homes on week-ends or as second homes.¹ The "Palm Desert Post" noted that condominium units share a common garden, pool, walkway, and driveway areas.² Scheduled demolition began in 1985 and the last land-leased cottage was demolished in 1993.

This area is a candidate for an historic site plaque.
Current use: Shopping Mall: The Gardens on El Paseo

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¹ Historic Sites and Markers Survey, January 9, 1981; and Sun Lodge Colony file; both held in the archives of the Historical Society of Palm Desert, California
² No date is given on the copy of a map, in the possession of Jan Holmlund, of condominiums in the Cove Communities published by the "Palm Desert Post". It lists Marrakesh as the leader with 450 units at that time. See also "Press Enterprise 5/22/85"
J Russell Salon
45-145 San Luis Rey
Built 1966
Owner: T.A.C. Corporation
William F. Cody
Bob Pitchford Remodel 1985
O’Donnell and Escalante Remodel 2005

William Cody was educated at USC, then worked with architect Cliff May before he moved to Palm Springs and built his first project in 1947. He converted the Thunderbird Dude Ranch to the Thunderbird Country Club, and then designed the Tamarisk and El Dorado Country Clubs, the Palm Springs Library, St. Theresa Catholic Church, other commercial structures and multi-unit developments, and numerous residences. It is thought that there may be several Cody structures designed, other than the Salon, in Palm Desert. More research is required at this point.

Cody’s modern design on this structure has delivered more than forty years of commercial value. A fine example of the architects desire to provide a structure with an extremely thin roof. Materials include glass, steel, wood, slump stone and natural landscaping.

The original project was one of thirteen commercial units called the Town and Country Shopping Center. Some of the area has been enclosed or remodeled and a building was added in 1985. Changes were made in 2005 that were a part of the City sponsored façade improvement program. Exterior renovation was sympathetic to the architectural intent; exterior wood treatment received the same beading and surface look of the original wood requiring replacement.¹

This structure is a candidate for an historic architectural plaque.
Current use: Commercial

¹ Palm Desert Historic Preservation Subcommittee Findings. Available at the City of Palm Desert
College of the Desert  
Monterey Avenue and Fred Waring Drive  
Founded: 1958  
Building Began: 1961  
Classes Began: 1962  
First President: Dr. Roy C. McCall

This is the First Institution of Higher Learning in the Coachella Valley

After the presentation of several site choices, and the court cases which followed, land was selected and purchased for the Junior College, and nine buildings were designed. The cost to create the College District and the first phase of campus development was financed through bond issues totaling $5.5 million.¹ Building began in 1961, after 3 years of study and planning.

The basic campus design was by John Carl Warnecke and Associates of San Francisco; site development including utilities and coordination was by John Porter Clark; working drawings and site supervision was Williams and Williams, Frey and Chambers, Wexler and Harrison J.C., clearly this was considered a large undertaking. Yet the first classes were able to assemble by the fall of 1962. There must have been a very great deal of architectural cooperation to have achieved the short deadline. The creative arts building designed by architect Robert Ricciardi was added in 1976. Thirty-one years later both design and construction continue as growing numbers of students coming from an increasing and changing population arrive, and new technological demands require specialized and enlarged spaces. Still, the cool arcaded passages along the new and old buildings will remain to shade the long walkways.

Five years from now the campus will enjoy its 50th birthday, planning should begin for an appropriate site plaque.

Current use: Junior College.

¹“Los Angeles Times”, January 24, 1964; and, Archives, Historical Society of Palm Desert
Odell Ranch Home
43-500 Monterey
Parcel: 622-160-001-2
Owners: Amos and Nell Odell

Former Residence of the President of the College of the Desert

There were two houses on the Odell ranch when it was sold to the Coachella Valley Junior College District. The largest, a prairie style, two story concrete block dwelling, home of the Odell family and also the ranch headquarters, was built by Carl Hansen; it survived to become a residence for the first President of the College of the Desert.¹

Although various years have been given for the 3500 square foot construction it was probably built between 1948 and 1951. The ground story extends in 2 wings as a base for the smaller second story. A recessed wide doorway and windows accent the front facade. There were 7 rooms: including 3 bedrooms. The 3 baths, powder room, laundry and two storage rooms were not included in the room count. Refrigerated air conditioning and an attached two car garage were among the modern conveniences. The house was sited on 10 acres of landscaped ground surrounded by the entire ranch of 120 acres offered for the proposed college. The value of this structure, the owners’ residence, was estimated at $100,000 in 1958.²

This structure is an historic candidate for a wall plaque or a site plaque.
Current use: Meeting space and storage, College of the Desert

¹Indio Daily News, October 17, 1973; Los Angeles Times, January 24, 1964
²Letter from A. J. O’dell to David McGahey, September 1, 1958