



City of Palm Desert  
Department of Building and Safety  
73-510 Fred Waring Dr., Palm Desert, CA 92260  
(760) 776-6420  
Fax (760) 776-6392

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## Historic District Designation Application

Thank you for your interest in the City of Palm Desert's cultural resources designation program. Cultural resources include buildings, structures, sites, signs, objects, and streets that are of historic or archaeological significance and help interpret the city's rich history. To help preserve this past for the future, we encourage property owners to participate in the City's stewardship efforts as led by the Cultural Resources Preservation Committee.

This packet is designed to assist you in completing the cultural resources designation application. The Cultural Resources Preservation Committee and the Administrator are available to help you. If you have any questions, please contact the City of Palm Desert at (760) 776-6420.

### **This application packet includes the following:**

- Cultural Resources Nomination Application - Historic District
- Instructions for Completing a "District" Cultural Resources Nomination Application
- Cultural Resources Ordinance Excerpts (Title 29 of the Palm Desert Municipal Code), including criteria for Historic District
- Researching a Historic Property
- Sample Historic District Description and Statement of Significance
- How to Photograph Historic Districts



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## Historic District Cultural Resources Nomination Application

1. District Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### APPLICANT INFORMATION

Preparer: \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsoring Organization (if any): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Applicant (s): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date form prepared: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Attach additional sheets as necessary)

### DESCRIPTION

2. Boundary Description: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Boundary Justification: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Physical Description: \_\_\_\_\_

**SIGNIFICANCE**

5. Theme: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Period of Significance: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Narrative Statement of Significance: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

8. References

9. Photographs

# **Historic District Instructions for Completing the Cultural Resources Nomination Application**

1. If there is a historic name for the district property, note that here.

Please fill out the next section of the form, noting who prepared the form, what organization you represent (if any), address and where to contact you by mail or telephone, and the signature of the applicant(s).

2. Describe the boundary limits of district and attach map showing boundary and district elements.
3. Boundary justification.
4. Discuss the physical description and overall coherence of the district, its setting, visual characteristics, and minor features. List all elements of district.
5. Discuss significance and period of the district's importance in terms of its historical context as defined by theme.
6. Discuss the period of significance, and geographic scope. Also address the integrity of the district as a whole.
7. Provide a narrative statement of significance.
8. References.
9. Photographs. Show representative streetscapes or vistas, and major contributors. Please label each photograph with the name of the property.

**Cultural Resources Ordinance (excerpt)**  
**Title 29 of the Palm Desert Municipal Code**  
**Criteria for the Designation of City Historic Districts**

**29.50.010 Historic District designation criteria.**

A historic district, either geographic or thematic, as defined in Chapter 29.20 with the written consent of the property owner may be designated as such by the City Council upon the recommendation of the Committee if, after completion of a survey, it is determined that the district represents a significant and distinguishable entity that at the Local, State, Regional, or National level:

- A. Exemplifies or reflects special elements of cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, architectural, or natural history; or
- B. Is identified with persons or events significant in history; or
- C. Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction, or is a valuable example of the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship; or
- D. Represents the work of master builders, designers, or architects; or
- E. Reflects distinctive examples of community planning or significant development patterns, including those associated with different eras of settlement and growth, agricultural, or transportation; or
- F. Conveys a sense of historic and architectural cohesiveness through its design, setting, materials, workmanship or associations; or
- G. Is an archaeological, paleontological, botanical, geological, topographical, ecological, or geographical resource that has yielded or has the potential to yield important information in history or pre-history.

## Researching a Historic Property

Research will not only help you develop a narrative history of your property, but will also place the property within the appropriate historic context. In addition to completing building specific research, you should also read some general histories of the Palm Desert area to determine where your property fits into the city's history. Visit the [Historical Society of Palm Desert](http://www.hspd.org/history_pd.html) website @ ([http://www.hspd.org/history\\_pd.html](http://www.hspd.org/history_pd.html)) and "Bibliography of Resources" for additional information. At the completion of your research, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- **What is the historic name of the property?**
- **When was the property constructed (circa date is acceptable)?**
- **Who designed the property? Who built it? Are they well known for their skill or expertise?**
- **How many buildings, structures, and other resources make up the property?**
- **What changes have been made over time and when? How have these affected its integrity?**
- **How large is the property, where is it located, or what are its boundaries?**
- **Was a landscape architect associated with the property?**
- **What is the current condition of the property, including the exterior, grounds, setting, and interior?**
- **How was the property used during its period of significance, and how is it used today?**
- **Who occupied or used the property historically? Did they individually make any important contributions to history?**
- **How does the property relate to Palm Desert's history?**
- **Were there any important events that occurred at the property?**
- **Was there a community function or group associated with the property?**
- **Is it a rare building or architectural type, or is it representative of many other properties in its vicinity? Is it a fine example of style, craftsmanship or details?**

There are many sources that can be used to research a historic property. The following is a list of the most common locations within the City of Palm Desert and Riverside County that may have information regarding your property:

1. Building permits are available at the City's Building Department. Permits may indicate original construction date, owner, and architect or builder and provide information on additions and alterations. Building and Safety may also have information related to relocation or demolition of a building.
2. [Historical Society of Palm Desert](#), 72-861 El Paseo Dr., (760) 346-6588
3. [Riverside County Assessor's Office](#), County Administrative Center, 4080 Lemon Street. Assessor's records indicate ownership and construction dates.

# Sample Historic District Description and Statement of Significance

## Somerset Drive Historic District

### District Description

Somerset Drive Historic District is located east of Victoria Avenue and west of the Tequesquite Arroyo between Cridge Street and Woodbine Street. The district is comprised of 23 properties. The addresses range from 4705 to 4858 Somerset. Only three properties in the district are non-contributors – two include residences built outside of the period of significance for the district ((4796 Somerset, 1979 and 4840 Somerset, 2002) and one is a vacant lot (4798 Somerset). The residences are one to two stories in height and generally represent the variety of architectural styles popular in Riverside during the period of significance, 1911 to 1952. These include Craftsman, Moderne and various Period Revival styles such as Spanish Colonial, Mediterranean, Pueblo, Tudor, and Monterey. Post War architecture is also represented in the form of Minimal Traditional style residences.

Somerset Drive is situated at the edge of the Tequesquite Arroyo and overlooks Victoria Club. It is a 30-foot wide street, which gently curves and is shaded by mature trees and landscaping, isolating the neighborhood from the larger residences of the arroyo's south side and the Victoria Country Club. The topography of the street is varied, with the west side of the street being flat, and the east side sloping down toward the arroyo. This allows for the residences to be situated at unusual angles and elevations in relation to the street. The noncontributing residences are located on the east side of Somerset and are not visible on the street as they are at the bottom of the arroyo. The contributing residences have setbacks of approximately 35 feet with well manicured lawns and mature landscaping. Some contributing residences on the east side of Somerset are below street level without a discernable setback and are surrounded by mature trees. Detached garages are a common feature of the properties and are designed in the style of the primary residence. The garages are generally visible from the street. Driveways vary from modern to Hollywood, with some paved and some gravel. The streetscape does not include street trees, parkways strips or sidewalks although there are concrete curbs. Fencing or low walls are common and materials range from brick and stone to wrought iron. Town and country style street lights are spaced at regular intervals along Somerset Drive. The district maintains a high degree of integrity of design, feeling, association and setting.

### Statement of Significance:

Somerset Drive Historic District includes an intact grouping of 20 single-family residences which reflect excellent examples of the wide variety of architectural styles popular in Riverside, and Southern California generally, during the first half of the 20th century, specifically the period from 1911-1952. It showcases high style examples of Period Revival style architecture including Spanish Colonial, Tudor, Monterey, and Pueblo. Every house on the street has a view of Tequesquite Arroyo and the Victoria Club, situated on a unique location at the slope of the Arroyo. The entire neighborhood conveys a sense of historic and architectural cohesiveness in its representation of the aforementioned styles, as well as its overall design and setting. The district, therefore, is eligible for local designation under Criteria C and H of Title 20 and is also eligible for

listing in the California Register of Historical Resources under Criterion 3. Additionally, three of the residences are individually designated as Structures of Merit, and five others have been determined eligible for designation as Structures of Merit.

There were only a few homesteads on the plain east of Riverside's Mile Square until the Gage canal spurred residential subdivision and development. Priestley Hall, then an assistant engineer of Matthew Gage, purchased 280 acres of land encompassing much of southern Eastside. This portion of Hall's addition was first divided in 1888, and Hall created his own small water company to provide Gage canal water to his subdivisions. Hall later built his imposing Victorian mansion - Rockledge, on Ivy Street, just south of Hall's addition.

Matthew Gage went on to subdivide Arlington Heights on either side of Victoria Avenue for citrus. In 1891 he collaborated with Hall to build a bridge across the Tequesquite Arroyo in order to connect the brand new Victoria Avenue with downtown. The wooden bridge became known as the Victoria Bridge, and was later reconstructed from steel in 1928. The Victoria Bridge would provide the homes of Somerset on the north side of the bridge a connection to the wealthy estates on Victoria Hill on the south side.

The Victoria Club, organized in 1903, constructed their country club and golf course along the bottom of the Tequesquite Arroyo. The proximity of manicured greens and "high society" undoubtedly influenced developer A.D. Clark to subdivide division "C" of Hall's addition in 1910. Division C was the portion that included the arroyo's cliff face as well as part of the arroyo later sold to the Victoria Club for further expansion. Clark's subdivision featured the creation of lots along Victoria Avenue, and the construction of a new street along the edge of the arroyo named "Clark Street." Another subdivision the following year connected the new street to Victoria Avenue. In 1925, the street name was changed to "Somerset Drive."

Although the street's first house was built in 1911, Clark's lots did not see substantial development until the 1920's. These were mostly high-style homes that featured popular Period Revival styles. Styles such as Spanish Colonial Revival and Monterey came into vogue following the 1915 Pan Pacific Exposition in San Diego. The same building materials could be used in several stucco and tile based revival styles, such as Mediterranean and Pueblo, both of which are represented in the district. Another popular Period Revival style was based on old world cottage architecture, represented in this district by several Tudor Revival homes. The turn of the century Arts and Crafts movement resulted in the proliferation of Craftsman Bungalows from as early as the 1900's, but their popularity continued well into the 1920's. Craftsman Bungalows in this district represent a substantial time span of the style's popularity. The decorative and stylistic nature of these styles waned through the 1930's and 40's, as the realities of the depression necessitated more economical designs. Postwar construction became centered on innovations in construction and design that left the period styles in their 1920's heyday. Somerset District represents a fine example of this heyday.

The overall design quality and attention to detail suggests that most of the houses in the district were architect designed. Unfortunately, this information was not always provided on building permits. Two residences have been identified as the work of well known local architects including Robert Spurgeon ((4795 Somerset) and G. Stanley Wilson (4710 Somerset). A third residence was designed by the Barker Building Company headquartered on Rockledge Drive.



Permit records indicate that the homes on Somerset Drive were valued at an average of \$5,000 in the 1920's, with some valued at as much as \$15,000. This is substantially higher than the average value of nearby construction. In 1925, an average 1500 square foot bungalow would cost \$1,500. City Directory research indicates that the heads of household for Somerset addresses worked in professional fields: attorney, chemist, engineer, physician. Somerset Drive was a street where upper-middle class professionals built custom designed homes to accommodate the topography of the area, with views of the Victoria Club golf green. The residents of Somerset Drive occupied a unique position, between the wealthy mansions of Victoria Hill, and the more modest homes of the Eastside working class.

## How to Photograph Historic Districts

Photographs are required as part of the Cultural Resources designation application. These photographs will be used to document the appearance and condition of the property. Since the photographs will remain in the Building Department files as part of the permanent record of a property, it is important that some consideration be made to their quality and permanency.

**Camera:** For quality photos, a 35mm camera should be used. A simple point and shoot is sufficient; however, a manual-focus stabilized with a tripod will produce better photos. Be aware of the lighting, and make sure that features are not obscured by dark shadows. Digital Photos are now acceptable for designation applications. Please submit on a CD and label all views.

**What to Photograph:** Photograph each elevation of the building at least once, and photograph architectural details. Make sure that what you describe in the architectural description is shown in the photographs. Step back and take a few broader view photos to show the property's setting and surroundings. Photograph interior features that you feel are significant. For historic districts and neighborhood conservation areas context views showing streetscapes help give a feel for the overall character of a neighborhood. Include features such as setbacks, street trees, streetlights and other defining features such as retaining walls, fencing, etc. District photos should also show examples of representative buildings and various architectural styles that contribute to the district's significance.

**Labeling:** Label each hard copy print **in pencil** with the address of the property, the date the photograph was taken, and the view. Attach them to the nomination in an envelope. Do not staple, clip or glue the photographs to your application.

**Historic Photographs:** Include copies of historic photographs if any are available. Please date them as best as you can. If you cannot date them, mark them "date unknown." These will help illustrate changes, if any, that the building has undergone.

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**For more detailed information on architectural documentation photography please see "How to Improve the Quality of Photographs for National Register Nominations," a National Register Bulletin available from the U.S. Department of the Interior.**

## Historic Contexts of the City of Palm Desert

The City of Palm Desert was founded on the south side of Highway 111 in 1945-1946. It was founded by four brothers, Randall, Carl, Clifford, and Phil Henderson, who hoped to follow in the footsteps of neighboring communities, such as La Quinta, Rancho Mirage and Palm Springs, and establish a winter resort for Hollywood celebrities. The Henderson brothers were involved in early development, and organized the Palm Desert Corporation to promote their new desert town, and by 1947, the population was sufficient to establish a post office. Randall donated land for the community's first library on Portola Avenue. Clifford donated the land for the first fire station on El Paseo, which currently (2003) serves as the home of the Historical Society of Palm Desert. Clifford was also the developer of the Shadow Mountain Club on San Luis Rey, which attracted movie stars and tennis pros.

In 1951, Palm Village and Palm Desert merged into a single community, forming the present urban core of the city. Around that time, the community of Cahuilla Hills emerged on the west side of Highway 74, just southwest of Palm Desert. In addition, several tracts of land south of the railroad and in the area between the Little San Bernardino Mountains and the Indio Hills were settled. After four unsuccessful attempts, the City of Palm Desert was incorporated in 1973 and became the 17th incorporated city in Riverside County.

### Historic Sites in the Planning Area

Analysis of previous cultural resources studies indicates that, of the 138 archaeological sites recorded in the planning area, 13 are historic-era sites. These are primarily comprised of trash scatters, although structural foundations, a road, and a water conveyance system have also been recorded. Among the historic sites are the Southern Pacific Railroad and other nearby features associated with the railroad. Several sites associated with the construction of the Colorado River Aqueduct in the 1930s have been recorded in the vicinity of the Little San Bernardino Mountains.

From 1981 to 1983, the Riverside County Historical Commission coordinated a countywide historical resources reconnaissance, which led to the recordation of 30 historic sites in the planning area. These include a well site that dates back to 1912, the Cavanagh Adobe building that was built in the 1920s, and single-family residences constructed in the 1930s and 1940s. Most of these sites are located near the city center of Palm Desert, although several are located outside the present day city limits.

Although the City of Palm Desert does not maintain a list of officially recognized or designated local historical landmarks, the Historical Society of Palm Desert has compiled a list of 21 sites of local historical significance. The list includes sites ranging from early homesteads to mid-twentieth century urban development. They are concentrated in the central urban core of the City, and only a few are located in outlying areas. The majority of the sites were recorded on the California Historical Resource Information System during the countywide survey in the 1980s.

## Bibliography of Resources

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### Architectural Guides

Blumenson, John J.-G. *Identifying American Architecture: A Pictorial Guide for Styles and Terms, 1600-1945*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981.

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### **General Sources**

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McKee, Harley J. *Recording Historic Buildings*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1970.

National Register of Historic Places Bulletins. The National Park Service publishes a number of bulletins designed to assist people in writing nominations for the National Register of Historic Places. Many of these are available by writing to the National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127.

Weitze, Karen J. *California's Mission Revival*. Los Angeles, Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1984