

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

DRAFT

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property O'Donnell, Thomas, Residence

historic name O'Donnell, Thomas, Residence

other names/site number Ojo del Desierto

2. Location

street & number 447 Alejo Road (Access via private road from Palm Springs Art
Museum north parking lot)

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

not for publication

city or town Palm Springs

vicinity

state California code _____ county Riverside code _____ zip code 92264

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national **statewide** **local**

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

O'Donnell, Thomas, Residence
Name of Property

Riverside County, California
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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Category: Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals

Sub-category: Colonial Revival / Monterey Style
variant

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Concrete

walls: Concrete and cement plaster

roof: Variegated Clay Tile

other: Wrought Iron

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Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph: The 1925 Thomas O'Donnell Residence was the first Palm Springs building to be constructed above the valley floor on the lower slopes of Mt. San Jacinto. The steep hillside lot, approximately 200 feet above the village that, at the time was the highest elevation of any Coachella Valley building site. The site fans out to the south and west of the house to a lawn area bordered by boulders. A cactus garden that was established when the house was built is located near the house. The rear (west) facade was built within six feet of the sheer mountain face and cannot be easily viewed. The construction is of concrete block faced with cement plaster. Significant features include the floor plan, an L-shaped form surmounted by intersecting gable roof forms covered with variegated clay tile in reds and browns. Other significant features are the trim-less, frameless windows and doors that are recessed into the thick masonry walls; they are constructed of wooden components and are single glazed. The curving balcony on the principal facade at the second level is also included among the building's character-defining features. The two-story, four-bedroom, 4,100 square foot residence is approximately 100 feet long by 20 feet deep with an orientation that is about 15 degrees out of north-south alignment, resulting in a structure whose principal facade faces southeast to maximize views from all of the rooms. The 150' x 150' site contains 22,500 square feet, roughly half an acre. A comparison between historic and contemporary photographs reveals the property is essentially unchanged from its original appearance with two exceptions: on the first floor, a roofed patio area has been enclosed with French doors, and on the second floor, an enclosed sundeck has been roofed over. These changes occurred in the 1940s and have acquired historic significance in their own right. As the last intact surviving structure of the Desert Inn complex, the building represents a development pattern that parallels Palm Springs' growth from a tiny rural village to a city of national prominence. The building is the important surviving component of the large building compound known the Desert Inn, the village's first luxury resort hotel which fueled the growth of the village. (See Continuation Sheets)

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Events: Evolution of rural village to resort city

Period of Significance

1925-1946

Significant Dates

Construction of subject property: 1925.

Sale of Subject Property: 1946.

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Contractor: Hicks, Alvah

Building designer: Tanner, William Charles

Period of Significance (justification): The period of significance for the O'Donnell Residence is from its construction date of 1925 until the property upon which the residence was built reverted to Nellie Coffman, the land owner in 1946.

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Criteria Considerations

Statement of Significance (Summary Paragraph)

Thomas A. O'Donnell Residence, in Palm Springs, Riverside County, California.

Historically significant for its association with the development pattern of recreational tourism in Palm Springs, this is the last surviving building that was a part of the large hotel complex known as the Desert Inn, created by Palm Springs pioneer Nellie Coffman. She was a Los Angeles housewife who relocated her family to the desert and opened a boarding house that evolved into a high-style luxury hotel/resort complex that forever changed the rural Native American agricultural village of Palm Springs into an international desert resort destination; these resorts became the town's primary focus, and the basis for its growth into a modern city. The construction of the residence involved the work of several of Palm Springs' most important pioneer figures including Coffman, pioneer contractor Alvah Hicks, architectural artist Charles Tanner, and oilman Thomas A. O'Donnell.

The O'Donnell residence survives today as the last intact structure from the period of Palm Springs' emergence on the national desert resort scene, and is a key structure that reflects the development history of Palm Springs. By virtue of its land-lease from the Coffman family matriarch Nellie Coffman to oilman Thomas A. O'Donnell, both pivotal players in the evolution of the village of Palm Springs into the small city that exists today, the property's role in the development patterns of the village qualifies it for National Register listing under Criterion A at the local level of significance.

Narrative Statement of Significance (See Continuation Sheets)

Developmental history/additional historic context information (See Continuation Sheets)

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

See Continuation Sheets

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: Palm Springs Historic Site Preservation Board
Riverside County Historic Resource Survey

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): Riverside County Survey: 33-2262-94

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Approximately .5 acre (see plat map).

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>11</u>	<u>541 740</u>	<u>374 2600</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal Boundary Description

150' x 150 square as illustrated on Assessor's Map, Book 513, page 11, portion of the east half of section 15.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries correspond with those of the designation of the subject property as a Palm Springs Class 1 Historic Site. The property was originally designated as a Class 7 on 10/13/1980 and following revisions to the ordinance became a Class 1 on 10/04/2000 under City Council Resolution 19916.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Patrick McGrew
organization Preservation Consultant date June 17, 2010
street & number 674 South Grenfall Road telephone 760 416 7819
city or town Palm Springs state CA zip code 92264
e-mail patrickmcgrew2@gmail.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.
Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
 - Section 7: Narrative Description
 - Section 8: Statement of Significance including Developmental History/Context
 - Section 9: Bibliography
 - Additional Documentation:
 - Sketch Map with Photo Key
 - Assessor's Map
 - Figures 1 thru 4
 - Figure Log
 - Photograph Log

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: O'Donnell, Thomas, Residence
City or Vicinity: Palm Springs
County: Riverside State: CA

Photographer: Patrick McGrew
Date Photographed: April 2010

Description of Photograph(s) and number: Included are one photograph of each façade of the O'Donnell Residence and one of the adjacent garage doors for a total of five.

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Tracy Conrad and Paul Murat
street & number 1850 Smoke Tree Lane telephone 760 323 3295
city or town Palm Springs state CA zip code 92264

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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Section 7: Narrative Description (*Describes the setting, buildings and other major resources, outbuildings, and landscape features.*)

Setting:

The O'Donnell residence is located on a steep hillside lot, approximately 200 feet above the Coachella Valley floor. The 22,500 square foot site is accessed by a private road flanked by two wrought iron gates. The smaller gate [Figure 1] leads to the house; the larger gates [Figure 2] lead to a paved motor court. South and west of the house, there is a lawn bordered by boulders and a walled garden accessed via a rock archway. An original cactus garden lies at the southeast corner of the house. The nearly invisible west facade of the house lies within six feet of the mountain face.

Building:

The O'Donnell residence is a surprisingly modest home considering the wealth of its owner. The two-story, ell-shaped four-bedroom, 4,100 square foot residence is approximately 100 feet long by 20 feet deep. The principal facade [Figure 3] faces southeast to maximize views from all rooms. The house was built in a hybrid Spanish Colonial Revival/Monterey style; such buildings are often called "Hollywood Spanish." The Monterey-style balcony projecting along the front facade may be the most character-defining feature of the building. The balcony's fret-cut balusters and curving end are more elaborate than those usually found on buildings in this style. The building displays other Spanish Colonial stylistic markers including plain cement plaster walls, a clay tile roof, wrought-iron gates and window grills, and brightly colored ceramic tiles in the bathrooms and kitchen. In addition to the extensive use of tiles from Malibu Tile, Gladding McBean and Batchelder can also be found.

Arriving at the small wrought-iron gate, a visitor passes through a small courtyard paved with cobblestones of different colors arranged in delicate curves. On the other side of the courtyard, the North

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elevation contains the main entrance door. Visitors enter directly into the tall 20' x 30' living room [Figure 4] located in the shorter leg of the ell. The room is approximately 25' tall with an exposed wooden truss ceiling. The regular height kitchen lies at the far end of the living room, separated from that room by an enclosed stair that leads to the upper level of the adjacent wing. Here on the second level are the owner's bedrooms, tiled bathrooms and dressing rooms outfitted with mirrors, cabinets and built-in drawers. The doors of the bedrooms open onto balconies, which were used as sleeping porches. Each bedroom has a fireplace. A sundeck, at the far southern end of the bedroom wing, was originally framed with hand-adzed oak columns and beams from which curtains were hung for wind protection and privacy. Today, the sundeck has been roofed over and the openings glazed to allow the room's use as an additional bedroom.

On the first floor, at the intersection of the two wings, a roofed porch was originally used as an indoor-outdoor room. Today, this space has been enclosed with French doors to allow year-round use. The lower level of the bedroom wing contains two guest bedrooms, each with a tiled bath and dressing area. French doors open onto a paved walkway.

Construction is of concrete block faced with cement plaster that gives the appearance of adobe on both the interior and exterior. The intersecting gable roof forms are covered with variegated clay tile in reds and browns. The home's single-glazed wooden windows and doors are frameless, and trimless, and recessed into the thick masonry walls. The building contains a series of chimneys, all but one of which are simple rectangular forms topped with metal spark deflectors. The large chimney above the living room fireplace has more elaborate Moorish inspired detailing.

The walls were originally colored a greenish-gray and the woodwork was stained black, unlike the stark white usually associated with this

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style. The living-room features Spanish details in the interior doors, the hooded fireplace, and the overhanging balconette. A large arched window flanked by two matching doors defines the east end. Each French door is subdivided into four vertical lites. On the south side, additional French doors open to the roofed open-air living / dining area.

Outbuildings:

Cut into the mountain rock, a small garage that was part of the original construction is essentially unseen, except for a pair of painted wood garage doors. Too small for today's automobiles, the space is now used for storage. **[Figure 5]**

Landscape features:

A switchback path from the Desert Inn that led up to the O'Donnell house is said to have been used twice daily as Nellie Coffman personally monitored the construction of the O'Donnell house. In later years it was used by the public to climb the mountain for Easter Sunrise services held annually on the site. In addition to the previously cited entrance drive, and the cactus garden and motor court, a retaining wall along the south end of the property was created to allow a flat outdoor space. A green lawn, bordered by boulders leads to an expanse of lawn and a rock archway that provides access to the former laundry drying yard used by the O'Donnell housekeeper; today this area is a "secret" walled garden.

Integrity:

After having gone through a period of decline, the property was purchased by the current owners who embarked upon a thorough restoration program. The current condition of the property is excellent. A few minor changes that have occurred to the building are noted below:

- o The second floor room on the south end of the house was

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originally a roofless sundeck that was also used as sleeping porch. It had no windows and was screened from the breeze through the use of canvas awnings in wooden frames. Today, the space has been roofed over and converted into an enclosed bedroom.

- o The roofed outdoor living / dining area was originally shielded from the elements through the use of large canvas awnings. In the 1940s, it was enclosed with pairs of French doors that resemble those found elsewhere on the house. Along the south elevation, there exists a stone stairway that provided access from the garden to the sunroof. It is in original condition, although pipe handrails have been added.
- o Interior changes: The original balconette in the living room has been replaced with a simpler version. There is no explanation as to the loss of the original, which was a finely-detailed example of the type often found in Spanish churches. Two doors at the west end of the living room were removed in the 1940s. Replicas, based upon photographic evidence, were fabricated and installed.
- o An evaluation of the building's integrity indicates that in spite of the minor changes cited, the building still retains integrity of location, materials and workmanship. The changes in the original construction are insufficient to compromise its design, and although the Desert Inn, of which it was a part, is gone, the hillside setting remains essentially unchanged. The subject property retains sufficient integrity to qualify for listing on the National Register.

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Section 8, Statement of Significance continued: The O'Donnell Residence was created with the participation of the most significant early settlers in Palm Springs. The association of the subject property with the development pattern of recreational tourism in Palm Springs is reflected in the roles the participants played in the O'Donnell Residence's construction.

Of Irish descent Nellie Norton Orr Coffman (1867-1950) was the owner of the land upon which the O'Donnell Residence was built. Nellie's family moved to Dallas, Texas in 1877 because of her mother Ruth's health. In Dallas, the twenty-year old Nellie met and married building contractor George Ball Roberson in 1887. Several months later, Roberson tragically died in a fire shortly before his son George, Jr. was born. At that time, Nellie's family had already moved to Los Angeles, California, where her father entered the hotel business. She joined them and, in 1889, she met Harry Coffman whom she married in 1891. Their son Earl was born in 1892. Coffman earned his medical degree in 1901, after which he established a medical practice in Santa Monica.

Health issues also caused Nellie to explore a dryer climate. In 1909, the Coffmans purchased an existing residence and stable from B. W. and Mary McKenzie¹ for \$5,000, with a down payment of \$2,000. It was here that they established a convalescent health care facility called the Desert Inn Sanatorium, with Dr. Coffman as the resident physician – he is considered the first practicing physician in Palm Springs.

As the village grew up around the Desert Inn, the Coffmans expanded the property to include thirty-five acres: "twenty-seven on the flat, eight on the mountain."² Theirs was an informed choice because, unlike other Palm Springs properties, this property had access to fresh water via the Tahquitz Flume that bordered the north end of the Coffman property.

Within a few years the Coffmans separated: Harry pursued his medical practice elsewhere while Nellie remained in Palm Springs and transformed the sanatorium/boarding house into a hotel. In 1914, they were divorced; Nellie and her sons retained ownership of the hotel. In 1920, Nellie began to formulate plans to expand the Desert Inn to a luxury resort and actively discouraged guests with respiratory or pulmonary ailments. She developed a "no invalid" policy and tent houses were replaced by wooden bungalows with screened porches.

¹This house was previously owned by Eleanor Martin. The purchase agreement was signed in San Diego (later Riverside) county on September 30, 1909 (Book 2292, Page 45).

²Time, November 17, 1947: "Nellie's Boarding House."

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Anticipating the growth of the village, Nellie borrowed \$35,000 from the Citizen's National Bank of Riverside to begin the first expansion of the hotel through the construction of the first concrete buildings in the compound beginning in 1922. During this period, the Desert Inn began to emerge as a haven for wealthy Los Angelinos, one of whom was multi-millionaire oil man Thomas O'Donnell, who became not only a regular visitor, but also a close friend of Nellie Coffman.

O'Donnell encouraged Coffman's expansion plans by providing funding for new construction of the Inn in 1924 in the form of a \$350,000 loan (the equivalent of \$5,000,000 today). In exchange, Coffman agreed to lease part of the Desert Inn property (on the cliff overlooking the hotel) to O'Donnell for the construction of his own vacation home. That home is the subject of this nomination. The renewable 25-year lease covered 14.56 acres of mostly unbuildable land. Today the site of the O'Donnell Residence has been reduced to approximately one-half an acre.

Thomas Arthur O'Donnell was born at McCain, Pennsylvania, June 26, 1870, the son of Thomas O'Donnell and Myra (Parsons) O'Donnell.³ In 1896, he married Lilly Woods. The marriage produced two daughters, Ruth and Doris. Although O'Donnell had little formal education, he was extremely industrious. By the age of 10 he had found work as a newsboy. Within a couple of years he was drawn to the Colorado gold and oil region and soon found work as a laborer in the gold mines where he worked for five years, becoming a thoroughly experienced miner by the age of 19. In 1889 he moved to California and began working in the oil business. In 1894, O'Donnell formed an oil well drilling partnership with pioneer oilman M. H. Whittier. The partnership lasted for five years after which O'Donnell became an independent driller and oil land speculator. Within three years he controlled properties in California and Mexico. In 1902, he entered the Coalinga, California field, and his success there was among California's most profitable on record. In 1909, O'Donnell and several other oilmen organized the American Oil Fields Company. O'Donnell was vice president and field manager of that corporation; he also held the same position in the American Petroleum Company. These two oil companies were among the largest independent producers in the United States.

³ *Press Reference Library, Southwest Edition: Notables of the Southwest, Being the Portraits and Biographies of Progressive Men of the Southwest Who Have Helped in the Development and History Making of this Wonderful Country.* Los Angeles Examiner, Los Angeles, California, 1912, p 456.

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Although O'Donnell's principal residence was in Long Beach,⁴ from his first visits to the desert in the 1920s, he became a major benefactor and cultural force in the village who contributed substantial funding to the Palm Springs Library and the Palm Springs Museum. Upon his death, the O'Donnell Golf Course was bequeathed to the city with a long-term lease to the members of the golf club.

The designer of the O'Donnell Residence, William Charles Tanner (1876-1960), was the son of English immigrants who arrived in Canada in 1875. The family soon immigrated to the United States, ultimately settling in Elgin, Illinois. By the age of seventeen, Tanner found work as an illustrator for Christian children's book publisher David C. Cook Publications.

By 1890 Tanner had moved to Chicago where he met and married Charlotte Mae "Lottie" Whitney, with whom he had two daughters. Tanner studied art in Chicago (1903-1908), Boston (1908-09), New York (1909-11), and Paris and Giverny, France (1911-14).⁵ At the age of 38, Tanner relocated his family to Riverside, California. He is mentioned briefly in Esther Klotz' definitive *The Mission Inn: Its History and Artifacts*, as having loaned paintings to the hotel which were hung with their collection of Mexican and Spanish paintings. To supplement his income as an artist and art teacher, in 1921 Tanner opened an *architectural* practice located in Riverside at 624 Main Street.⁶ Although the California Architectural Registration Board has confirmed that Tanner was never licensed in the State; he is credited with having designed houses in Riverside, as well as workers' cottages for the Southern Sierra Power Company. In 1924, the Tanners moved to Hollywood where he worked as a draftsman in the office of architect G. Vincent Palmer (1902-1992). The 22-year-old Palmer – who was born in Fabian, Indiana and died in San Bernardino at age 90 – had just completed his Bachelor of Science in Architecture at University of Southern California, and immediately established his practice, employing the 42-year-old Tanner as a draftsman, a position Tanner held for thirty-five years.⁷ An obituary in the

⁴ O'Donnell's permanent home was in Long Beach. From 1929 until his death in 1945, the pioneer oil industrialist resided in the 1912 Craftsman style home he had purchased from Elizabeth Milbank Anderson, a wealthy philanthropist and heiress to the Borden Milk and Pacific Coast Railroad fortunes. It is located on a bluff-top overlooking Long Beach Harbor and the Pacific Ocean at 2300 East Ocean Boulevard. Today the building is the home of the Long Beach Art Museum.

⁵ Merchell and Conrad, p 19.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Two sources confirm Tanner's employment with Palmer. Palmer's biographical data fails to include any Palm Springs projects. Information crediting Tanner with several Pam Springs buildings is largely anecdotal, usually based upon newspaper articles or interviews with Nellie Coffman as no drawings or building permits have been discovered. As Tanner was Palmer's employee, the correct attribution of the work would have been to Palmer's firm. Based upon information currently available, this issue remains unresolved.

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Los Angeles Times confirms the death of "architectural artist and draftsman" Charles Tanner at the advanced age of 83, in Santa Monica on October 13, 1960. He was survived by Lottie and their daughters.

Although Tanner is credited with the design of several more Spanish Colonial Revival style houses, it is unknown how Tanner managed to transform his education as an American Impressionist painter into the skills required to work as a building designer without a formal education or work experience as an architect.

In Palm Springs Tanner is credited with the design of the Carrie Birge Residence – now the Ingleside Inn (1922), George Roberson House – now Le Vallauris Restaurant (1924), the O'Donnell House (1925), and the huge, sprawling reconstruction of The Desert Inn (1922-27). All four of these projects were designed and built in the Spanish Colonial Revival style,⁸ which between the years 1920 and 1930, was the dominant style of California architecture. The three extant buildings are locally designated Class 1 Historic Sites.

In 1936 he designed his only non-Spanish Colonial Revival Palm Springs project, the First Community Church an early modernist design created through a novel use of decorative concrete block. Like Tanner's other Palm Springs projects, this is a Class 1 Historic Site. Lottie Tanner was the Assistant Chair of the extant Palm Springs Women's Club in the 1930's during the time that Mrs. O'Donnell was Chair. Nellie Coffman was the head of the Building Committee. Palm Springs City Directories indicate the Tanners maintained a Palm Springs residence in the Los Hacienditas Tract (Movie Colony) in the years 1935-37.

The contractor of the O'Donnell Residence was Alvah Hicks (1884-1944). He achieved exceptional importance in his adopted town during his lifetime, and continues to be known through successive generations of his family that still reside in Palm Springs. A New Yorker by birth, Hicks moved to Los Angeles in 1912, and the following year resettled in Palm Springs with his wife Theresa and his two small sons, Harold and Milton. The growing village had few skilled carpenters, so the industrious and hardworking Hicks became known for the quality of his work leading to a successful career as a contractor; he soon began investing in desert land. Partnering with Prescott Stevens, the two were among the town's earliest developers, building and selling quality homes. Hicks built about twenty of the area's most beautiful extant Spanish Colonial Revival homes. The home he built for his family, the Villa Theresa, at 501 North Belardo Road is today better

⁸ The style, which is sometimes called "Hollywood Spanish", seems particularly appropriate for these buildings as Tanner was working for Palmer in Hollywood when they were built.

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known as the one-time home of the flamboyant concert pianist Wladziu Liberace. Hicks has also been credited as the builder of the Desert Inn, and the O'Donnell, Roberson, and Birge residences previously mentioned.⁹

In 1940, Thomas O'Donnell's deteriorating health made climbing stairs in his Palm Springs home difficult. The situation was resolved by the construction of another house – this time only a single story – located on the flat land overlooking his beloved golf course. The O'Donnells lived in this valley house, until his death in 1945. The golf course property, including the valley house were given to the city of Palm Springs Mrs. O'Donnell retired to their home in Long Beach where she resided until her death in 1969.

Following the move to the Palm Springs valley house, the original O'Donnell Residence was leased and ultimately purchased and remodeled by the second owners, perfume importers Nathan and Virginia Milnor. Upon Mrs. Milnor's death in the 1970s, the home was acquired by Howard Ahmanson through his Home Savings and Loan Company as part of the property assembled to build the Desert Fashion Plaza (a shopping center). In 1974 the property was part of a land swap resulting in the home being owned by the Palm Springs Museum who used it as a painting studio. In 1993, the home was purchased by Ken Shellan who sold it to the current owners in 2000 who removed the unsympathetic alterations and restored it to its current condition. The O'Donnell Residence is listed as a Palm Springs Class 1 Historic Site.

DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY/ADDITIONAL HISTORIC CONTEXT INFORMATION

Palm Springs historians have determined that the relatively short history of Palm Springs can be organized into three distinct periods that include Prehistory, the Settlement Period, and the Modern Period. It is within the context of the Settlement Period that the O'Donnell Residence is evaluated.

Pre-History Period For centuries Palm Springs was the home of the Agua Caliente Indians. As the site of natural hot springs and a dry and sunny desert climate, the area drew its first non-Indian visitors in the late 19th century. Of Palm Springs' Pre-History Period the only remaining feature is the mineral hot springs that initially drew the Native Americans to the location.

The Settlement Period (1880-1925.) The property represents the middle-to-late Settlement Period of local history, significant because this is when Palm Springs became known nationally as a unique desert resort. The O'Donnell Residence is relevant in illustrating that historic context because it is the last surviving,

⁹ Shannon Starr: "Alvah Hicks Constructed His Palm Springs Destiny."

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intact structure from that period as illustrated by its function as a resort hotel and its architectural style whose physical features convey those aspects of history with which the town is associated. The building is also associated with several important figures from the period, which began with the 1880 land purchase from the Cahuilla Indian Pedro Chino, by the first white land owners W E. Van Slyke and M. Byrne.

The Modern Period (1925-present) When the Settlement Period came to a close, it was replaced with the emerging Modern Period which began with the construction of the town's first non-traditional structure, the Prairie style Oasis Hotel in 1925. It was commissioned by Pearl McCallum McManus, and designed by architect Lloyd Wright. With this building, the town's dominant architectural style based primarily on Mexican and Spanish Colonial motifs that were already well-established in Southern California began to fade in popularity.

Following incorporation of the village in 1938 and continuing through the post-WWII era, Palm Springs prospered through its reliance on tourism. Hollywood celebrities and other tourists patronized its hotels, inns, nightclubs and restaurants. Palm Springs was transformed from a sleepy rural agricultural village into an increasingly cosmopolitan environment that saw the construction of schools, hospitals, an airport, and other important public works projects. The commercial core along Palm Canyon Drive flourished. Modernist housing enclaves, designed by noted architects in the 1950s, continue to draw visitors and architects to the city. Palm Springs retains an international reputation as a repository of relatively well-preserved mid-century residential and commercial architecture.

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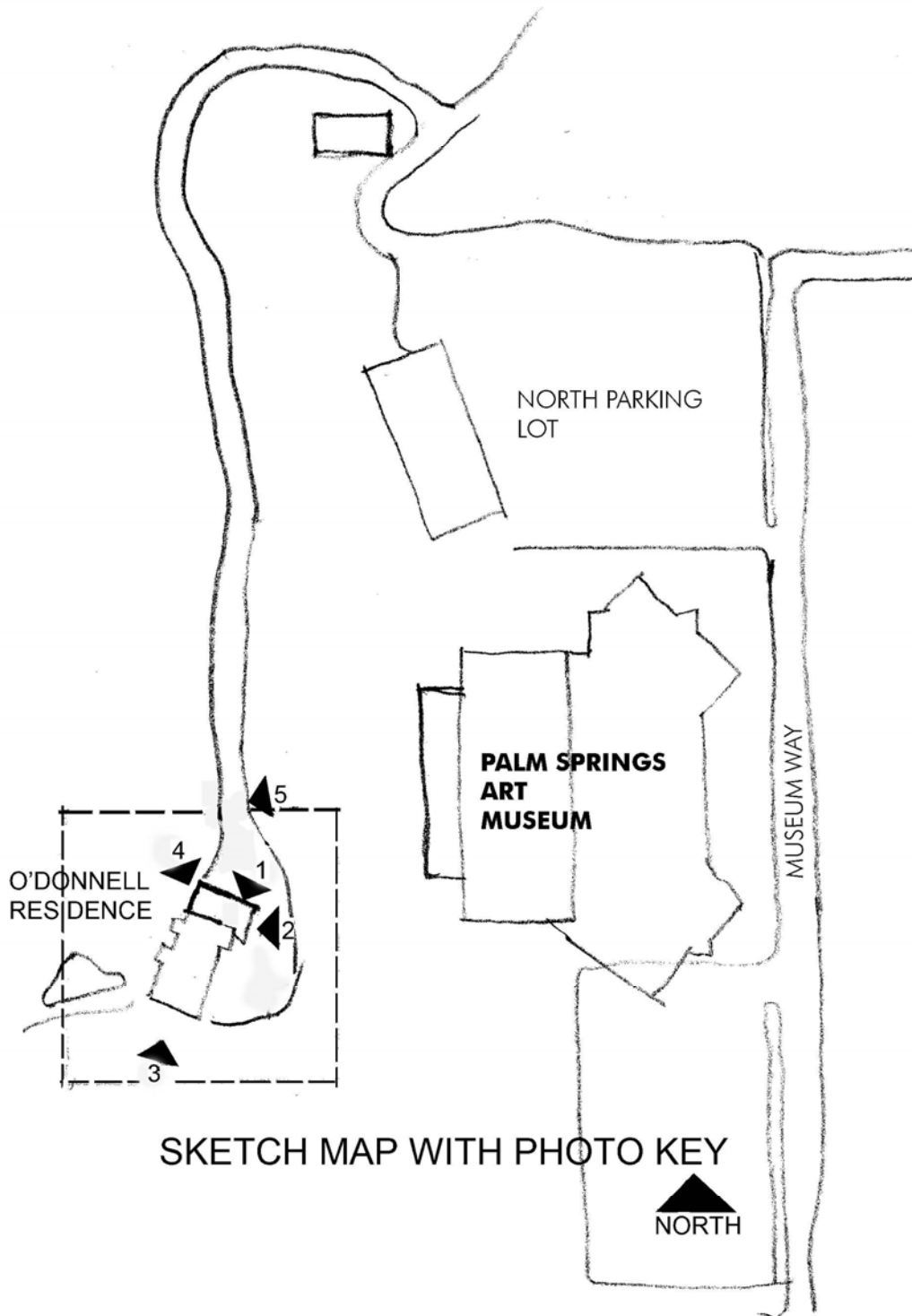
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Figure 1 Entrance Gate

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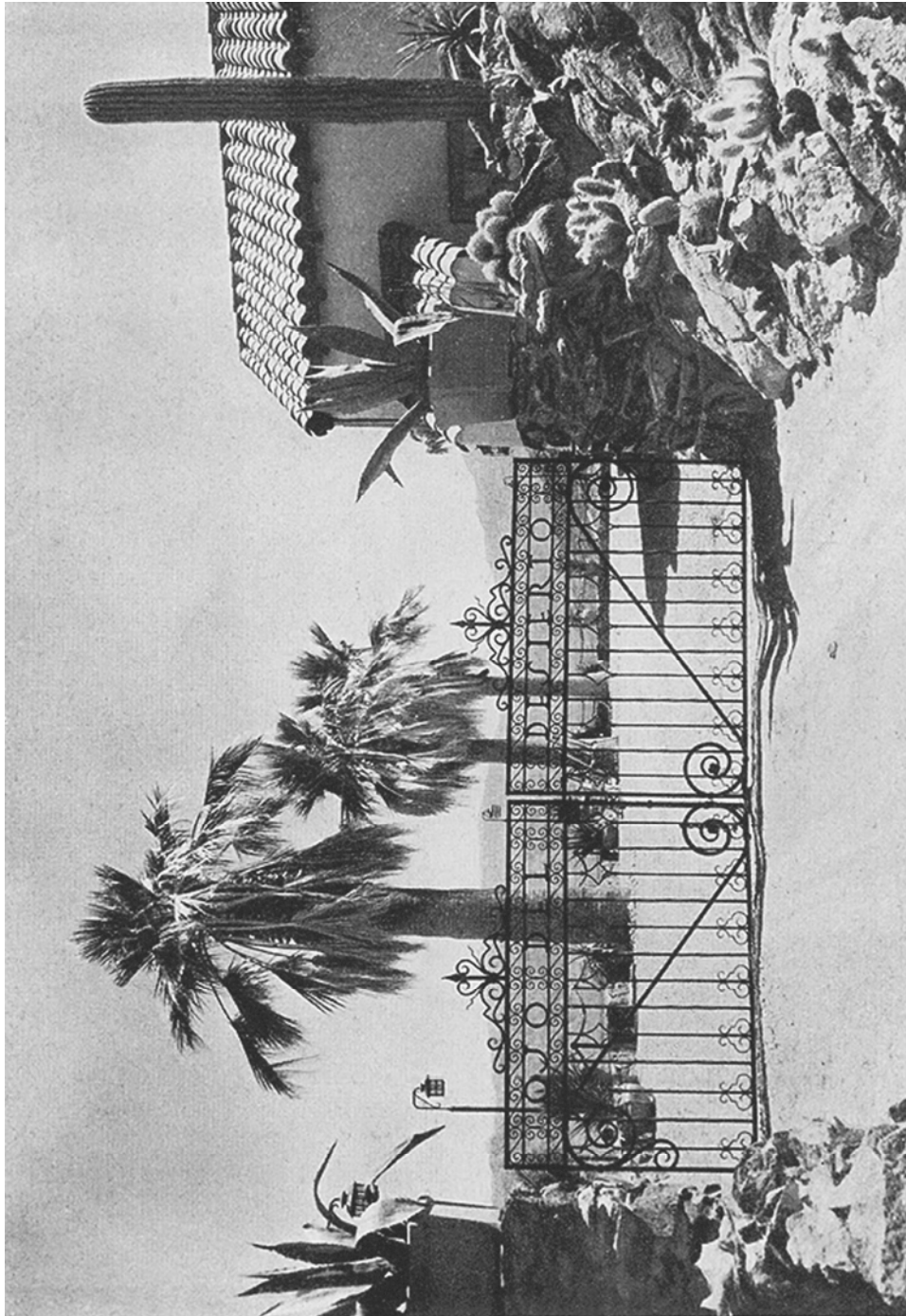


Figure 2 Automobile Gates

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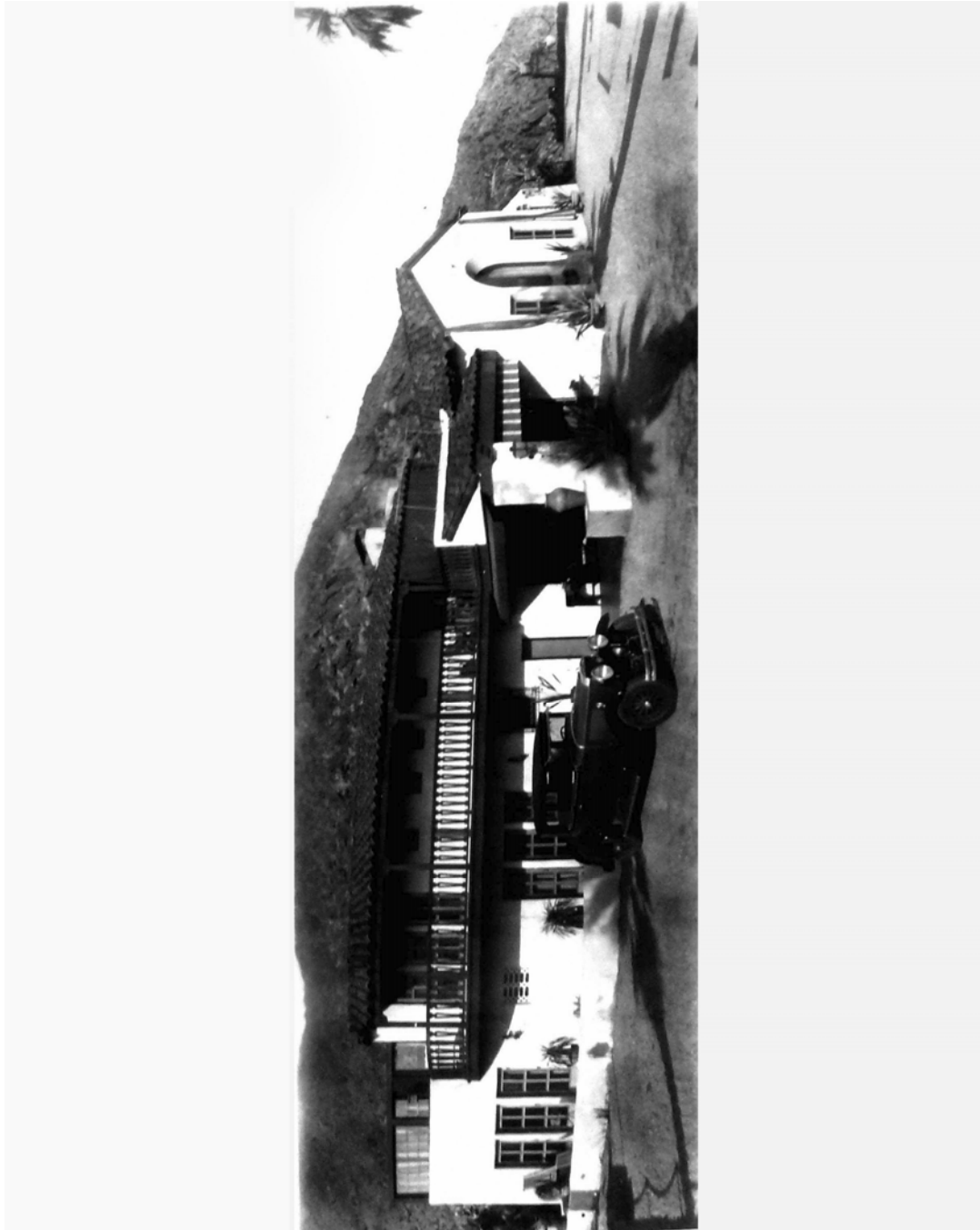


Figure 3 Front Facade

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Figure 4 Living Room Interior

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FIGURE LOG

Name of Property: Thomas O'Donnell Residence
 City or Vicinity: Palm Springs
 County: Riverside County
 State: CA
 Photographer: Historic (Unknown)
 Date: Historic (Unknown)
 Location of original digital files:
 674 South Grenfall Road, Palm Springs, CA 92264
 Figure #1 (CA_RiversideCounty_O'Donnell Residence_1) Entrance gate

Name of Property: Thomas O'Donnell Residence
 City or Vicinity: Palm Springs
 County: Riverside County
 State: CA
 Photographer: Historic (Unknown)
 Date: Historic (Unknown)
 Location of original digital files:
 674 South Grenfall Road, Palm Springs, CA 92264
 Figure #2 (CA_RiversideCounty_O'Donnell Residence_2) Automobile Gates

Name of Property: Thomas O'Donnell Residence
 City or Vicinity: Palm Springs
 County: Riverside County
 State: CA
 Photographer: Historic (Unknown)
 Date: Historic (Unknown)
 Location of original digital files:
 674 South Grenfall Road, Palm Springs, CA 92264
 Figure #3 (CA_RiversideCounty_O'Donnell Residence_3) Front Facade

Name of Property: Thomas O'Donnell Residence
 City or Vicinity: Palm Springs
 County: Riverside County
 State: CA
 Photographer: Historic (Unknown)
 Date: Historic (Unknown)
 Location of original digital files:
 674 South Grenfall Road, Palm Springs, CA 92264
 Figure #4 (CA_RiversideCounty_O'Donnell Residence_4) Living Room Interior

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PHOTOGRAPH LOG

City or Vicinity: Palm Springs
County: Riverside County
State: CA
Photographer: Patrick McGrew
Date: April 2010

Location of original digital files:

674 South Grenfall Road, Palm Springs, CA 92264

Photo #01 (CA_RiversideCounty_O'Donnell Residence_0001) North Façade

City or Vicinity: Palm Springs
County: Riverside County
State: CA
Photographer: Patrick McGrew
Date: April 2010

Location of original digital files:

674 South Grenfall Road, Palm Springs, CA 92264

Photo #02 (CA_RiversideCounty_O'Donnell Residence_0002) East Façade

City or Vicinity: Palm Springs
County: Riverside County
State: CA
Photographer: Patrick McGrew
Date: April 2010

Location of original digital files:

674 South Grenfall Road, Palm Springs, CA 92264

Photo #03 (CA_RiversideCounty_O'Donnell Residence_0003) South Façade

City or Vicinity: Palm Springs
County: Riverside County
State: CA
Photographer: Patrick McGrew
Date: April 2010

Location of original digital files:

674 South Grenfall Road, Palm Springs, CA 92264

Photo #04 (CA_RiversideCounty_O'Donnell Residence_0004) West Façade

City or Vicinity: Palm Springs
County: Riverside County
State: CA
Photographer: Patrick McGrew
Date: April 2010

Location of original digital files:

674 South Grenfall Road, Palm Springs, CA 92264

Photo #05 (CA_RiversideCounty_O'Donnell Residence_0005) Garage Doors