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COUNCILWOMAN MONICA RODRIGUEZ
SEVENTH DISTRICT

July 23, 2024

Cultural Heritage Commission
c/o Office of the City Clerk
200 N Spring Street, Room 340A
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: CHC-2024-3336-HCM 13161 W. Van Nuys Boulevard

Dear Commissioners,

I would like to express my support for the staff recommendation of recognizing StylesVille Barber Shop and Beauty Salon as a Historic-Cultural Monument. Earlier this year, I introduced a motion to start the historic preservation process to give this center of community for the valley its rightful recognition.

Located in the heart of the commercial district in Pacoima on Van Nuys Boulevard, StylesVille Barber Shop and Beauty Salon has served the African American community and brought people together from around the city while remaining a family owned and operated business. The vital contributions of the African American community in Pacoima are perfectly encapsulated in the long tenure of success of StylesVille Barber Shop and Beauty Salon.

Thank you for your consideration of this item and I look forward to our continued collaboration that allows for culturally important landmarks to be preserved for generations to come.

Sincerely,


Monica Rodriguez
Councilwoman, 7th District

SECONDARY SUBMISSIONS



National Trust for
Historic Preservation®

March 7, 2024

Women Deserve More Than Three Percent

A New Model for Gender Equitable Designation in Los Angeles

More:

[Where Women Made History](#)

By:

Chris Morris

Of the nearly 1,300 places in Los Angeles designated as Historic-Cultural Monuments (HCM)—LA’s version of local landmarks—only 3 percent of them represent women’s history.

I remember the first time I heard this shocking statistic from Nellie Scott, the executive director of the [Corita Art Center](https://www.corita.org/) [Link: <https://www.corita.org/>] , in Los Angeles, California. *3 percent? That must be a mistake.*

Women’s history is quite literally everywhere, particularly in Los Angeles. Julia Morgan was a prolific architect in California. Biddy Mason is considered an early and entrepreneurial California real estate developer. Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz revolutionized how television was made and invented the concept of the “rerun.” Second wave feminism and the feminist and lesbian art movements thrived in Southern California at CalArts. Esther Wong made her “Madame Wong’s” bar in Chinatown into an epicenter of the punk and new wave scene.

This year, the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s [Where Women Made History initiative](#) [Link: </womens-history>] , in partnership with the [Los Angeles Conservancy](#) [Link: <https://www.laconservancy.org/>] are working on a solution.



Exterior of the Corita Kent Studio in Los Angeles, California.

The Full Scale of the Problem

It turns out that 3 percent was a generous estimate, the reality is closer to 2 percent and unfortunately, Los Angeles is not unusual. Only 4 percent of our country's National Historic Landmarks are designated for recognition of women and women's achievements, and it has been stuck at that low level of representation for almost 50 years. The degree to which women's history is acknowledged on the National Register of Historic Places is even less clear, because associations with women's history and achievement are not even tracked.

These low figures reflect the system that we in the preservation movement created for designation at the national and the local level. This system privileges the physicality of a structure or site over associations with the events, histories, and people who inhabited and activated these places. By giving more weight to the integrity of the design, materials, and details than to the stories these places tell and the meaning they hold, we consistently favor style over substance.

This was the challenge Nellie Scott faced with the [designation of Sister Mary Corita's studio](#) [Link: /more-than-a-pop-art-nun-preserving-the-studio-of-sister-mary-corita-kent], which a developer planned to demolish for a parking lot. The national significance of Sister Corita story was undeniable, including the many years of activism, education, and artistic creativity she led at her studio. But the simple, one-story concrete block commercial

building had been modified by subsequent owners and the Office of Historic Resources recommended against designation on the grounds that the building lacked sufficient integrity. It took an extraordinary outpouring of vocal support from nearly 100 artists, historians, and advocates across the country to challenge that argument and convince the Cultural Heritage Commission to approve designation of Corita's studio as an HCM.

When it's this onerous to achieve formal recognition for a place clearly connected to an internationally acclaimed female artist, is it any surprise that the history of less famous women is so rarely recognized? Having served as chair of a local preservation commission, I realize there's a common misperception that it's more "objective" to evaluate a place based on its physical characteristics and condition, rather than dig deeply into the historical record to reveal the stories of women and other groups that are consistently excluded, the majority of whom were rarely mentioned in contemporary media sources and continue to get minimal coverage in many current history texts.

This is particularly true for women of color, Indigenous women, and women who identified as lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. Because women's histories can be exceptionally—and often intentionally—difficult to find, it makes them easier to ignore. And that is how we find ourselves at only 3 percent representation.

A New Model for Gender-Equitable Designation

As manager of the National Trust's Where Women Made History (WWMH) initiative, I'm keenly aware that how we choose to recognize and communicate about our national heritage at historic places has real and profound implications. The pervasive lack of women's representation across all types of landmarks means that women, girls, and people who identify as female do not see themselves reflected in the history they encounter at historic places. This must change and we are committed to leading that change.

WWMH is planning an unprecedented new project in Los Angeles to address the bias in the designation process by creating a new model for more gender-equitable historic designation. We'll be tackling this groundbreaking work in partnership with the Los Angeles Conservancy, who has been at the forefront of efforts to protect places of women's achievement and resistance like Sister Mary Corita's studio, the LA Women's Building, the Crenshaw Women's Center, and most [recently, the home of Marilyn Monroe](https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2023/09/marilyn-monroe-demolition-house) [Link: <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2023/09/marilyn-monroe-demolition-house>].

Adrian Scott Fine, president and CEO of the Los Angeles Conservancy said, “when we tell stories about Los Angeles and women, it is fundamentally more real and tangible when we root them in the physical places that help illustrate their lives, contributions, and connection to this city. Acknowledgement is empowerment, which is why we want to ensure more places are designated for women’s contributions.”

Together with supportive local agencies, community groups, researchers, advocates, educators, filmmakers, and many others, WWMH and the LA Conservancy will nominate 15 new HCMs, bringing to light some of the overlooked histories, stories, and accomplishments of the diverse women who shaped Los Angeles. In doing so, we will invent and test new processes and policies that will make it easier to designate sites of women’s history (for instance, designing, an amendment process for adding women’s history into the approximately 1,300 existing HCM nominations), and tracking metrics against long-term goals for increasing gender equity and women’s representation in future nominations.



Where Women
Made History

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history is
important to
you, then we
belong in your
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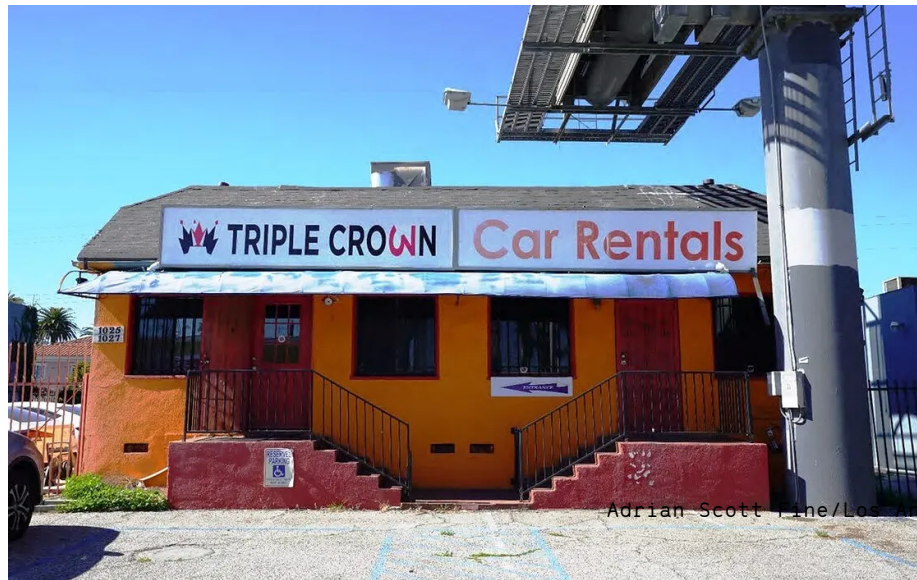
SIGN UP

We're excited about the prospect starting this project in fall of this year with graduate students in the USC School Architecture and Heritage Conservation program, who will be directly involved in every step of the designation process and will shape the work with their own perspective and priorities as the next generation of preservationists.

Designation is Only the Beginning

If this ambitious project resulted in new HCMs of under-appreciated sites of diverse women's history, that alone would be a worthwhile endeavor. It would be 15 places of women's achievement that are recognized and protected, and it would move the needle—albeit very slightly—to increase women's representation among Los Angeles' landmarks. It's not enough. If we want to change the status quo and create a new gender-equitable model

for other cities and the preservation movement, the designations must be the beginning of our work, not the end.



Adrian Scott Fine/Los Angeles Conservancy

The former Crenshaw Women's Center as it looked in 2021.

In addition to generating new research, HCMs, and procedures, WWMH and the LA Conservancy intend to help build new forms of preservation “infrastructure” that will change not only how people think about Historic Cultural Monuments, but the potential impact of historic preservation in general:

New Tools: Create an online resource to assist with research for future women-centered designations; a new process for amending existing HCMs to incorporating the women’s history that was overlooked; and an initial database of hundreds of sites across Los Angeles that have the potential to designated for their connections to diverse women’s history

Public Programming and Interpretation: Expand the public’s appreciation of diverse women’s histories and impact in Los Angeles with short video documentaries and oral histories related to each of the 15 designated sites; and create a new companion series of LA Conservancy public programs, tours, and field trips for adults and students centered on places of women’s history.

Student Lesson Plans: Produce 4-5 new virtual lesson plans for students that will meet California State Standards, which will introduce middle and high school students to their local female history makers, and draw on the research, primary resources, oral histories, and content from the HCMs.

Plans for the Future: We realize that making significant progress toward gender equity in designations is a long-term project and it will require a commitment on the part of the City of Los Angeles and a wide range of local partners. To facilitate this, we will outline a set of recommendations for future designations, additional research, new or expanded context statements, additional interpretative and educational materials, and potential funding sources that could support this critical work.

Our goal is to encourage wider adoption of this approach and incite fundamental change in the designation protocols across the country, which is why we are committed to making all products and models from this project publicly accessible online to be shared with local commissions and staff, city officials, preservation organizations, the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions, and many others.

If we hope to tell an honest and accurate national story, we have a responsibility as a national preservation organization to acknowledge the presence of women, girls and people who identify as female at virtually every historic place. Three percent

representation is not good enough.
It's time we changed that.

Donate Today to Help Save the Places Where Our History Happened.

Donate to the National Trust for
Historic Preservation today and you'll
help preserve places that tell our
stories, reflect our culture, and shape
our shared American experience.



Chris Morris is a senior director of preservation programs and leader of the Where Women Made History initiative.

Women's Heritage in Los Angeles

A Overview of the Representation of Women in Existing Historic-Cultural Monuments in Los Angeles, California

Prepared for

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July 9, 2024

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Acknowledgements

This research was made possible by a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation's "Where Women Made History" initiative. This research was also supported by Lindsay Mulcahy, Christina Morris, Christy McAvoy, Teresa Grimes, Sian Winship, Trudi Sandmeier, Marla Felber, and Alan Hess.

Introduction

Overview

This report provides an overview of the representations of women's history in existing Historic-Cultural Monuments (HCMs) in Los Angeles. To understand how women are represented, a sample of forty-three existing HCMs were chosen for study. This group of HCM nominations represent a broad time period (from 1962 to the present) and vary in terms of quality and quantity of information. The original nomination file for each was evaluated for its inclusion, or exclusion, of women in its significance statement. The purpose of these evaluations is to understand the work needed to amend existing HCMs to properly convey women's contributions to the history of Los Angeles.

Scope of the Problem

This research was undertaken to better understand the general premise that women's history is severely underrepresented in HCMs. It quickly became apparent that this underrepresentation manifested in various ways:

- Women's history was not adequately conveyed, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and, as a result, is not included in the designation:
 - Example: **The Mack Sennett Studios (HCM #256)** nomination does not mention Mabel Normand at all despite her significant role in the studio's establishment, growth, and success
- In cases where women were included in the designation, their contributions were diminished and/or overshadowed by other histories in the significance statement.
 - Example: **In the Case Study House No. 8 (HCM #381)** nomination, only Charles Eames is listed as the architect and owner. Ray is primarily mentioned and his wife, with one mention of her as his business partner. This nomination also includes a period of significance that ends at the date of Charles' death, even as Ray continued to live in the house.
- Even in HCMs that were designated for women's history, that history is rarely intersectional:
 - Example: HCMs designated as part of the women's club movement – like the **Ruskin Art Club (HCM #639)** and **YWCA Studio Club (HCM #175)** – account for almost a quarter of the nominations studied. This historical narrative is centered around the contributions of middle- and upper-class white women, a narrative that goes hand-in-hand with the historical narratives of middle and upper-class white men's contributions to Los Angeles.
- In HCMs designated for women's history, significance statements often diminished women's contributions through gendered language, inadequate research, misspelled names, etc.
 - Example: **In the Gibbons-Del Rio Residence (HCM #1038)** nomination, Dolores Del Rio's biography reduces her importance to the men she married and her

physical beauty. When describing the decline in Del Rio's popularity in Hollywood, the preparer argued that this happened "even if she looked as good as ever." (Preparer's own words)

In short, women's history is both underrepresented and misrepresented. This brief list, of course, does not cover the wide range of ways in which women have been excluded or misrepresented in HCMs, but it gives a sense of the current state of women's heritage in HCMs and the types of narratives that need to be addressed.

This is not to say, however, that there were no HCM nominations that properly acknowledged the contributions of women to the history of Los Angeles. In fact, there are a handful of HCMs that were designated for women's history and have incredibly detailed historical narratives that properly convey the role that women have played in shaping Los Angeles. They serve as models for how this work can and should be done. There are two that stand out:

- **The International Institute (HCM #1224)** – this nomination clearly outlines the importance of the International Institute for newly-arrived immigrants in Los Angeles. It is a well-researched, robust narrative that incorporates women of various races and ethnicities, socio-economic level, and citizenship status. It is an excellent example of intersectional women's history in Los Angeles and the types of historical narratives we should be incorporating into HCMs.
- **Standard Oil Company Sales Department/Woman's Building (HCM #1160)** – this nomination is a great example of telling the story of a place with multiple histories. Although the building is part of the overwritten narrative of early development and "great men," it is also part of the history of the feminist and lesbian art movement. Both stories are described in detail, adequately conveying the evolution of space over time.

It is clear from a quick read of these two nominations that they required an extensive amount of research and work that the average community member cannot undertake. The International Institute nomination was co-written by Ph.D. candidate (at the time of nomination) Laura Dominguez and incorporated academic texts to make a strong case for its significance. The Standard Oil Company Sales Department/Woman's Club building was prepared by the Architectural Resources Group. Even with these excellent nominations, there is still a clear problem: the increasing professionalization of the HCM process makes telling stories without easily available information – the stories of any underrepresented group – difficult for the average community member or preservation enthusiast to realistically carry out to the level required for designation. This reality is antithetical to the community-driven purpose of local historic preservation programs.

In general, historical narratives of women's heritage primarily fall along a spectrum:

- On one side, women are footnotes, excluded all together, or subject to problematic language or narratives. These HCMs are not just a product of the past. They span the entire time period that HCMs have been in existence.

- On the far less populated side, there are extremely-thorough significance statements that tell intersectional women's histories and demonstrate how a site changes over time. These HCMs are largely the product of the present, nominated within the past couple of years.
- In between, there are a handful of nominations that are designated for women's history and are not in need of amendment, but do focus on the already prominent history of middle and upper-middle class white women.

Implications and Potential Outcomes

This research is meant to inform the creation of a new amendment process for existing HCMs and a gender-equitable model for new HCMs. As such, there are questions that need to be addressed as we consider what the tangible outcome of the research looks like.

- Integrity – How do we face the challenges of integrity as we try to develop a gender-equitable, intersectional model for amendments and nomination? Like in the case of the Sister Mary Corita Studio, how do we incorporate vernacular places of historical and cultural significance, but poor physical integrity?
- Standards for Nominations – Is the average nominator expected to meet an academic standard when telling underrepresented stories? Given that these stories are historically under-documented, how can we ensure that current standards are not a barrier to including diverse narratives?
- Nomination Process – How can we incorporate women's history into the structure of HCM through the nomination process? Consider modifying the nomination form to allow for recordation of diverse areas or themes of history, including women's history.
- Layers of Histories – Do we expect nominators to provide an exhaustive history of *all* the people and stories that are present at a particular place? Is there a way for them to mark areas of significance – women's history, Indigenous history, etc – without having to write a significance statement that covers all of these areas? In other words, can a nomination be left open for future amendments and additions?