

Berkley Square An Architectural & Historic Legacy

Berkley Square is the first subdivision in Nevada history that was constructed by a Black architect and for the Black community living in Las Vegas. It was designed in 1949 by internationally acclaimed architect Paul R. Williams whose work is well-known across the country. It was built during a time when segregation was rampant in Las Vegas. Blacks were confined to the Westside for their education, commerce, and housing. Berkley Square provided affordable, quality housing in an area that had experienced significant neglect. Still today, it is an important piece of the Historic Westside.

The namesake of Berkley Square is Thomas L. Berkley, the primary financier for the project. Several streets within the neighborhood are named after persons who were integral to Berkley Square's development: J. J. Byrnes and Edward A. Freeman, two fellow financiers, and Harry L. Wyatt, who supervised the construction of the historic subdivision.

Berkley Square consists of 148 homes situated on 22 acres of land in the Historic Westside of Las Vegas, Nevada. It was part of the post-World War II construction boom that swept the nation. It was officially recorded on May 17, 1954 and was sponsored by the Veterans Administration. The homes in Berkley Square are built in the contemporary ranch style, popularized in architectural publications of the day and was a favored design of the Federal Housing Administration, which dictated design in the name of safety, ease, and comfort. The overall design quality of Berkley Square has remained remarkably intact, earning it a place as a Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009.

**The tour is intended to be either walked or driven. Please note that the route does not end where it began.*

BERKLEY SQUARE

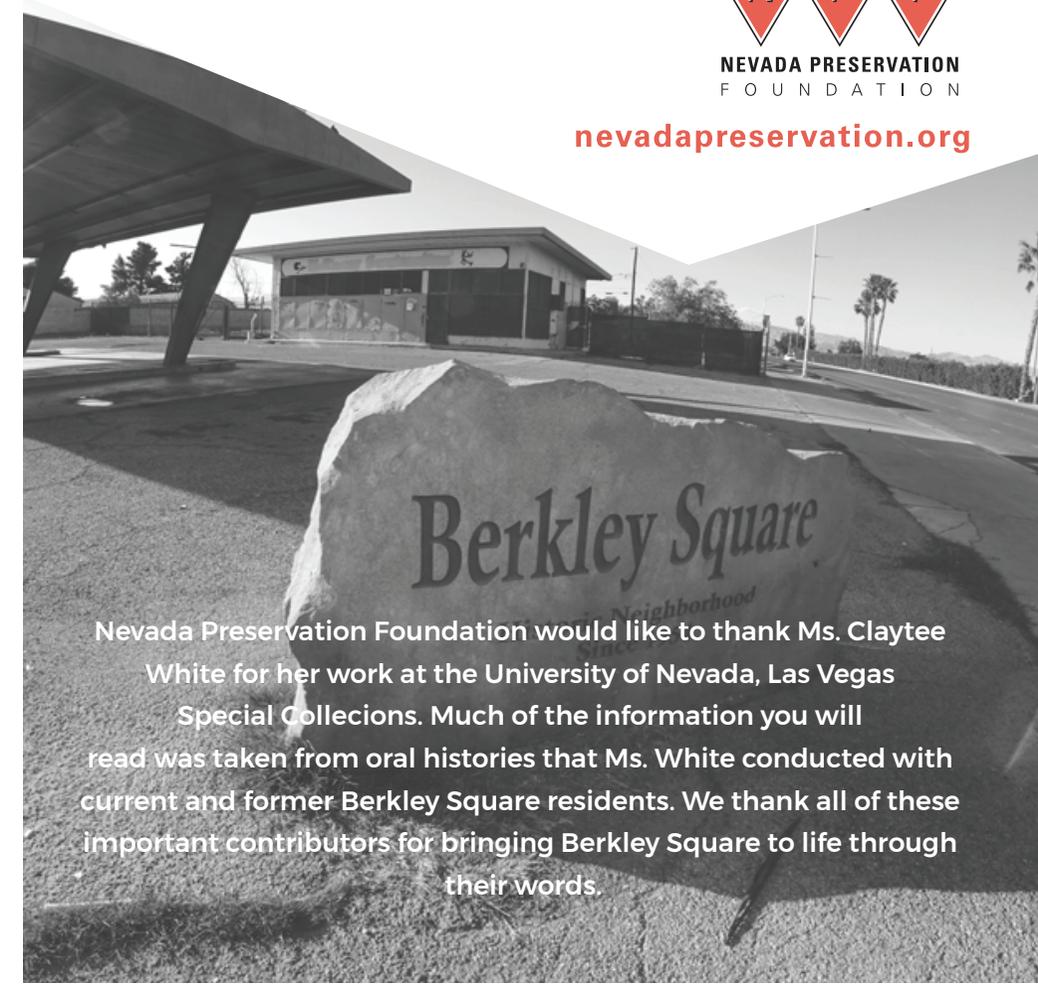
Historic Neighborhood Walking Tour

*Berkley Square is located in Historic Westside, Las Vegas.
Parking on F St. between Leonard Ave. & Owens Ave.
See map on the back.*



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Nevada Preservation Foundation would like to thank Ms. Claytee White for her work at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Special Collections. Much of the information you will read was taken from oral histories that Ms. White conducted with current and former Berkley Square residents. We thank all of these important contributors for bringing Berkley Square to life through their words.

Berkley Square Historic Walking Tour

**Parking on F St. between Leonard Ave. & Owens Ave.*

1. Berkley Square Sign

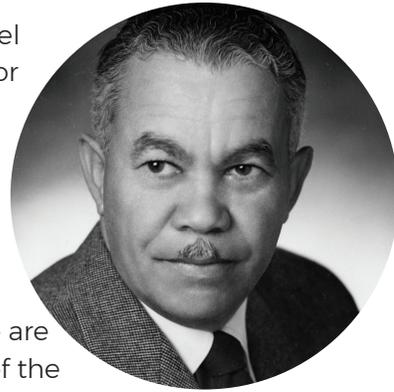
Corner of D St. & Owens Ave.

Paul Revere Williams (1894-1980) was the architect of Berkley Square, the first housing development for the middle class Black community in Las Vegas. Williams was born and his talent discovered in Los Angeles, Ca., where he designed thousands of projects in well-known neighborhoods such as Hollywood and Palm Springs. His work continued in Las Vegas with the design of numerous projects such as

the La Concha Motel lobby, Guardian Angel Cathedral, and nearly 500 housing units for employees of Basic Magnesium, Inc.

In 1923, he became the first African American to become a member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Williams demonstrated great versatility in his work, and his homes in Berkley Square are highly representative of his talent. Many of the concepts he introduced in his books *Small Home of Tomorrow* and *New Homes for Today* are seen in Berkley Square. He went on to achieve international fame and was posthumously awarded the Gold Medal by the American Institute of Architects in 2017, their highest annual honor.

Look to your left/west to the apartment complex on Owens.



2. Ruby Duncan Manor, Affordable Housing Community 500 W. Owens Ave.

Named after the late Ruby Phillips Duncan, a champion of welfare rights and an activist for the poor in Las Vegas during the 1960s and 1970s. Duncan went on to develop the Nevada Welfare Rights Organization, served as a Democratic Delegate for Nevada at the 1980 Democratic National Convention, and was awarded the honorary title of Distinguished Nevadan in 1998. This affordable housing complex was built in her honor.

Proceed north on D St. turning west on Leonard Ave. Stop near the house at the far end west of Leonard St.

3. Chaney Family Residence 1620 G St.

Russell and Annie Chaney were one of the original Berkley Square families. This is where they lived and raised their children. The home was owned by the Chaney family until 2016. See the commemorative marker in the home's front yard.

Continue north on G St. Stop between Freeman Ave. & Wyatt Ave. The best view is across the street, so you can compare the two homes.

4. Berkley Square Model A & Model B 1650 & 1654 G Street

1650 G St. is an example of the Berkley Square Model B homes, while 1654 G St. is an example of the Model A homes. Note the differences in

the facades, roofs, and the placement of the windows in each style. These were the two models to choose from for homeowners looking for a house in Berkley Square. It was common architectural practice to create a few, different models with similar floorplans as it allowed for cheaper construction, keeping home prices low, while still providing some variation in street views. As you continue through the tour, see if you can determine which model other homes are!

From here, proceed north on G St. turning east on Byrnes Ave. Stop where Byrnes Ave. curves.

5. Curves and Cul-de-Sacs Byrnes Avenue & E Street Curve

As an FHA project, the plat development of the Berkley Square neighborhood was designed to comply with FHA residential planning standards of the time. The curve in the street seen here is demonstrative of the FHA's criteria for looping streets and short cul-de-sacs, which intended to slow traffic and increase pedestrian safety in residential areas. Also contributing to pedestrian safety was the limited, few access points to and from the neighborhood, which is clearly demonstrated in Berkley Square's layout. Berkley Square can only be accessed at the northwest, south, and southeast by vehicle, which also works to keep unwanted foot traffic from crossing through the neighborhood.

Head south on E St. Turn west on Wyatt Ave. and continue to the last house on the left.

6. Dr. Charles & Dottie West Residence 605 Wyatt Avenue

Charles West was the first Black doctor in Las Vegas. Dr. West and his wife owned an adjacent property here that was used as accommodations for prominent Black entertainers when they came to perform in Las Vegas during the 1950s and 1960s. Racial bias kept Blacks from visiting the resorts on the Strip, and the Wests' rental home provided accommodations for Black entertainers and other visitors who were not welcome elsewhere in Las Vegas. The Wests lived very near to Dr. James McMillan, the first Black dentist in Las Vegas. In addition to being neighbors, the families were long-time friends, and ultimately the McMillans also purchased an additional home as another rental property for Black entertainers who came through Las Vegas.

Turn south on G St. and then east on Freeman Ave.



7. Ruth d'Hondt Residence 500 Freeman Avenue

Ms. d'Hondt has lived at this home since 1976. When she was a child she lived with her parents on this same street, right next door. She was one of the first Black women who worked in the casino industry in a front-of-house position as a cocktail server. She worked at the Marina, Castaways and then 26 years at Caesar's Palace. Her mother – Mattie Eppinger (420 Freeman) – owned Mattie's Café, and her father worked at the Nevada Test Site. Today, Ms. d'Hondt volunteers as the president of the Berkley Square Neighborhood Association and was instrumental in having the neighborhood declared a historic district.



8. The Eppinger Residence 420 Freeman Avenue

William and Mattie Eppinger were original Berkley Square homeowners. Ms. d'Hondt (500 Freeman) was their daughter, who grew up in this home. The Eppingers moved from Arkansas in the 1940s. William was one of the few Blacks who worked on the Hoover Dam project and later at the Nevada Test Site. Mattie worked as a cook at the Town Tavern and later went on to own Mattie's Café. In 1955, William and Mattie Eppinger moved into this home, which to this day remains in the Eppinger family.

Continue east on Freeman Ave. onto D St. Turn north on D St. If you are walking or driving, be careful. This is a busy street!

9. Agnes Marshall Residence 1666 D Street

Ms. Marshall moved to Las Vegas in 1951 after growing up in Louisiana. Her first job was at White Cross Drugs at the corner of Oakey and Las Vegas Blvd, where she washed dishes. Later she worked for many years in retail, an unusual vocation for a Black woman in that era. After marrying her husband, George Marshall, they purchased this home in 1955 with \$1 down through the FHA program as George was a veteran. She still lives here today and volunteers as the vice president of the Berkley Square Neighborhood Association.