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A Toolkit for Change: The Los Angeles Women's Landmarks Project

How to Evaluate Your Landmarks in 5 Steps: Los Angeles as a Case Study

Introduction

This report summarizes a study of the representation of women's history in designated Historic-Cultural Monuments (HCMs) in Los Angeles, California. An evaluation of designation HCMs was undertaken to better understand the general premise the women's history is severely underrepresented in HCMs, with only 2 percent of over 1,300 places recognized for women's history.

Conducted from May through August 2024, this study reviewed forty-three existing HCMs for their inclusion, or exclusion, of women's history. The HCMs in the sample were specifically chosen for their association with women's history, even if they are not officially designated as such.¹ The sample includes sites that were designated from the HCM program's inception in 1962 up to the time of the study, representing a broad range of approaches to nominating and designating women's history. This range also reflects shifting standards for designation, and, thus, includes nominations with varying levels of quality and quantity of information.

Original nomination files were provided by [LA City Clerk Connect](#) and the [Office of Historic Resources](#). Each file was evaluated for the representation of women in its significance statement, criteria under which it was nominated, and criteria under which it was designated.² The purpose of these evaluations is to understand the existing narratives around women's contributions to the history of Los Angeles and the type of reparative work needed to properly convey women's history.

Because this study is a part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's [Where Women Made History](#) initiative, its scope is limited to the representation of women in Los Angeles'

¹ See "Step 2: Identifying Landmarks" for a full description of how HCMs were chosen.

² Upon the introduction of criteria in the nomination process, preparers mark which criteria a particular site falls under. The Cultural Heritage Commission does not necessarily have to designate the HCM according to those selected criteria and can vote to add or remove criteria it was nominated under.

historical narratives.³ As such, this research does not include detailed analyses of the representation of other communities—LGBTQIA+, Black/African American, Latinx, Asian/Asian American, Indigenous – in designated HCMs, except in cases where these histories intersect with women’s history. Full-length studies of each of these communities is essential for creating historic preservation practices and policies that incorporate social justice.⁴ The overarching goal of this project is to provide a model for other groups undertaking similar reparative work.

About the Preparer

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Step 1: Know Your Designation Process

Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monuments: A Brief History

The Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument program has its origins 1958, when members of the Los Angeles chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) became concerned with the destruction of historic places during post-World War II urban growth and development. Members of the local AIA chapter began working with the City’s Municipal Arts Commission to create an ordinance that identified and protected historic buildings. This work culminated in the passage of the [Cultural Heritage Ordinance](#) in 1962. Notably, this predates New York City’s renowned [Landmarks Preservation Law](#) (1965) and the [National Historic Preservation Act](#) (1966).

The Cultural Heritage Ordinance created a Cultural Heritage Board, a five-member board responsible for the designation of any historic place important to the history of Los Angeles, California, or the United States. Originally, the Board maintained unilateral power to declare

³ In line with the project’s goal of inclusivity, we used “women” to refer to anyone who identifies as a woman regardless of sex at birth.

⁴ It is important to note that the Getty launched a similar project, [African American Historic Places Los Angeles](#), in 2020. This collaborative project rethinks historic preservation practices and policies through the lens of social justice and equity.

Historic-Cultural Monuments. In 1980, a code amendment created a review process by the Los Angeles City Council and, in 1985, the Board became a City Commission, with all members appointed by the mayor. Today, the Cultural Heritage Commission (CHC), formerly the Cultural Heritage Board, considers all HCM nominations and reviews proposed work to existing HCMs.⁵

The Historic-Cultural Monument program was conceived as an egalitarian process; anyone can nominate an HCM.⁶ While early nominations did not require research or written historical narratives to be considered for designation, current nominations follow a very structured process. The application must include a typed [nomination form](#), written statements, bibliography, primary photos, primary documents, copies of building permits for major alterations, contemporary photos, historical photos (if available), and a [ZIMAS](#) parcel report.⁷

Once a nomination application is deemed complete by the Office of Historic Resources (OHR), the CHC holds a public hearing to vote on whether it will begin a formal HCM review process. Property owners are then notified, permits in process are flagged for review, and a temporary stay on demolition is put in effect.⁸ OHR then evaluates the proposed monument and prepares a staff report recommending approval or denial of HCM designation.

The CHC holds a second public hearing to approve or deny status. If status is approved at the hearing, the nomination is forwarded to the Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) committee for final approval or denial. City Council then grants the property, site, structure on the [list of designated HCMs](#).⁹

Since its establishment in 2006, the Office of Historic Resources (OHR) has coordinated the City's historic preservation programs and provides support to the Cultural Heritage Commission.¹⁰

⁵ "Department of City Planning Recommendation Report," City Planning Commission, Los Angeles City Planning Department, January 22, 2009, <https://planning.lacity.gov/StaffRpt/initialRpts/CPC-2008-4918.pdf>.

⁶ It was conceived as an egalitarian process, but the level of time, research, and financial support to prepare nominations act as a barrier for community members.

⁷ "Historic-Cultural Monument Nomination: Information Guide," Office of Historic Resources, City of Los Angeles, April 2018, https://planning.lacity.gov/odocument/2b4fefbf-fa6a-47e8-9ae2-186477dfe661/HCM%20App%20Guidelines_2018.pdf.

⁸ The City of Los Angeles does not require owner consent to nominate and designate a property.

⁹ "Historic-Cultural Monument Nomination: Information Guide," Office of Historic Resources, City of Los Angeles, April 2018, https://planning.lacity.gov/odocument/2b4fefbf-fa6a-47e8-9ae2-186477dfe661/HCM%20App%20Guidelines_2018.pdf.

¹⁰ "Community: Los Angeles," Los Angeles Conservancy, Preservation by Community, accessed Aug. 5, 2024, <https://www.laconservancy.org/save-places/community-preservation/los-angeles/>.

The Cultural Heritage Ordinance (Updated 2018): The Basics

- The Cultural Heritage Commission: A five-member commission that have a demonstrated interest and knowledge of historic preservation
- Designation Criteria: A proposed monument must meet at least one of the three criteria
 - Is identified with important events of national, state, or local history, or exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community.
 - Is associated with the lives of historic personages important to national, state, city, or local history.
 - Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction; or represents a notable work of a master designer, builder, or architect whose individual genius influenced his or her age.
- Procedures for Designation
 - Initiation: The City Council or Commission can initiate consideration of a proposed site.
 - Application: Any interested individual can apply for proposed designation of a site.
 - Action: The Commission recommends the approval or disapproval of a proposed designation. Designation is not effective until it has been adopted by City Council.
- Notice: There must be a public hearing of the proposed designation, and the property owner must be notified of any determination made by the City Council or Commission. Owner consent is not required for designation.
- Preservation: The Commission must take all steps necessary to preserve a Monument that does not interfere with the public health, safety, or general welfare of the city.

The Cultural Heritage Ordinance outlines the parameters of the Cultural Heritage Commission and the Historic-Cultural Monument program. Just as important, however, is what is *not* included in the ordinance language. The ordinance does not include language that addresses any proposed changes to a designation—amendments or rescissions. As such, there is no current pathway to add or remove information in the historical record.

Unpacking the Designation Criteria: Changes over Time

Formal criteria were not in use at the time of the program's start in 1962 and, as a result, nominations did not argue for significance under specific categories. HCM nomination process later included "main themes" on the application cover sheet for preparers to indicate broad areas of significance. This transformed into a general paragraph that ambiguously defined some criteria, rather than having clear, separate criteria:

The criterion is the Cultural Heritage Ordinance which defines a historical or cultural monument as any site (including significant trees or other plant life located thereon) building or structure of particular historic or cultural significance to the City of Los Angeles, such as historic structures or sites in which the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community is reflected or exemplified, or which are identified with historic personages or with important events in the main currents of national, State or local history or which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction, or a notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influenced his age.

In 2007, this paragraph was adapted into four criteria (Added by Ord. No. 178,402, Eff. 4-2-07):

- Reflects the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, state, or community
- Is identified with historic personages or with important events in the main currents of national, state, or local history
- Embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural-type specimen, inherently valuable for study of a period, style, or method of construction
- A notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual genius influenced his or her age

A 2018 ordinance amendment (Ord. No. 185,472, Eff. 4-28-18) resulted in the three, numbered criteria that are in use today:

1. Is identified with important events of national, state, or local history, or exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community.
2. Is associated with the lives of historic personages important to national, state, city, or local history.
3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction; or represents a notable work of a master designer, builder, or architect whose individual genius influenced his or her age.

From Policy to Practice

Knowing about the Historic-Cultural Monument program is not just about knowing how to navigate the nomination/designation process. Knowledge of organizational history and policy helps inform evaluations of individual nominations and of the program as whole. For example:

- How do nominations change over time? What is the difference between a nomination from 1962 (when the Board had unilateral power) and nomination in the present day?
- How does the development of a formal structure in the historic designation process shape how individuals prepare nominations?
- How does historic preservation policy translate into practice?
- Are there certain policies that result in harmful practices?
- Are there any policies that can support more inclusive historic preservation practices?

Step 2: Identify Landmarks

Identifying HCMs for Review

Forty-three HCMs were selected by a group of historic preservation practitioners in Los Angeles—Christina Morris, Christy McAvoy, Teresa Grimes, and Sian Winship—who are invested in creating a gender-equitable amendment and nomination process. The sample group of HCMs was selected after each practitioner reviewed the list of existing 1,300 HCMs. Using their personal and professional knowledge, each practitioner made note of which designated places are known sites of women's history. In most cases, whether or not women's history was actually reflected in the original nomination was unknown prior to selection. In other words, these HCMs were specifically chosen because they *should* be designated for women's history.¹¹

The chosen HCMs represent designations from the program's beginning in 1962 through the present. To ensure that a variety of nominations were included, HCMs were selected based on how they fell into three general categories:

1. **Easily Amended:** These HCMs have a clear and strong association with women's history in Los Angeles. If the site is not already designated for women's history, additional information is accessible (institutional access not required for research) and can be easily incorporated into the historical narrative.¹²
2. **Challenging Amendments:** These HCMs may not have as clear of an association with women's history as the Easily Amended group and, as such, require significant additional research and writing to properly convey women's history. Additionally, the research materials needed to make a strong case for women's history are not easily accessible without affiliation with a research institution. Given the level of changes to the original nomination, there might be the need for another review process by the Cultural Heritage Commission.
3. **Precedent-Setting Nominations:** These HCMs were precedent-setting at the time they were designated—either in their actual nomination or in the review by the Cultural

¹¹ There was not a particular target number for this initial sample of HCMs for study. Forty-three simply ended up being the number of HCMs after each practitioner had the chance to review and comment on the full list of designated places in Los Angeles.

¹² Institutional access refers to the ability to access academic subscriptions, databases, archival material, book holdings, support, etc. that is typically provided through a university or other research institution for those affiliated with that institution. Without affiliation, these resources are restricted or have a paywall.

Heritage Commission (or its predecessors) – and could serve as guides for the amendment process.

*It is important to note that these categories were determined prior to studying the original HCM nominations. This analysis of the HCMs revealed that there was little difference between the Easily Amended HCMs and the Challenging Amendments.

Reviewed HCMs

HCM NO.	NAME
6	Bradbury Building
8	Foy House
12	Hollyhock House
34	Barnsdall Art Park
134	Crossroads of the World
158	Mary Andrews Clark Residence of the YWCA
175	YWCA Hollywood Studio Club
196	Variety Arts Center Building/Friday Morning Club
241	Casa de Rosas/ Sunshine Mission
254	Marymount High School
256	Mack Sennett Studios
284	Highland Park Ebell Club Building
301	Arzner-Morgan Residence
327	Thomas Potter Residence
328	August Winstel Residence
352	Los Angeles Nurses Club
354	Giannini Building/ Bank of Italy Building/Women's Banking Department
381	Case Study House No. 8/ Eames House and Studio and Grounds
503	Wachtel Studio - House and Eucalyptus Grove
537	Eagle Rock Women's Twentieth Century Clubhouse
562	Eagle Rock Women's Christian Temperance Union Home
578	Emmanuel Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church
583	Zobelein Estate

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587	Lincoln Heights Jail/ Bilingual Foundation for the Arts
604	Hollywood School for Girls/ Women's Club of Hollywood
639	Ruskin Art Club
712	Textile Center Building
863	Los Tiempos - The Chandler Estate
892	Nin-Pole Residence
930	Garment Capitol Building
1038	Gibbons-Del Rio Residence
1044	Haight-Dandridge Residence
1115	Altman Apartments
1160	Standard Oil Company Sales Department Building/ Women's Building
1194	New Temple Missionary Baptist Church
1199	Arthur and Nina Zwebell Residence
1203	Monday Women's Club
1224	International Institute
1228	Sister Mary Corita Studio
1242	Dolores Del Rio Residence
1251	Crenshaw Women's Center
1271	Women's Christian Temperance Union State Headquarters
1282	Morris Chernus Apartments

Step 3: Evaluate a Sample

Evaluating the HCMs

All forty-three identified HCMs were evaluated for their representation of women's history. Given the sample size, there needed to be a systematic way of reviewing nominations with varying levels of information. This led to the creation of an evaluation form—a template of which called **Evaluating Historic Sites** is located in the Evaluation and Assessment part of the toolkit—to ensure that each site was evaluated on the same categories.

Each evaluation of the original nomination makes note of the original criteria/themes (if available) that the HCM was designated under and which of the three present criteria this would equate to in the present. If none were indicated in the original nomination, [Historic Places LA](#) (HPLA) was consulted for clarification. This online tool, operated by the City of Los Angeles, maintains an inventory of significant places. For HCMs that predate the use of present-day criteria, the HPLA inventory often includes the reason for designation using current criteria. In these cases, criteria was determined through a recent survey and do not necessarily reflect the history that was deemed significant at the time of nomination.

If HPLA did not include the criteria for designation, criteria were determined through a close reading of the nomination. The significance statement, in particular, was read for its inclusion of any history that fell under broad history, historic personage, and/or architectural significance. Present-day criteria were then assigned to correspond to what the HCM was originally deemed significant for.

The assignment of present-day criteria guides the scenarios in the next section.

Amendment Scenarios

The evaluation of each HCM in the sample group revealed six potential amendment scenarios. These scenarios reflect the different levels of work that are needed to convey women's heritage in particular narratives and serve as a guide for the amendment process. After the evaluation of each individual HCM, a scenario was assigned to each HCMs. This scenario included a summary of the nomination and recommendations for an amendment. Regardless of which scenario an HCM falls under, most HCMs still require additional architectural descriptions, alteration history, list of character defining features, and photographs to meet contemporary standards for designation.

1. **No Amendment Needed:** This site was nominated for its association with women's history and contains a significance statement focused on the contributions of women; narrative contains sufficient research to convey women's significance.
2. **Name Change Only:** This site's significance statement focuses on the contributions of women to its history, but the sitename does not reflect its importance to women's history.
3. **Minimal Changes to Narrative and/or Documentation, NO change to criteria:** This site's significance statement identifies women's heritage through its criteria and

historical narrative but could use more detail or information to emphasize women's contributions. Minimal or no additional research is needed.

4. **Significant Changes to Narrative and/or Documentation, NO change to criteria:** This site's significance statement identifies women's heritage in its criteria and historical narrative, but the overall nomination form is very basic and does not fully explain women's contributions. This scenario requires additional research and significant editing to the existing narrative.
5. **Significant Changes to Narrative and/or Documentation, addition of criteria:** This site does not identify women's heritage in its designation criteria and may or may not point to women's contributions in the historical narrative. If women's history is mentioned, the current narrative does not adequately convey the significance of women's contributions. This scenario requires significant additional research, editing, and new writing to the existing narrative. Even without these changes, the narrative does articulate that the site is significant in some way.
6. **Full Review:** This site has minimal information and is largely incomplete. It not only lacks women's history, but it fails to adequately convey the significance of the site through its criteria, narrative, and documentation. This scenario requires significant additional research, editing, and new writing to convey the site's overall significance.

Example Evaluation Write Up

Mack Sennett Studios (HCM #256)

Adopted November 5, 1982

Silver Lake - Echo Park - Elysian Valley, Council District 13

The nomination for Mack Sennett Studios consists of a cover sheet, single-page significance statement, and two high-quality photographs. The significance statement is too short and too general to make a strong case for the studio's significance. This brief historical narrative argues for the place's significance as the last remaining building from the days when Mack Sennett Studios was a popular producer of comedy films. Limited information, however, is given regarding the studio's history, important figures, or films that were produced. It is important to note that the OHR file contains the individual comments of Cultural Heritage Board members and two of the five members state that the building was *not* historically significant. No specific reasoning is given for these members' opinions.

Criteria were not in use at the time of the nomination, but Historic Places LA notes that the building was designated under Criterion 1. It appears that the designation is based on the fact that it is the last remaining building from the days of Mack Sennett, as opposed to broader film history.¹³ Neither Historic Places LA or the nomination mentions the importance of Mabel Normand to the studio's founding, growth, and popularity. The Mack Sennett Studios website even includes Normand as a central part of the studio's legacy and is credited with running the studio, working as one of Hollywood's first female directors, and the co-creator of the infamous

¹³ "Historic Resource - Mack Sennett Studios 1712 N GLENDALE BLVD," Historic Places LA, Los Angeles Historic Resource Inventory, accessed August 4, 2024, <https://historicplacesla.lacity.org/report/5f0801a0-5e91-478f-a88a-ad4eb26b8e68>.

pie-in-the-face gag.¹⁴ To properly convey the significance of the studio and Mabel Normand's integral role in its popularity, **this HCM requires a full review.**

*See the **Sample Evaluation: Mack Sennett** provided in the Evaluation and Assessment section of the toolkit for an example of a completed evaluation form for Mack Sennett Studios.

Step 4: Analyze the Trends

Scope of the Problem

It became clear early in the research process that *underrepresentation* was not as simple as leaving women out of the historical record. It manifested in various ways:

- Women's history is not adequately conveyed in the significance statement, 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 actress, director, and screenwriter Mabel Normand at all, despite her significant role in the studio's establishment, growth, and success. Mack Sennett Studios even includes Normand in the "Studio History" section of their website.¹⁵
- In cases where women are included in the nomination and designation, their contributions are diminished and/or overshadowed by other people/histories.
 - 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 as 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.¹⁶
- Even in HCMs that are 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 celebratory narratives of middle and upper-class white men's contributions to the development of Los Angeles.
- In HCMs designated for women's history, significance statements often diminish women's contributions through gendered language, inadequate research, misspelled names, etc.

¹⁴ "History of the Soundstage and Production Studios," Studio History, Mack Sennett Studios, accessed Aug. 7, 2024, <https://macksennettstudios.net/history/>

¹⁵ "History of the Soundstage and Production Stage," Studio History, Mack Sennett Studios, accessed July 24, 2024, <https://macksennettstudios.net/history/>.

¹⁶ *Period of significance* is not required information for Historic-Cultural Monument nominations in Los Angeles, but some preparers choose to include a time period in the significance statement. It is required information for the National Register of Historic Places nominations.

- 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). This nomination was submitted in 2015.

In short, women's history is both underrepresented and misrepresented. This brief list, of course, does not cover all the 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 that there were no HCM nominations that properly acknowledge the contributions of women to the history of Los Angeles. In fact, there are a handful of HCMs that are designated for women's history and include detailed historical narratives that convey the important 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, in particular, 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 that should be incorporated 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 Los Angeles narrative of early development and influential boosters, it is also part of the history of the feminist and lesbian art movement. Both stories are described in detail, portraying the evolution of this 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. For example, the International Institute was co-written by a Ph.D. candidate (at the time of nomination) and a staff member at the Los Angeles Conservancy, a non-profit historic preservation organization. The Standard Oil Company Sales Department/Woman's Club building nomination was prepared by the Architectural Resources Group (ARG), a West Coast architecture firm that specializes in the research and conservation of historic places. These nominations were carried out as a part of the everyday tasks of the preparers and are the product of access to research materials.

These nominations point to another key issue in incorporating underrepresented histories into Historic-Cultural Monuments: telling the stories of underrepresented groups – stories that have been historically excluded from dominant narratives or have minimal archival traces – is a difficult task for the average community member to realistically carry out without professional support. These types of histories require a dedicated practitioner or scholar with access to

research institutions or professional subscriptions. This reality is part of the increasing professionalization of the HCM process, which is antithetical to the community-driven purpose of local historic preservation programs.

Quantifying the Problem

Breakdown of Amendment Scenarios

Categorizing the reviewed HCMs by the amendment scenario they fall under

AMENDMENT SCENARIO	PERCENTAGE	HCM
No Amendment Needed	32.5%	Hollywood School for Girls/ Women’s Club of Hollywood, Ruskin Art Club, Textile Center Building, Los Tiempos - Chandler Estate, Haight- - Dandridge Residence, Standard Oil Company Sales Department Building/ Women’s Building. New Temple Missionary Baptist Church, Arthur and Nina Zwebell Residence, International Institute, Sister Mary Corita Studio, Dolores Del Rio Residence, Crenshaw Women’s Center, Women’s Christian Temperance Union State Headquarters, Morris Chernus Apartments
Name Change Only	0%	Although none of the reviewed HCMs fell under this category, it remains a part of the proposed amendment categories in the event that it is relevant for groups doing similar reparative work
Minimal Changes to Narrative and/or Documentation, NO change to criteria	6.9%	Case Study House No. 8/ Eames House and Studio Grounds, Zobelein Estate, Gibbons-Del Rio Residence
Significant Changes to Narrative and/or Documentation, NO change to criteria	18.6%	YWCA Hollywood Studio Club, Marymount High School, Highland Park Ebell Club Building, Arzner - Morgan Residence, Giannini Building/ Bank of Italy/ Women’s Banking Department, Emmanuel Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lincoln Heights Jail/ Bilingual Foundation for the Arts, Altman Apartments
Significant Changes to Narrative and/or Documentation, need change to criteria	16.2%	Casa de Rosas/ Sunshine Mission, Thomas Potter Residence, August Winstel Residence, Wachtel Studio, Nin-Pole Residence, Garment Capitol Building, Monday Women’s Club
Full Review	25.5%	Bradbury Building, Foy House, Hollyhock House, Barnsdall Art Park, Crossroads of the World, Mary Andrews Clark Residence of the YWCA, Variety Arts Center Building/ Friday Morning Club, Mack Sennett Studios, Los Angeles Nurses Club, Eagle Rock Twentieth Century Women’s Clubhouse, Eagle Rock Women’s Christian Temperance Union Home

Nominations that Include Gender Bias in Language and/or Narrative

The following HCMs contain language and/or crafts a narrative about women’s history that indicates a gender bias in the preparation. This includes omitted women altogether and using gendered language. The resulting nomination minimized women’s contributions to the site’s history.

GENDER BIAS	PERCENTAGE	HCM
No Mention of Women’s History	11.6%	Bradbury Building, Crossroads of the World, Mack Sennett Studios, Giannini Building/ Bank of Italy Building/ Women’s Banking Department, Zobelein Estate
Problematic Language and/or Narrative	13%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Eames House and Studio Grounds – Ray is only really mentioned as Charles’ wife; not listed as architect, designer, or owner. ● Gibbons-Del Rio Residence – sexist language used to describe Del Rio’s life and career ● Arzner-Morgan Residence – evades the fact Dorothy Arzner and Marion Morgan were a couple, something that they were open about at the time they were alive. ● Eagle Rock Women’s Twentieth Century Clubhouse – no woman is mentioned in the narrative of this women’s club; contributions to the community are diminished. ● Eagle Rock Women’s Christian Temperance Union Home – no woman is mentioned in the narrative of this women’s club; just a broad history of WCTU union is given ● Highland Park Ebell Club Building – no woman is mentioned in the narrative of this women’s club; only a broad history of Ebell Clubs is given

Representation of Intersectional History

Intersectional histories of women refer to historical narratives centered around women with multiple identities related to race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality.

REPRESENTATION	PERCENTAGE	HCM
Nomination focuses on intersectional women’s history	23.2%	Haight - Dandridge Residence, Standard Oil Company Sales Department Building/ Women’s Building, New Temple Missionary Baptist Church, International Institute, Dolores Del Rio Residence, Crenshaw Women’s Center, Casa de Rosas/ Sunshine Mission, Thomas Potter Residence, August Winstel Residence, Monday Women’s Club
Significance statement mentions intersectional women’s history, but it is not a part of the designation	9.3%	Garment Capitol Building, Arzner - Morgan Residence, Gibbons - Del Rio Residence, Lincoln Heights Jail/ Bilingual Foundation for the Arts

Prominence of the Women’s Club Movement

Breakdown of how many of these HCMs are significant for the same historical narrative of the Women’s Club Movement

23.2% (10/43) of the HCMs are designated for their history as a women’s club.

- Mary Andrew Clark Residence of the YWCA
- YWCA Hollywood Studio Club
- Variety Arts Center Building/ Friday Morning Club
- Highland Park Ebell Club Building
- Los Angeles Nurses’ Club
- Eagle Rock Women’s Twentieth Century Clubhouse
- Eagle Rock Women’s Christian Temperance Union Home
- Hollywood School for Girls/ Women’s Club of Hollywood
- Monday Women’s Club
- Women’s Christian Temperance Union State Headquarters

Women’s Clubs represent a significant portion of the HCMs selected for research (23.2%). Even as these sites represent women’s history, all but one (the Monday Women’s Club) use the same historical narrative. The narrative focuses on middle- and upper-class white women, many of whom were married to early Los Angeles boosters. For example, the nomination for the Ruskin Art Club (HCM #638) clearly states that “the foundation women of the Ruskin Art Club were of the highest-ranking citizens of the day, socially, intellectually, and financially.” These clubs are typically mentioned along with a mission of “social reform,” which, at the time they were operated, was a coded phrase that was tied to racist and classist policies, such as the rise of the eugenics movement.

While these clubs certainly had philanthropic significance and these women shaped early Los Angeles, it is still a history that represents the contributions of wealthy Angelenos. Women's history can still be exclusionary. The prominence of this narrative, then, should serve as a reminder that we need to incorporate more diverse women's stories into the history of Los Angeles.

Key Takeaways

In general, the narratives of the studied HCMs fall into three general categories:

1. Women are footnotes, excluded altogether, or subject to gendered language or descriptions. These types of HCM nominations are not just a product of the past. They span the entire time period of the HCM program.
2. Well-researched nominations and significance statements that tell intersectional women's histories. These HCMs are largely the product of the present (nominated within the past couple of years) and are the work of preservation professionals.
3. In between, there are a handful of nominations that are designated for women's history but focus on the prominent narratives of upper-middle-class white women. These are not necessarily in need of a full amendment, but they do reveal a key point: women's history can also be exclusionary.

The study of these narratives ultimately is what will guide the amendment process and the nomination of new HCMs going forward. They point to how important it is to focus on the stories of the diverse women in Los Angeles who shaped their own communities and the city as a whole.

Step 5: Create an Action Plan

Start Rewriting History: LAWL + USC Partnership

The City of Los Angeles does not currently have a formal process to amend the narratives of existing designations. City Councilmember Hugo Soto-Martinez submitted a [motion](#) in May of 2025 to create an amendment process, and the Los Angeles Women's Landmarks continues to [advocate](#) for this policy change. In the interim, the project team created a partnership with the Masters of Heritage Conservation program at the University of Southern California to practice writing the amendments of selected HCMs. These practice amendments serve a model for the amendment process and are examples for new designations associated with women's history.

During Spring of 2025, Los Angeles practitioner Sian Winship led students in an advanced practicum course dedicated to rewriting the historical narratives of selected HCMs to focus on women's history. The following HCMs were selected from the original forty-three reviewed sites and assigned to students based on individual research interests:

- Bradbury Building, assigned to Alexandra Clark
- Hollyhock House, assigned to Melissa Miller
- Casa de Rosas/Sunshine Mission, assigned to Morgan Richmeier

- Arzner-Morgan Residence, assigned to Evan McAvenia
- Garment Capitol Building, assigned to Zoe Detweiler
- Monday Women’s Club, assigned to Eliza Jane Franklin
- YWCA Hollywood Studio Club, assigned to Sai Ravikumar
- Los Angeles Nurses Club, assigned to Jade Mothé
- Ruskin Art Club, assigned to Leslie Madrigal

Students spend the semester research their HCM for women’s history and writing significance statements focused on women’s contributions to the site. At the end of the semester, students presented their findings at a mock Cultural Heritage Commission meeting, with project team members and local practitioners serving as “commissioners.” Students presented the information currently included in the HCM designation and their recommendations for amendments

Proposed Amendments

Bradbury Building HCM #6	
<p>Current Designation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No nomination from the time of designation; HABS report included in OHR file was written after HCM designation • According to HPLA, falls under Criterion 1 and Criterion 3 • The limited narratives provided through HPLA and the HABS report mentions Lewis Bradbury (as part of the social history, not historic personage), but the focus is on architectural significance. 	<p>Proposed Changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include the contributions of Simona Martínez Bradbury, who oversaw the completion of the building after Lewis’ death and was heavily involved in her husband’s business; named as an executor of his estate • These contributions could be included as a part of Criterion 1 (existing) and/or included through the addition of Criterion 2.
<p>Amendment Scenario: Full Review</p>	

Hollyhock House HCM #12	
<p>Current Designation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No nomination from the time of designation; HABS report included in OHR file was written after HCM designation • According to HPLA, designated under Criterion 1 as a cultural and recreational center for public use, as well as Criterion 2 for its association with Aline Barnsdall. • Aline mentioned as a generous benefactor, but not given active role in the design process or vision for the park 	<p>Proposed Changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add to Criterion 2 by focusing on Aline as the driving force behind the house and the park. • Highlighting Aline’s vision for the park also emphasizes its social, cultural, and historical significance (Criterion 1)
<p>Amendment Scenario: Full Review</p>	

Casa de Rosas/Sunshine Mission HCM #241	
<p>Current Designation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nomination provides general information on social significance and limited information on architectural significance • Numbered criteria not in use at time of nomination, but the cover sheet indicates that the preparer only intended to make an argument for architectural significance (Sumner Hunt design) • HPLA does not list criteria it was designated under 	<p>Proposed Changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addition of Criterion 1 – focus on its significance as a women’s shelter • Addition of Criterion 2 – include information on Essie Binkley West, known as the “Angel of Skid Row”; she also worked closely with Aimee Semple McPherson
<p>Amendment Scenario: Significant Changes w/ Addition of Criteria</p>	

Arzner-Morgan Residence HCM #301	
<p>Current Designation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nomination is brief and largely focuses on the home’s association with Dorothy Arzner (Criterion 2), with some mention of her partner Marion Morgan • Architecture is only mentioned as part of the physical description of the home 	<p>Proposed Changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add Marion Morgan, an accomplished dancer and choreographer, under Criterion 2 • Addition of Criterion 1 – the home was not just private residence, but a private LGBTQ gathering space; emphasize the significance of Arzner and Morgan’s relationship (could also be included in Criterion 2) • Include narrative on Florence Yoch’s garden design (gardens no longer extant, not able to add under Criterion 3)
<p>Amendment Scenario: Significant Changes w/ Addition of Criteria</p>	

Garment Capitol Building HCM #930	
<p>Current Designation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated under Criterion 2 for its association with real estate developer Florence Casler • Designated under Criterion 3 as the work of William Douglas Lee and an example of the Gothic Revival style in an industrial building • Preparer briefly mentions labor history of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers strike, but this is not included in either of the two criteria 	<p>Proposed Changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addition of Criterion 1 – build on brief labor history section in the existing nomination; include the ILGWU strikes that the women working in the building were involved in
<p>Amendment Scenario: Significant Changes w/ Addition of Criteria</p>	

Monday Women’s Club HCM #1203	
<p>Current Designation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated under Criterion 1 • Also nominated (but not designated) under Criterion 2 for its association with Abbot Kinney and Etta V. Moxley • Significance statement heavily focuses on Abbot Kinney’s contributions to the historically Black neighborhood of Oakwood 	<p>Proposed Changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize contributions of the club and its members in Criterion 1, rather than focusing on Kinney • Addition of Criterion 2 – add narrative about Etta V. Moxley, MWC board member and former president of the California Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (depending on information available, could be included as part of Criterion 1)
Amendment Scenario: Significant Changes w/ Addition of Criteria	
YWCA Hollywood Studio Club HCM #175	
<p>Current Designation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria not listed in either nomination or HPLA, and the significance statement only provides a general overview of the club’s history • Women’s Rights Context Statement lists the social history of the YWCA and Julia Morgan design as contributing to the club’s significance, equating to Criterion 1 and Criterion 3 	<p>Proposed Changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build the narratives on both criteria • Emphasize the role of Julia Morgan is the design • Detail the social significance of the club to its residents and how it supported young women in Hollywood
Amendment Scenario: Significant Changes w/o Added Criteria	
Los Angeles Nurses Club HCM #352	
<p>Current Designation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal information presented in the nomination • Information provided only focuses on architectural details and physical features • Narrative does not detail contributions of women or any information on residents • HPLA notes that it was designated under Criterion 1 and Criterion 3 	<p>Proposed Changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build narrative on the social and work life of residents • Point to founders and key figures in the club’s history
Amendment Scenario: Full Review	

Ruskin Art Club HCM #639	
<p>Current Designation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated specifically for women’s history • Clearly conveys the significance of the club and the members’ influence in LA • Focus is on prominent women with means 	<p>Proposed Changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further detail the significant contributions of these women to the City of LA <i>and</i> point to how women’s history can still be exclusionary • Point to how the club’s mission of “social reform” was racially coded in the 20th century • Model for thinking through reparative work needed to be done within similar narratives on the women’s club movement
<p>Amendment Scenario: Significant Changes w/o Added Criteria</p>	

Share the Stories: Using Social Media

Policy change takes time, but we don’t want to wait to share the stories of the women behind Los Angeles’ historic sites. As part of their “Women’s History Wednesdays” social media campaign, the communications team at the Los Angeles Conservancy created the following videos:

- [Women’s HERstory](#) with Arabella Delgado
- [Garment Capitol Building](#) with Zoe Detweiler
- [Barnsdall Art Park and Hollyhock House](#) with Melissa Miller
- [Monday Women’s Club](#) with Eliza Jane Franklin

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