

## Historic Significance and Integrity Assessment Report for Listing Louise Lincoln Kerr Cultural Center on the Scottsdale Historic Register

### Louise Lincoln Kerr Cultural Center

6110 N. Scottsdale Rd, Scottsdale, Arizona, 85253-5413

#### Background

The Scottsdale Historic Preservation Ordinance (Ordinance No. 3242, amending the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Scottsdale) was passed in July 1999, thereby creating the Scottsdale Historic Register (SHR) to serve as the City's official list of historic and archeological resources which have special significance in United States, Arizona, and/or Scottsdale history, architecture, archeology, engineering, or culture. Pursuant to Sec. 6.118.B, the Scottsdale Historic Preservation Officer has conducted a preliminary study of the Louise Lincoln Kerr Cultural Center, and has produced a Historic Designation Report detailing the findings of this study. The Kerr Cultural Center has been identified as having historic, cultural, and architectural significance.

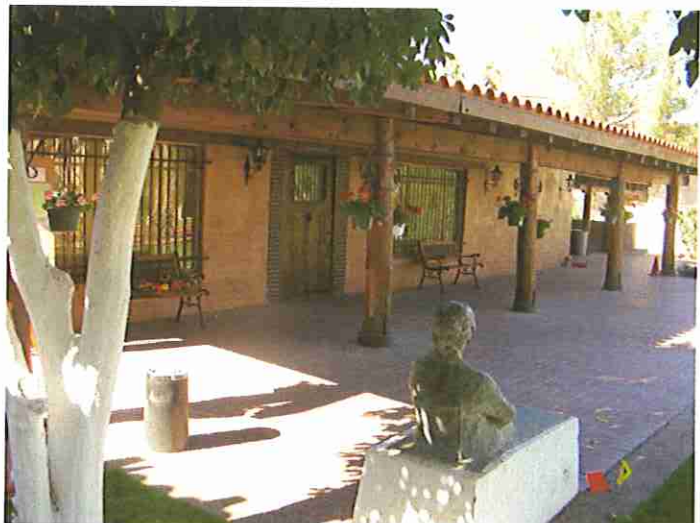
#### Historic Context: Arts Colony & Tourist Destination

The promotion of the Salt River Valley as a tourist and health destination has had a profound impact on the development and history of the City of Scottsdale. Early resorts in the area led visitors to make trips into Scottsdale in search of shopping and the opportunity to experience a small western town. This experience, combined with the natural environment of the area, helped draw artists, artisans, and architects to the area. The number of artists and architects increased dramatically during the Great Depression. In 1936, Phoenix was selected as the site for a Works Progress Administration (WPA) funded art center, which opened in 1937.

The natural scenery of the area was another major factor in attracting artists and architects to the area. Artists came to "put on canvas the color, bright sunlight, deep shadows, and vast distances of desert and mountain." Architects also drew inspiration from the scenery, developing a local style which emphasized using organic and low profile forms, indigenous materials and natural colors. Other artisans focused on creative crafts, including sculpting, leatherwork, pottery, silversmithing, and textile design. These crafts were popular with tourists vacationing in nearby resorts, further spurring Scottsdale's development as an arts colony and tourist destination.

#### Description

The Kerr Cultural Center's address is 6110 N. Scottsdale Road. The Center is located in the Southeast quarter of Section 10, Township 2N, Range 4E. The Center is located on three connected land parcels. They are listed as Maricopa County Assessor parcels #174-65-011R, 174-65-016D, and 174-65-016F. Parcels #174-65-016D and 174-65-016F serve as a parking lot for the Kerr Cultural Center, while the house and studio are located on parcel #174-65-011R.



*The east side of the studio has a broad covered patio and a sculpture of Louise Lincoln Kerr on the south end.*



There are two buildings on the site: the house and the studio. The house is directly south of the studio. Both house and studio are currently surrounded by resort and retail properties.

The one story, five room house was built in 1948 in the Spanish Colonial style. The house is roughly rectangular in shape. The walls are constructed of natural adobe bricks, made and dried on the property by Mexican artisans. The north end of the east wall has a simple ramada. The southeast corner of the house has a wooden staircase, behind a curved adobe wall, providing access to the roof. The roof is flat, with low parapet walls, topped with red ceramic tiles.

All the entry doors are hand-carved sugar pine. Each was carved in a different style by Tucson artist, Charles W. Bolsius, a friend of Ms. Kerr's. The windows are simple square windows, with oversized wooden lintels and iron security bars on the outside. The window sills are brick.

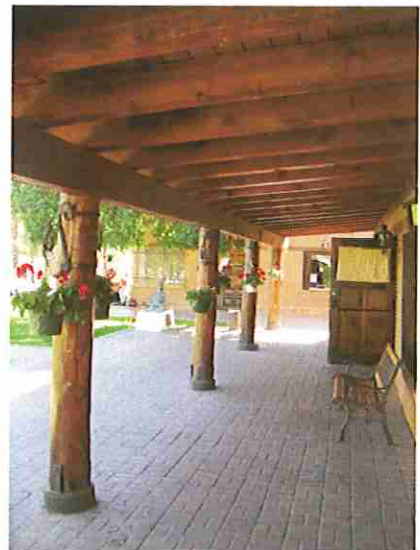
The studio is to the north of the house. It was completed in 1959, with an addition added to the west end in 1969. The walls are constructed of the same natural adobe bricks as the house. The roof is a low-pitched gable, which extends at an even lower pitch to cover the front and rear patios. These extensions have exposed rafters, and are supported by rounded wooden posts with squared roof-beams. The posts have curved iron decorations near their tops. The roof is tiled with red ceramic tiles in a pantile style (S-shaped tiles, placed so that the downturn of one overlaps the upturn of the next tile in the same course). A brick chimney is located on the north-eastern side of the roof. The chimney is set at a 45 degree rotation compared to the rest of the studio.

Like the house, all the entry doors on the studio were hand-carved by Mr. Bolsius. The main entry on the east side is of special interest. The doorframe is unique, made of empty beer bottles set into the wall. Also like the house, the studio has simple square windows, with brick sills and metal security bars.

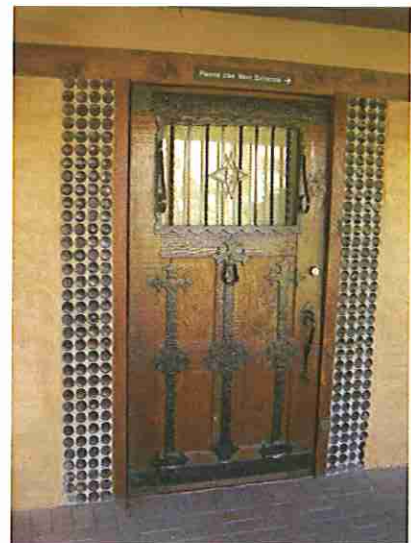
There are two identical decorative walls connecting the house and studio. They are made of natural adobe bricks, similar in construction to those of the house and the studio. The walls are lower on the sides, coming up into an archway in the middle.



*The residence is visible on the left with a simple wooden ramada on the northeast corner of the home.*



*The broad covered patio roof is supported by rustic peeled logs.*



*Entry door to studio is framed by beer bottles.*



These archways have simple iron gates under them. The entire lengths of both walls are topped with curved red Spanish tiles.

### **History**

The Kerr Cultural Center was originally the home and studio of Louise Lincoln Kerr (pronounced “Care”). Ms. Kerr was born April 24, 1892, in Cleveland, Ohio, the eldest child of John C. Lincoln. After attending Barnard College and Columbia University, where she studied music composition, Ms. Kerr joined the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra as a violist. In 1936, she moved to Flagstaff, Arizona. After brief periods living in Phoenix and Los Angeles, California, Ms. Kerr built a home in Scottsdale in 1948. It was from this home that she oversaw the construction of the studio/performance hall. The studio initially had seating for up to 210 people. In 1969, architect Fred Fleenor was hired to expand the west side of the studio. The expansion included built-in seating for 100 people, improved lighting and air conditioning, and kitchen and restroom facilities. Special care was taken to ensure that this expansion matched the rest of the studio in design, materials, and construction.



*Connecting wall between house and studio.*

For most of the next twenty years, the site served as a place where musicians and other artists could come together to talk, learn, listen, work, and perform. Over the years, the studio became the site of hundreds of private and public performances. In addition to providing space and resources for individual artists, the studio served as a meeting place for the Phoenix Chamber Music Society, the American Cello Society, the Bach and Madrigal Society, Young Audiences, the Musicians Club, the Arizona Composer’s Society, the National Society of Arts and Letters, and Monday Morning Musicals. For years, many of these groups called Ms. Kerr’s studio home.

By the time the studio had been completed, a number of small separate dwellings existed on the property. Known as the “Shacks,” these dwellings served as temporary residences for visiting musicians, artists, and friends. Unfortunately, no known records exist for the construction of the Shacks. Notable guests who stayed in the Shacks included Pablo Casals, Isaac Stern, the Budapest and the Juilliard String Quartettes, and Will and Ariel Durant. The Shacks are no longer present (removed between Ms. Kerr’s death in 1977 and the construction of the Marriott Renaissance Scottsdale Resort in 1979-1980).

Upon Ms. Kerr’s death on December 10, 1977, the house and studio were given to Arizona State University in accordance with her wishes. The Arizona State University College of Fine Arts established the Louise Lincoln Kerr Cultural Center on the site in her memory. In 1981, administration of the Center was transferred to ASU Public Events. As part of this transfer, major renovation, restoration, and improvements were carried out, finishing in late 1982. These renovations include the construction of a lighted parking lot, installation of a new furnace/air conditioning unit for the house, repairs to the abode, and bringing the buildings up to code. More work was carried out in 1988 to complete repairs to the adobe walls, re-roof the studio, and to install a security system. None of these renovations made any significant alterations to the exterior appearance of either the house or the studio.



The Kerr Cultural Center continues to serve as a venue for a variety of local, regional, national and international performing artists presented every year, and for both private and corporate affairs including small conferences, meetings, weddings and private parties.

### **Significance**

The Louise Lincoln Kerr Cultural Center has been determined to have significance under the following criteria from the Secretary of the Interior standards: A – association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history; B – association with the lives of significant people in history; and C – embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values.

The Kerr Cultural Center is significant under Criterion A for its association with the development of the City of Scottsdale as an arts colony and tourist destination. It is significant under Criterion B for its association with the life and work of Louise Lincoln Kerr, an important and influential musician, composer, and patron of the arts. The Kerr Cultural Center is significant under Criterion C as an example of an important architectural style and for the construction methods used.

The Kerr Cultural Center is significant for its association with Scottsdale’s development as an arts colony and tourist destination. For many years, the Kerr Cultural Center served as the premier music venue for the City of Scottsdale. The Kerr Cultural Center served in this capacity until the completion of the Scottsdale Center for the Arts in 1975. Today, the Kerr Cultural Center still plays an important role to the musical community in the City, and the metro area. This is due to its outstanding acoustics and because it offers a relatively small and intimate setting for performances. The combination of wood beams, adobe walls, and the floor tiles (made of a mixture cement and white marble dust, now extremely rare and quite valuable) result in what many feel is the best venue in the whole Valley for chamber music.

The Center is also significant for its association with a number of important musicians. First among these is Louise Lincoln Kerr, who composed more than 100 works and constantly preformed. Often referred to as “The Grand Lady of Arizona Music,” Ms. Kerr was inducted into the Arizona Women’s Hall of Fame in 2004. In addition to her own playing and composing, Ms. Kerr played an important role in the creation and/or operation of many of the area’s musical programs, societies, and associations. The Kerr Cultural Center is associated with the various musicians and groups who both lived on and performed at the property over the years.

The Center also holds architectural significance. Its design reflects the Spanish Colonial style of architecture which has become emblematic of much of the Southwest United States in general. The use of natural adobe bricks, made on the property by Mexican artisans, the hand-carved wooden beams, and the rare floor tiles all contribute to the site’s architectural significance. The physical function of the Center continues to convey its historic associations as the site continues to serve as a place for musicians to create, practice, and perform.



*Detail of pealed wooden post, exposed beams and rafters with attached ornamental ironwork.*