

Historic Erma Hayman House Opens Its Doors

BW Staff
Oct 6, 2022



Above, left to right: Boise City Council Member Lisa E. Sánchez; former Boise City Council Member and task force member Jerome Mapp; Erma Andre Madry Hayman's Grandson Richard Madry; Boise City Mayor Lauren McLean; Boise City Council President Elaine Clegg; and Director of Arts and History Jennifer Stevens.

Brandon Loureiro/Boise Arts & History

BOISE — With the tinkling sound of wind chimes playing in the background, Boise city leaders, along with task force and family members gathered to officially open the Erma Hayman House. The chimes echoed days now gone when Mrs. Hayman would look out of her back window to a similar musical refrain.

The home that is still standing in Boise's historic River Street neighborhood at the corner of Ash and River in the Lover's Lane Addition, is the only single-family home remaining on the block. The opening ceremony and dedication on Sept. 22 included: Mayor Lauren McLean, along with Boise City Council, the Boise City Department of Arts & History, the Erma Hayman House Task Force, and members of Erma Andre Madry Hayman's family. The Erma Hayman House, which longstanding resident and community advocate Erma Hayman (1907–2009) called home from 1948 until her death in 2009 at the age of 102, is Boise's newest cultural site, according to a press release. The home is now open to the public Thursdays and Fridays from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. a Saturday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The back story

In 2011, Mrs. Hayman's grandson, Richard Madry, sold the Erma Hayman House to the Capital City Development Corporation. The City of Boise acquired the property from CCDC in May 2018. Since then, the property, constructed of sandstone, has been rehabilitated and preserved, and Mrs. Hayman's story has been contextualized and interpreted, said the release. Her story is about her, her house and her neighborhood.

The city's Department of Arts & History researched the property and neighborhood, oversaw site and program planning in conjunction with architects and technical staff, established the Erma Hayman House Task Force, facilitated the selection of a nationally recognized artist, conducted oral histories, and established an archival photo and documentation collection around the River Street Neighborhood's history.

For much of the 20th century, the River Street Neighborhood was the most ethnically and culturally diverse area in Boise, said the release. A working-class section of the city, the neighborhood housed immigrants from the Basque Country, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hawaii, Japan, Russia, and elsewhere.

By 1940, housing discrimination in other parts of the city had made River Street home to the majority of Boise's Black residents. But, like so many areas populated by immigrants, Black Americans, and members of the working class, their stories have been largely omitted from standard historical narrative, in part because of the loss of structures and the visual lens that buildings can offer into a community's past. Most structures from the River Street Neighborhood's earliest residents have been lost to time, and the opportunity to preserve the Erma Hayman House was "an important opportunity to preserve the history of this treasured community," said the release.



Mayor McLean spoke at the opening and dedication. "The Erma Hayman House is a tangible example of our city's vision of 'Creating a City for Everyone' and supports our deep-rooted commitment to center and reflect our community in everything we do, ensuring we create a community that welcomes and engages all," she said.

Included at the site is original art, "The Memoirs of Erma Hayman, 2022" by award-winning American sculptor Vinnie Bagwell. The work takes the form of a series of bas-relief sculptural objects, presented in cold-cast bronze resin with a smooth black patina and gold highlights and serves to represent personal and intimate moments and references to some of Mrs. Hayman's family stories.

For more information, go to the website: ermahaymanhouse.org.