



NEVADA  
**STATE HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION OFFICE**

STATE OF NEVADA  
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Joe Lombardo, *Governor*  
James A. Settelmeyer, *Director*  
Rebecca L. Palmer, *Administrator*

**Board of Museums and History**

**September 13, 2024**

**Staff Report**

*Prepared: September 6, 2024*

*Previous Staff Report: June 20, 2024*

**NRHP or SRHP Pending Nominations**

Black Springs Volunteer Fire House - NRHP, Reno Vicinity, Washoe County

This nomination has been submitted to the SHPO for review and consideration. Black Springs became a predominantly Black neighborhood in the unincorporated North Valleys area north of Reno, Nevada in the 1950s. It was notable as an entire neighborhood where Black citizens could purchase property at a time when restrictive racial covenants and rampant discrimination limited Black land ownership throughout the closest cities of Reno and Sparks. The Black Springs Volunteer Fire House served as headquarters for the neighborhood's volunteer firefighting organization for just over a decade. It was constructed in 1970 during a period of increased self-determination and community uplift.

LULAC Multi-Purpose Senior Center – NRHP, Las Vegas, Clark County

This revised nomination incorporates the Board's comments from their June 20, 2024 meeting.

**NRHP or SRHP Future Nominations and Modifications**

SHPO staff received three nominations and modifications for NRHP or SRHP nominations since the previous staff report:

Historic Places Associated w/ Latinos in Nevada, 1864-2000 – NRHP MPDF, Las Vegas, Clark County

The Nevada Department of Transportation through C. Cliff Creger and Federal Highway Administration, reached out to the SHPO for review and concurrence regarding a new Multi-Property Documentation Form (MPDF) for the Latino Project. The MPDF is a context for Latino influenced buildings, structures, events and people for the State of Nevada. SHPO is currently reviewing the MPDF for the BMH meeting of December 6, 2024.

Culinary Union Local 226 Headquarters Building NRHP, Las Vegas, Clark County

The Nevada Department of Transportation through C. Cliff Creger and Federal Highway Administration, reached out to the SHPO for review and concurrence of nominating this property at 1630 South Commerce Street, Las Vegas to the NRHP. The nomination is part of the new MPDF

for the Latino Project. SHPO is currently reviewing the NRHP nomination for the BMH meeting of December 6, 2024.

Branch No. 1, Las Vegas Grammar School (Westside School): The City of Las Vegas through Diane Siebrandt, reached out to the SHPO regarding amending the existing 1978 and 2015 nomination of the Historic Westside School listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Las Vegas. SHPO is currently reviewing the amended nomination for the BMH meeting of December 6, 2024.

### **NRHP and SRHP Inquiries**

SHPO staff received 19 inquiries for potential NRHP or SRHP nominations since the previous staff report:

The Log Cabin bar, Hawthorne. The SHPO responded to owner interest in listing to the SRHP.

1970s Garage to Casita Conversions, North Las Vegas. The SHPO responded to architectural historian inquiry about this potential historical context.

East Fourth Street Survey, Reno. The SHPO reviewed and commented on city of Reno's survey of the historic Fourth Street Corridor, determining potential for a historic district and future NRHP HD nomination.

Caughlin Ranch, Reno. The SHPO answered an email from public individual interested in listing to the NRHP & SRHP.

St. Gall's Catholic Church, Minden. The SHPO answered owner's called inquiry about landmarks in Douglas County.

14 N. Buel Street, Eureka. The SHPO answered owner's emailed questions about funding for property in NR Eureka HD. The two story brick commercial building dates to the 1880s and the owner is restoring the exterior.

Lake Shore House. The SHPO answered a regional planning agency inquiry about this NRHP & SRHP listed resource, and provided historic photographs.

Bliss Boat House. The SHPO answered a regional planning agency inquiry about SRHP listed resource, and provided historic photographs.

Ely City Hall, Ely. The SHPO answered a city government inquiry about adding NRHP listed resource to the SRHP.

Kump Field, Elko. The SHPO answered follow up inquiries about SRHP.

Greenridge Neighborhood, Reno. The SHPO answered a public inquiry about adding neighborhood to the NRHP and SRHP.

Prather Building, Fernley. The SHPO answered an owner inquiry about adding resource to NRHP & SRHP.

Cliff May Homes Survey, Las Vegas. The SHPO answered a city requested review and concurrence of potential for NR HD nomination of architect Cliff May homes.

Mount Charleston Elementary School, near Las Vegas. The SHPO answered an owner inquiry in adding resource to NRHP & SRHP.

Arrowhead D Ranch, Sutcliffe. The SHPO answered a public inquiry about adding resource to NRHP & SRHP.

Virginia Price - First Habitat for Humanity House, Las Vegas. The SHPO answered an owner inquiry about adding resource to NRHP & SRHP.

Las Vegas Springs, Las Vegas. The SHPO answered an NPS inquiry about NRHP resource.

First National Bank of Nevada [Reno City Hall], Reno. The SHPO reviewed and commented on a first draft of NRHP nomination.

Army National Guard – Plumb Lane Armory, Reno. The SHPO is reviewing a request from the Army National Guard about the SRHP & NRHP eligibility of this 1959 era Army Reserve Armory.

### **Federal NRHP Nominations**

None

### **Nevada Historical Marker Program:**

None

## **Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse**

The Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse is located at West termination of Coretta Way at Kennedy Drive in Reno, Nevada, a Certified Local Government in Washoe County. The property contains a simple, single story, one-part garage building that sits next to the Westbrook Community Center. Modest and utilitarian, the building generally lacks ornamentation and does not exhibit a particular architectural style. It was Built in 1970 to house a firefighting rig and volunteer firefighting equipment to serve the residential community of Black Springs, Nevada. While the Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse is also associated with Chief William “Bill” Lobster, believed to be the first African American fire chief in the state of Nevada, consideration under Criterion B has not been applied for this nomination. The continued significance of the Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse to the community is recognized as it is now home to the Northern Nevada African American Firefighters Museum.

The Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse is significant under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage/Black and Community Planning and Development. It is nationally significant based on its role as a structure constructed by and for the community of Black Springs to house the neighborhood’s volunteer firefighting equipment. Black Springs became a predominantly Black neighborhood in the unincorporated North Valleys area north of Reno, Nevada in the 1950s. It was notable as an entire neighborhood where Black citizens could purchase property at a time when restrictive racial covenants and rampant discrimination limited Black land ownership throughout the closest cities of Reno and Sparks. The Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse served as headquarters for the neighborhood’s volunteer firefighting organization until the mid-1980s. Therefore, the period of significance is 1970 when the building was constructed through the mid-1980s.

The nomination was prepared by Alicia Barber, historian and ZoAnn Campana, architectural historian of Stories in Place LLC (Barber) and Kautz Environmental Consultants, Inc. (Campana), 2370 Watt Street (Stories in Place LLC), Reno, NV 89509. [E-mail alicia@storiesinplace.com](mailto:alicia@storiesinplace.com), (775) 771-3975. The initial date of the nomination preparation was January 24, 2024. The revised final draft was reviewed by SHPO architectural historian Jean-Guy Tanner Dubé on July 25, 2024.

The Nevada State Historic Preservation Office recommends approval of listing the Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse to the National Register of Historic Places.

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse

Name of related multiple property listing: Fire Stations of

Nevada

## 2. Location

Street & number: West termination of Coretta Way at Kennedy Drive, Reno, Nevada,

County: Washoe

## 3. Classification

### Ownership of Property

Public – Local

### Category of Property

Building(s)

### Number of Resources within Property

Contributing 1 Building. Total 1

## 4. Function or Use

Historic Functions : GOVERNMENT/firehouse

Current Functions: RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum

## 5. Description

**Architectural Classification:** NO STYLE

**Materials:** Principal exterior materials of the property:

**Foundation:** CONCRETE

**Walls:** CONCRETE, CONCRETE BLOCK

**Roof:** WOOD FRAME/ASPHALT SHINGLES

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

Built in 1970 to house a firefighting rig and volunteer firefighting equipment to serve the residential community of Black Springs, Nevada, the Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse is a simple, single story, one-part garage building that sits next to the Westbrook Community Center. Modest and utilitarian, the building generally lacks ornamentation and does not exhibit a particular architectural style. It has a moderately-pitched front-gabled roof with overhanging eaves that reveal exposed rafter tails. Its rectangular footprint measures 20 feet by 30 feet. The building sits at its original location on a concrete foundation. The walls are constructed with concrete block, and the end gables are sheathed with horizontal wood siding. The roof is covered with composite asphalt shingles. As the building has not been significantly modified since its construction, it retains a high degree of historic integrity.

### Narrative Description

#### Site and Environment

The Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse is located in the primarily residential community of Black Springs/Grand View Terrace, approximately six miles north of downtown Reno. This subdivision consists of several long, rectilinear blocks stretching north-to-south from U.S. Highway 395 to North Virginia Street. The firehouse is sited at the corner of Kennedy Drive and Coretta Way, two quiet streets lined with trees and single-family homes set behind manicured lawns. The firehouse is adjacent to the Westbrook (formerly Black Springs) Community Center and Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Park. To its south is a private residence. Three massive modern warehouses built in the 2010s and 2020 are located to the west, across a large gully. The firehouse itself features very little landscaping. It is set behind the original asphalt driveway, with a new asphalt parking area that extends to the north and west, offering several defined parking spaces.

## Exterior

The east (primary) elevation of the firehouse is characterized by a large garage opening that comprises the majority of the façade (Photos 2 & 3). A modern rolling metal garage door has replaced the original plywood door and is fitted into the original opening, which is trimmed with narrow wood casings. The garage door and opening are centered in the concrete block wall, which has been painted red. North of the garage is an original flagpole mount. A replicated two-part sign above the door reads, “BLACK SPRINGS” and “VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT.” The gable end is clad with horizontal wood boards painted white. A modern floodlight has replaced the original 1970 floodlight fixture, affixed to the end gable that lights the signs and garage door. In front of the building near its northwest corner are the original siren speakers, mounted to a narrow, cylindrical metal pole (Photo 7).

The south (side, Photo 4) and west (back, Photo 6) elevations lack fenestration or detailing, consisting only of the painted concrete block wall and—in the case of the west elevation—the wood-clad end gable with horizontal wood boards and exposed rafters at the sides. A wooden passage door is located in the north (side) elevation (Photo 5). The door is framed with a multi-profiled wooden casing. A security light is installed above the door. East of the door are conduit and an electrical meter. A metal stove pipe chimney that vents the original interior ceiling mounted gas heater is visible on the northern slope of the roof.

## Interior

The interior of the building consists of a large open space (Photo 1). A new stand-alone non-structural wood paneled partition installed in 2022 for museum displays, connected to the south wall, has created a semi-private administrative area in the building’s southwest corner. The concrete block walls are painted. The roof framing is obscured by a dropped ceiling with fluorescent strip lights. A metal heater descends from the ceiling in the northwest corner. Various overhead exposed pipes are visible.

## Integrity

The Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse retains strong integrity in its character-defining features, as defined under the Fire Stations of Nevada Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) (NRIS# 10002068). The critical aspects of integrity as defined in the MPDF are location, association, design, materials, and workmanship. The Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse sits on its original location in Black Springs (since renamed Grand View Terrace). Its integrity of setting is somewhat compromised by modern intrusions to the west. However, the firehouse's immediate surroundings are intact and retain sufficient integrity of setting, feeling, and association to evoke Black Springs’ historic sense of place.

The building possesses good integrity to its original design and period of significance. It retains its overall massing, scale, roof form, and exterior wall materials. The only notable exterior modification is the replacement of the original plywood garage door with a metal roll-up door. The replacement door is a minor alteration that does not significantly detract from the firehouse's

overall design. Otherwise, the resource retains its original form and materials from its construction in 1970, expressing good integrity of design, materials, and workmanship.



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## 6. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

**Criteria Considerations:** N/A

**Areas of Significance:** Ethnic Heritage/Black, Community Planning and Development

### Period of Significance

1970-mid-1980s

### Significant Dates

1970

### Significant Person:

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Members of the Black Springs community and volunteers

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse is significant under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage/Black and Community Planning and Development. It is nationally significant based on its role as a structure constructed by and for the community of Black Springs to house the neighborhood's volunteer firefighting equipment. Black Springs became a predominantly Black neighborhood in the unincorporated North Valleys area north of Reno, Nevada in the 1950s. It was notable as an entire neighborhood where Black citizens could purchase property at a time when restrictive racial covenants and rampant discrimination limited Black land ownership throughout the closest cities of Reno and Sparks. The Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse served as headquarters for the neighborhood's volunteer firefighting organization until the mid-1980s. It was constructed in 1970 during a period of increased self-determination and community uplift that also brought the neighborhood upgraded infrastructure and recreational amenities including a new water system, street paving, a community center, and a park. While the Black Springs

Volunteer Firehouse is also associated with Chief William “Bill” Lobster, believed to be the first African American fire chief in the state of Nevada, consideration under Criterion B has not been applied for this nomination. The continued significance of the Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse to the community is recognized as it is now home to the Northern Nevada African American Firefighters Museum.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

#### A Note on Naming

The name of Black Springs has had different geographical associations in its nearly 100 years of use. Although beginning as the name of a literal spring of water, the name “Black Springs” was applied to a broader geographical area near that water source by the 1920s, when a small community of residences and a few businesses began to form on either side of the Purdy Road (now North Virginia Street). The unofficial tract that was laid out by J.E. Sweatt on the north side of the Purdy Road around 1949 and populated primarily by Black residents expanded the size of the area then known as Black Springs. Eventually it became the sole neighborhood associated with that name as the earlier, predominantly white community cluster on the south side of the road gradually dissipated. In 1990, at the request of Black residents of Sweatt’s unofficial tract, the name of their neighborhood was formally changed to Grand View Terrace, but recent revived interest in the community’s history has spurred discussions of readopting the name of Black Springs (RGJ 4/29/1990:1B).

#### Reno’s Black Community: Residential Discrimination and Development

Throughout Nevada’s history, where its African American residents have lived has often been dictated by discriminatory policies and practices that increased in intensity as their numbers grew. Overt housing discrimination and segregation were not readily apparent in the first decades of statehood. Through the end of the nineteenth century, Nevada was home to a small number of Black residents, but never more than 500 at a time (SWCA 2020:18). The 1900 U.S. Census recorded a total of just 134 African Americans living in the state, with 33 of those in Washoe County (SWCA 2020:22-23). The numbers fluctuated over the next few decades, largely in response to the state’s shifting economic landscape, which was primarily tied to mining, ranching, and railroads. By 1910, the state had 513 Black residents, with 115 living in Washoe County, but the numbers decreased by 1920, with only 69 in Washoe County out of a statewide total of 346. The numbers rebounded by 1930, with Washoe County reporting 143 Black residents out of a statewide total of 516 (SWCA 2020:25-29).

As Nevada’s municipal areas grew, local governments along with private land developers began to impose greater restrictions on land ownership and residence by minority groups. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as happened elsewhere throughout the country, racism, xenophobia, and religious intolerance led to unprecedented racial animosity directed at Chinese, Native American, and Black communities in Reno and throughout the state of Nevada (SWCA 2020:33).

This animosity extended into both formal and informal limitations on where minority residents could live. Discrimination in housing solidified after World War I in the form of racial restrictive covenants, which were written up by private developers across the United States to govern who could and could not live in the housing tracts they established. In 1917, the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled in *Buchanan vs. Warley* that outright segregation in zoning ordinances violated the 14th amendment, which guarantees equal protection of the laws to all United States citizens. The motivation of the 1917 ruling was not primarily to secure rights for those who might be targeted by such discriminatory practices, but to protect the right of all property owners to sell to whomever they pleased (Rothstein 2017:45). Even after that ruling, property developers could impose their own racial restrictions on land they developed privately. In 1926, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that private deeds and developer plat maps were not similarly affected by the 14th amendment because they were contracts that individuals entered into of their own volition, making them a private agreement between the seller of a property and its buyer, not a state action (Rothstein 2017:82).

Developers of many of the housing tracts established in Reno from the 1920s through the 1950s implemented restrictive covenants that expressly prohibited selling or even renting the lots within them to anyone who was not Caucasian. Live-in domestic workers generally were excluded from these restrictions. The first racially restrictive covenant in place in Reno may have been in the Newlands Terrace subdivision, which was laid out by the Newlands Company in 1920. Another prominent restricted neighborhood was Newlands Manor, laid out by developer W.E. Barnard in 1927 (Barber and Campana 2020:3). In the decades to follow, similar restrictions were imposed on new subdivisions established throughout the city.

The establishment of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in 1934 institutionalized the use of such restrictive covenants by encouraging land developers, realtors, and others to implement them in order to keep neighborhoods from being redlined, or marked risky for lending. The FHA's underwriting manual went so far as to make the use of racial deed restrictions one of the criteria for insuring mortgages. Such redlining made it even more difficult for anyone who was not white to purchase property because financing was refused in the only neighborhoods where they were allowed to live (Rothstein 2017:64-65).

Reno was too small at the time to have those areas formally mapped out on Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) maps as they were in many larger cities, but it would have been clear to Reno residents which subdivisions held racial restrictions. Prior to 1960, Black residents of Reno lived primarily in the older tracts that had been established in the fifty years prior to the 1920s. Many (although not all) lived on Reno's east side, mostly north of the railroad tracks and the Truckee River, in the tracts extending eastward from the original Reno townsite. These included Morrill's Addition, the Morrill-Smith Addition, and the Leete Syndicate Addition, extending from Lake Street eastward to Quincy Street, and from East 4th Street (the Lincoln Highway/U.S. 40) northward to East Ninth Street.

Reno was Nevada's largest city in 1930 and grew modestly through the next decade, in part due to the expansion of its tourism industry. The Nevada legislature's legalization of wide-open gambling in 1931, combined with the reduction of the residency period for migratory divorce to six weeks in that same session, resulted in the construction of more housing in all directions.

From 1930 to 1940 the population of Washoe County grew from 27,158 to 32,476. In the same decade, the number of its Black residents increased from 143 to 284, with the vast majority living in Reno. In contrast, the Black population of Sparks numbered just 13 in 1930 and 27 in 1940 (SWCA 2020:42-44).

Like their residences, most of the services and institutions catering to Reno's Black population in this period were also located on the east side of town. One exception was the Bethel AME (African Methodist Episcopal) Church (NRIS #01000587), constructed in 1910 at 220 Bell Street. That location placed it not far from other religious institutions including the St. Thomas Aquinas Cathedral (NRIS #100007430) at the corner of West Second Street and Arlington Avenue (then called Chestnut Street) and the Baptist Church (not extant) just north of that. The Bethel AME Church was the center of the religious and social life of many Black residents in Reno for decades. By 1941, its congregation had expanded and hoped to build a new church. Its leaders initially hoped to build it in a primarily residential neighborhood just south of the University of Nevada campus, but were forced to abandon their plans due to racially-motivated opposition from surrounding property owners, students, and representatives of the university, who asserted that property values would suffer if the plan went forward. As a result, the congregation chose to remodel their existing church on Bell Street and the expanded church reopened in August of 1941 (Harmon 2001:9-10).

Racial discrimination extended into Reno's commercial arena. Black patrons were not allowed to patronize Reno's famous downtown clubs and casinos. They could not dine in most area restaurants. They could not stay in most hotels or motels. As a result, several Black-owned boarding houses and more informal lodging arrangements opened up on the east side of town on streets including Valley Road and Elko Avenue. In the 1930s, the prominent Harlem Renaissance poet and writer Langston Hughes stayed in one of them, reporting that Blacks could only eat in a few of Reno's Chinese restaurants at the time (Albright 2019).

Commercial and gaming establishments catering to the non-white population, many of them Black-owned, also opened on the east side of downtown Reno, on Peavine Street (now Evans Avenue), Lake Street, and neighboring Douglas Alley. They included, most prominently, Club Harlem, which began as the Peavine Club, first located at 219 Peavine Street. In 1945, a Black U.S. Army veteran named William "Bill" Bailey became a part owner of the club and renamed it Club Harlem. Just over a year later, the building was condemned, and he moved the club to a new location at 221 E. Douglas Alley, where it remained one of the city's few integrated clubs for decades (Barber 2023a). The city's casinos, hotels, and restaurants remained largely segregated through the 1950s.

The legal context for restricting land occupation and ownership by minorities shifted in 1948, when the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Shelley vs. Kramer* that racial restrictive covenants could not be legally enforced in the courts. But because they were not yet illegal to establish and privately enforce, they continued to impact where minorities were able to live, in Reno as elsewhere (Rothstein 2017:85, 90). This persistent segregation significantly narrowed the options available to minorities who wished to live within the cities of Reno and Sparks. From all indications, most if not all Black residents of Washoe County through 1950 appear to have lived within city limits rather than in outlying unincorporated areas. The movement of African

American residents to the unincorporated area north of Reno known as Black Springs in the mid-twentieth century represented a unique response to the area's widespread housing discrimination.

### From Water Source to Community: The Residential Development of Black Springs

The valleys immediately north of Reno collectively known as the North Valleys, like the Truckee Meadows south of town, remained rural and largely agricultural through the early twentieth century, after which some of the longstanding farms and ranches began to transform into residential subdivisions. Various transportation networks traversed the North Valleys beginning in the 1850s, but settlement of the area by Euro-Americans remained sparse until the middle of the twentieth century. Like a vast expanse of northwestern Nevada and eastern California, the area is among the ancestral lands of the Wá-šiw (Washoe) people, who traditionally lived throughout the territory, including the higher elevations around Lake Tahoe in the warmer months and the lower valleys in the colder months (Washoe Tribe 2023).

Beginning in the 1840s, several overland trails were established in the region. Early emigrants traveling to California generally followed the route of the Truckee River westward through the Truckee Meadows and over the Sierra Nevada, beginning in 1844 with the Elisha Stevens party. Early routes through the valleys north of the river included the Beckwourth Trail, which was established by African American trailblazer James Beckwourth in the early 1850s and led west through Beckwourth Pass. It may have become what was later known as the Honey Lake and Virginia City Road, Honey Lake Road, or Honey Lake and Truckee Meadows Road, which ran along approximately the same route as today's U.S. 395 (Furnis 2009:11).

Lemmon Valley north of Reno was named for early rancher and settler Fielding Lemmon, who established a ranch near Beckworth's road in the 1860s. Other early settlement in the area, then part of westernmost Utah Territory, stemmed from a surge of mining interest, rewarded most lucratively by discovery of the Comstock Lode southeast of present-day Reno in 1859. Prospectors organized a mining camp and district called Peavine in the North Valleys in 1863 and founded a small community called Poeville in the 1860s. The region peaked in mining activity in 1873-1874 and only had a dozen residents by 1880 (McDonald 1982:13).

By 1867, three years after Nevada statehood and a year before the founding of Reno by the Central Pacific Railroad, the "Honey Lake and Virginia Stage Road" extended northwest into the small community of Peavine and continued north to California. In the 1880s, the valley became the site of an early railway, the Nevada & Oregon Railroad Company, which was founded in Reno in 1880. The tracks ran 30 miles north of Reno to Oneida by September of 1881 (Nevada-California-Oregon Railway 2023).



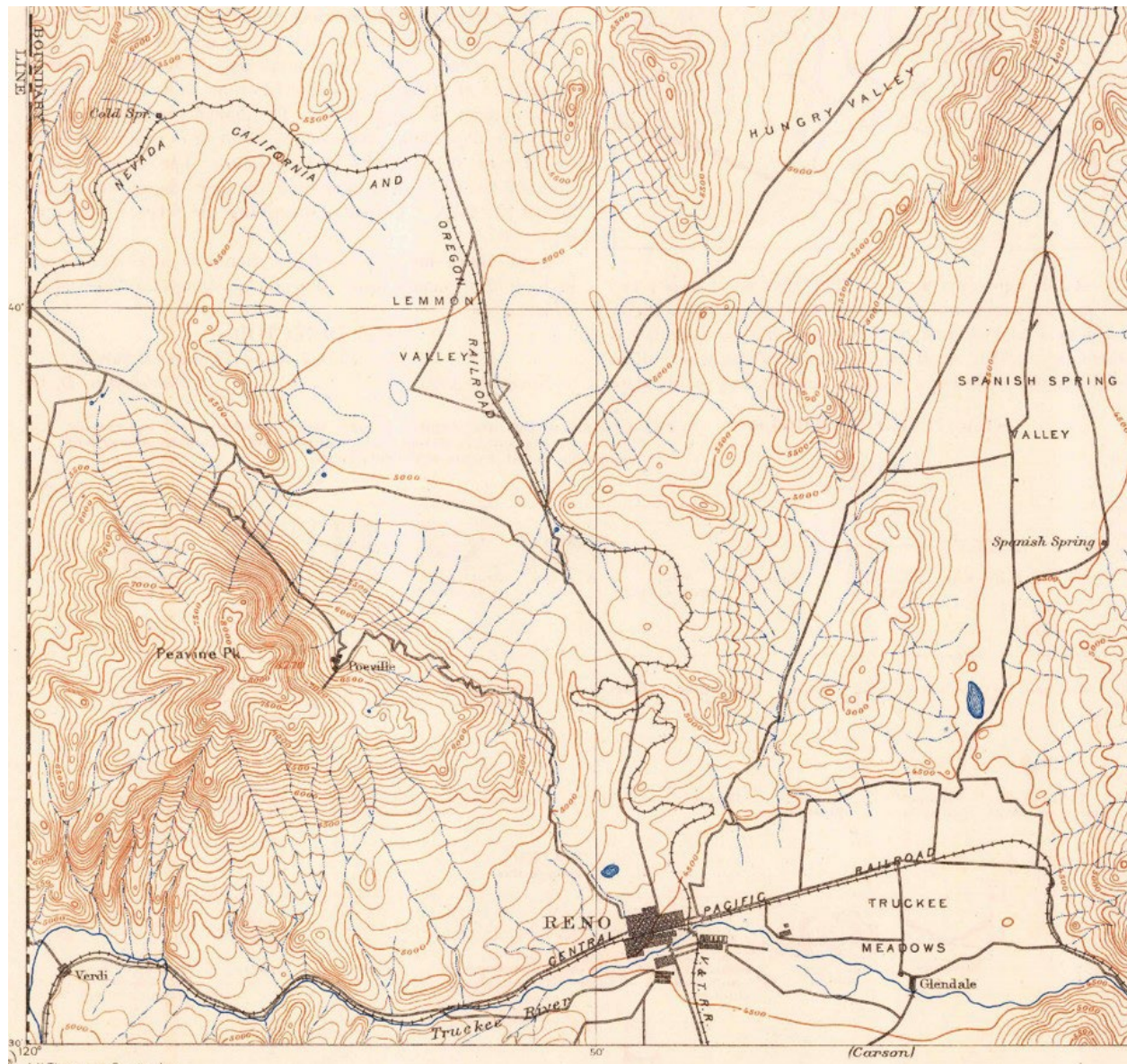


Figure 1

By the late nineteenth century, the name “Black Springs” had been ascribed to a natural spring located northeast of the Peavine Mountain range, at the southern end of Lemmon Valley. It was one of two adjacent springs that appear on early maps of the area. One that was earlier called “The Wells,” located at a crossroads where two roads met, appears to be the same source later labeled “Rock Springs.” Another spring just to its west has no name on an 1869 map but is labeled “Blacks Spring” on a late nineteenth century map for the Nevada-Oregon-California Railroad (Figure 2) (Furnis 2009:12). The origin of the name is not entirely certain. Some say it had to do with the dark appearance of the water, while others have posited its relationship to a person with the last name Black, which would explain the possessive form of “Blacks Spring.”

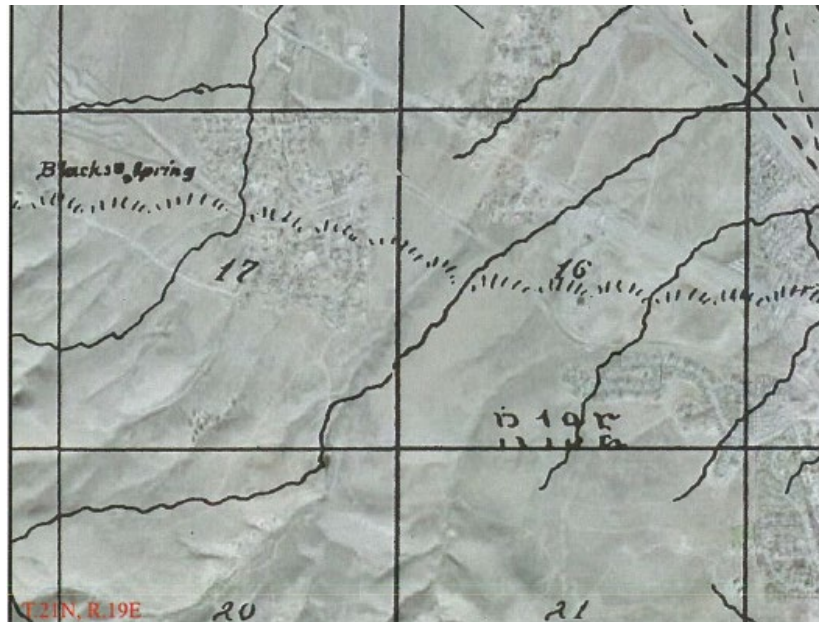


Figure 2

Several newspaper articles refer to incidents occurring “at Black Springs” in the late nineteenth century. An April 1889 article in the local paper referred to the suicide “at Black Springs” of a man who was employed herding goats for a man named A. Benitz (NSJ 4/4/1889:2). But the term “Black Springs” seems to have first been used to describe a geographical area larger than its namesake water source around 1920, when a woman named Hannah Bathurst began to advertise turkeys and chickens for sale at her “Black Springs Ranch” (REG 11/20/1920:4). Bathurst divorced her husband, William, in 1922 and by 1924, she was operating the Black Springs Service Station on the Purdy Road. She also ran a resort with a restaurant and dance floor, where live orchestras played until dawn through the 1930s (Hinman 2010:7).

The Reno-Purdy Highway, which ran past Bathurst’s resort, was built in the early years of the state highway system. The county received federal aid to improve the highway in 1920, straightened the route, and evened the grade. Before this, the road extended north from Sierra Street, but the new road extended north out of Reno city limits on Virginia Street, running for fifteen miles to the California line. It was also re-graded and slightly straightened (REG 8/21/1920:1). But even after that, it was so curvy that one section near Black Springs was named the “death curve” due to the high number of accidents occurring there. The highway department straightened it further in the early 1930s (REG 12/7/1931:10).

The character of the North Valleys changed permanently in the 1940s with the establishment of a federal military installation. In November 1941, just one month prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Lemmon Valley was chosen as the future site of a heavy bombardment base for the U.S. Army (REG 11/25/1941:1). The Reno Army Air Base was formally established in 1942. It was a training site for officers and enlisted men in the Signal Corps and in 1943 housed the Ferrying Division of the Air Transport Command. Its arrival spearheaded the construction of a new four-lane highway through the valley to the base.

Many white residents of Reno expressed concerns that the establishment of the Reno Air Base would bring Black soldiers to the area, leading Reno's mayor to assure residents that there would be no troops of color stationed there (NSJ 10/9/1942:1). But some Black servicemen indeed were stationed there as soon as 1943 (Myers 2018). The base was deactivated in 1945 and taken over in 1948 by the Nevada Air National Guard for use in training. Named Stead Air Force Base in 1951, it was reactivated in 1952 and served as the site of a U.S. Air Force Survival School where, again, Black servicemen were among those stationed (RGJ 4/30/1993:9).

These Black servicemen were not welcomed by many in the Reno community and were often actively prevented from entering many local businesses. In 1952, because local clubs, hotels, and restaurants refused to serve the Black soldiers stationed at Stead, the Air Force took the drastic step of providing them with free bus trips to Sacramento on the weekends for entertainment. There were nearly 85 Black servicemen stationed at the base at the time (NSJ 7/2/1952:12). After an article reporting these drastic steps ran in the local newspaper, the Chamber of Commerce appointed a committee to "investigate the reported discrimination cases." The Chamber's president, Harold S. Gorman, had this to say:

Reno has never had a large Negro population, and this fact gave us considerable concern when the first colored troops and their dependents began arriving for duty at Stead Air Force Base. The Chamber of Commerce joined with Air Force housing people and to date no airman or officer, regardless of color, has failed to find acceptable living quarters (NSJ 7/30/1952:14).

Gorman also said there would soon be about 150 Black troops at Stead (out of a total complement of 2,500) when the 3904th Composite Wing reached full strength (NSJ 7/30/1952:14).

There was no family housing at the Stead base until construction of 600 units got underway in 1957; until then, any enlisted men who arrived with families had to find housing in the local community, primarily renting rather than buying due to the uncertain nature of the length of their stay (NSJ 1/17/1957:8). The first families were moved into the on-base housing in March 1958 (REG 3/4/1958:11). But although President Harry Truman had issued Executive Order 9981, ending racial discrimination in the Armed Forces, in 1948, it is not clear if Black families were allowed to live on the base even then. Further research is required to determine how many Black servicemen moved to Reno with their families during this period. Tracking where they might have rented rooms, houses, or apartments poses another challenge. While some newspaper advertisements from this period directly appeal to servicemen, none explicitly indicate whether they would welcome people of color.

Among those offering rooms and even land to servicemen in this period, although it is not clear whether those included Black servicemen, was Hannah Bathurst of Black Springs, who was white. By 1946, she was offering cabins, houses, and lots on her property for rent and sale, including offering a free lot to any service men (NSJ 11/10/1946:18). In fact, she developed so many properties on her land that the 1950 U.S. Census listed her occupation as the owner of a subdivision.



The small community at Black Springs became more established by the mid-twentieth century, when residents lived on both sides of Virginia Street, and Bathurst's service station was still in operation (Furnis 2009:23). A Black Springs post office was established in October 1947 (NSJ 10/17/1947:16). In 1950, Black Springs was described in the local newspaper as "Washoe County's new community." Its residents formed a Black Springs Improvement Association and organized a boys' club. They also tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade the Sierra Pacific Water Company to extend water pipes and service to their homes (NSJ 10/19/1950:11). In 1951, the county library system established a small outpost in Black Springs, staffed by volunteer members of the Black Springs Improvement Association (REG 3/14/1951:12).

### The J.E. Sweatt Unofficial Tract

The area of land to the north of the established community cluster at Black Springs was not part of this initial neighborhood and appears to have been used for sheep ranching until the late 1940s. In April of 1948, Salvador and Elide Urrutia, members of a longstanding area ranching family, sold just over eleven acres there to a couple named H.C. and Ella Gerber (Washoe County 1948a). The Gerbers immediately sold the same land to J.E. Sweatt (Washoe County 1948b).

John Eugene Sweatt was already highly experienced in buying and selling property. In 1925, he had purchased an insurance and real estate business called the F.F. Small General Agency and ran his own firm in Reno until 1975. He was also politically active, serving in the Nevada State Assembly from 1937 to 1939 and chairing the Washoe County Democratic Party in 1944 and 1945 (REG 1/25/1979:36).

What prompted J.E. Sweatt and his wife, Dorothy, to purchase this piece of land and then to sell it off to Black buyers is not entirely clear. As a real estate professional aware of the area's potential for future growth, it is likely that Sweatt initially saw the purchase as a sound investment. Some sources including Sweatt's son John W. Sweatt have said that he met Eleanor Roosevelt sometime in the 1940s and that she inspired him to sell land to Black people at a time when few white people in Reno would (Furnis 2009: Appendix D). However, Sweatt appears not to have met Eleanor Roosevelt until 1954, when he hosted her visit to Reno in his capacity as state chairman of the American Association of United Nations (NSJ 4/6/1954:9).

In a 1967 newspaper interview, J.E. Sweatt himself recalled that the idea of selling the land to Black buyers came only after he had first purchased and surveyed the land, divided it into lots sized 100 by 130, marked off the streets, and had them roughly graded. As he recalled, he was then entitled to sell five or six lots a year (but it is not clear from whom this entitlement would have originated). As he told his interviewer, "A colored man contacted me and asked what I thought about selling to colored people. I thought it over; they're entitled to have their own land, their own homes. And that's the way it started. Other colored people came in. I bought a few more acres, and laid the streets out nicely—50 foot streets" (NSJ 3/26/1967: 30).

The first Black residents to purchase land from the Sweatts, in 1949, were Emmett and Winnie James and Curtis and Berta Chapman, followed by Waymon and Della Toney in 1951 (Washoe

County 1949a; Washoe County 1949b; Washoe County 1951). Through the 1950s and 1960s, Sweatt continued to sell property to primarily Black families. Most were originally from the American South, and many had lived in California prior to moving to northern Nevada. Some had already been living in Reno or Sparks for many years, while others were new to the area. Several had previously worked at the Ordnance Depot in Herlong, California and some continued to work in Herlong while living in Black Springs, riding there together in a van every morning (Bufkin 2023).

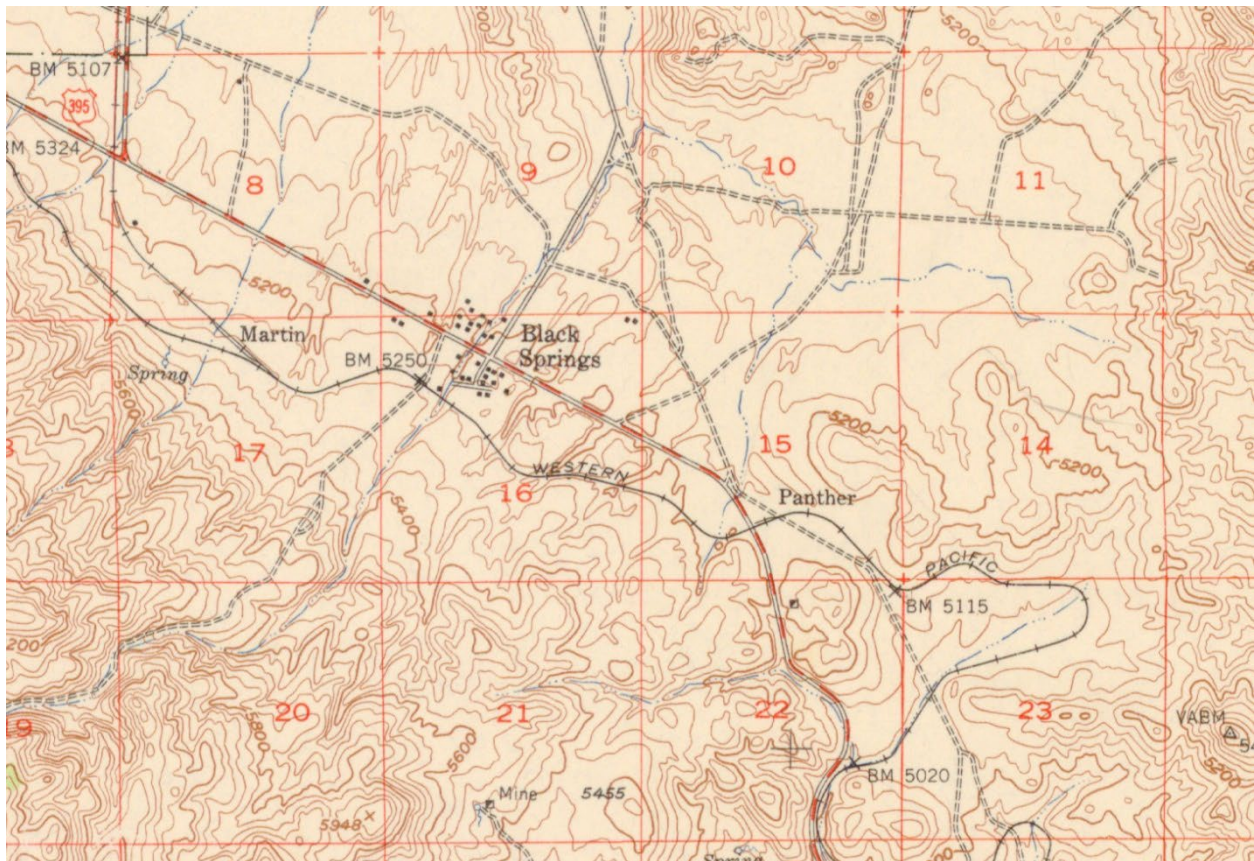


Figure 3

The actual dates and even years when these families moved to Black Springs is difficult to determine with precision due to the nature of their financial arrangements with J.E. Sweatt. Many of them, unable to secure loans through area banks, entered into private agreements whereby they paid Sweatt for the property in installments as though he were a mortgage lender, keeping track of monthly payments in small notebooks he provided. Due to this arrangement, the dates when their property deeds were filed with the County Recorder's office are often much later than the dates when the buyers physically moved to the neighborhood.

Even on the recorded deeds filed with Washoe County, the date when the agreement was initiated is often months or even years earlier than the document's official filing date. For example, on a deed of sale from J.E. and Dorothy Sweatt to A.C. and Ethel Mae Jones, the initial date of the indenture is September 30, 1955, while the filing date is May 23, 1960 (Washoe

County 1955a). It seems likely that in such cases, the buyers started to pay Sweatt on the date when the agreement was initiated and paid him off before the document was officially filed.

Sometimes the buyers' descendants have retained private records that help to clarify when the families moved to their properties. For example, Jeff and Carrie Townsell signed an agreement with J.E. Sweatt on July 16, 1958 in which they agreed to pay him \$745.50 for Lots 6 and 7, Block D. The agreement specified a payment plan of \$35 per month plus six percent annual interest on the unpaid balance (Sweatt and Townsells 1958). And yet the County has no record of any transaction between the two parties until the official deed was filed in 1960, around the date when the Townsells would have paid off the entire amount if they kept to the planned schedule (Washoe County 1960b).

Most of the property sales in Black Springs were for residences, with the notable exception of houses of worship. On September 9, 1952, J.S. DuPree requested permission from Reno City Council to solicit funds for construction of a chapel and recreational center at Black Springs. He was denied permission from the "advisory committee on solicitations" who stated that "the area wasn't sufficiently centralized to fulfill its stated purpose—to provide facilities for Negro soldiers stationed at Stead air force base" (REG 9/9/1952:11).

But just two days later, on September 11, 1952, Sweatt sold a piece of property in Black Springs to the trio of Du Pree, Fleeter Turner, and Charles Settles. The deed specified that the parcel was to be used exclusively for a church and parsonage, with "the expressed understanding that any and all improvements to be constructed upon said plot of ground shall be constructed and maintained for the use of a church of the gospel, and living quarters only for the use of a minister and his family connected with the church, and for construction and maintenance of Sunday school rooms and social halls to be operated in connection with such church; and for no other purpose" (Washoe County 1952). A permit to build a \$1500 church was issued to Dupree, Turner, and Settles in October 1952 (NSJ 10/3/1952:3).

The newspaper article describing the City Council's discussion of the church in September 1952 is one of the first to associate early residents of Black Springs with the military base at Stead. The specifics of that association are difficult to track, but there is evidence of both renters and buyers who lived in Black Springs while stationed there. At least one of them remained in the neighborhood for decades. While the vast majority of the early buyers were African American, Frank Higgins, who bought a parcel from Sweatt in June of 1961, was a white man from Alabama (Washoe County 1961a). He was stationed at Stead Air Force Base in the early 1960s, bought a parcel in Black Springs from J.E. Sweatt, and had a wood frame house moved there from the Kietzke Lane area in Reno to live in with his wife and four children. Interviewed in 2007 at the age of 86, Higgins said that there were definitely other Air Force personnel living in Black Springs at the same time and that his family along with the other military families did their grocery shopping in Stead (Furnis 2009: Appendix D).

It would seem more likely that any servicemen stationed at Stead would have rented rather than purchased property in the area, considering the temporary nature of base assignments for the enlisted. One such serviceman, a Black man who had married a white English woman, moved to the area in 1958 and rented a house in Black Springs from Waymon and Della Toney. The

couple's daughter, Lynne Harris, was born at St. Mary's Hospital in 1959 and recalls several other military families living around them (Harris 2023).

### "A Better Place": Challenges and Self-Determination in Black Springs

By the mid-1960s, approximately 15 to 20 Black families lived in Sweatt's unofficial tract. Meanwhile, the pre-existing community just to its south was starting to disperse. Hannah Bathurst had died in 1959, and in 1960 all the property that she had assembled but not sold to others was purchased by Raymond I. Smith, who built a new post office for Black Springs on the site of the old one in 1961 (REG 7/10/1961:13).

Sweatt's unofficial tract was notable not just for the racial composition of its early residents but for its affordability. What these early buyers purchased from the Sweatts for approximately \$350 per lot was not property with a residence and infrastructure included, as in traditional housing developments, but one-third of an acre of undeveloped land. For comparison, lots of similar size in Reno at the time were priced at well over \$1000, and often twice or even three times that much. Houses in town were even more expensive. And construction of a new home in any location could be cost prohibitive for those of lesser means. Racial discrimination worsened the problem. The discriminatory lending practices of area banks not only prevented many of the new residents of Black Springs from borrowing funds to purchase land, but also from obtaining loans to build their own houses. As a result, many arranged to have small houses moved to Black Springs from other locations in Reno and Sparks. Some of these houses had been in the path of the planned construction of Interstate 80, which got underway in the 1950s. Additionally, many families also constructed small shacks and sheds, the majority made of wood (Furnis 2009:24).

Once acquiring or constructing a house, residents had to contend with the rural area's lack of infrastructure. There was available electricity, which had long been provided to the earlier community of Black Springs. But because the land was well outside of Reno city limits, there was no water or sewage system, requiring them to rely on wells and outhouses. The streets were unpaved with no curbs, gutters, or sidewalks, and no garbage collection (Furnis 2009:24). This was all understood at the outset, but presented substantial hardships for the families who moved there.

Access to sufficient and clean water was especially challenging. According to J.E. Sweatt's son, John W. Sweatt, his father had only realized after purchasing and selling parcels that there was no available water short of drilling wells (Furnis 2009: Appendix D). However, that is likely not the case, as it would have been clear from the beginning that, as in other unincorporated areas, residents would have to rely on wells for water. Other sources indicate that most of the new residents simply could not afford to drill their own wells. In a letter to the editor of the *Nevada State Journal* published on March 11, 1969, a group of 28 Black Springs residents stated that Sweatt had eventually "put in a water system as we found the cost of drilling wells excessive due to the great depths required in drilling" (NSJ 3/11/1969:4).

Those without wells were forced to haul water in from somewhere else. According to early residents Thurman and Ella May Carthen, who were interviewed in 2007, the proprietor of Foster's Service Station on Sixth Street in downtown Reno, eight miles south of Black Springs,

allowed residents to fill containers with water for free whenever they needed it (Furnis 2009: Appendix D). Ollie Westbrook recalled carrying water from Foster's "in barrels, cans and any container that would hold water" (Townsell-Parker 2010:59).

Westbrook also recalled that the community approached Sweatt about installing a water system after he had sold between 15 and 18 lots, but that Sweatt had reservations since he had no experience installing public utilities (Townsell-Parker 2010:59). Nevertheless, in 1956, Sweatt invested \$25,000 to install a system that he named the Eugene Street Water Company after one of the tract's streets (and his middle name). After the installation, Sweatt raised the price of the parcels he sold from \$350 to \$500 to help finance it (NSJ 3/26/1967:30). A receipt in the Black Springs collection dated September of 1956 documents payment by resident Ollie Westbrook of \$20 to establish water service at 241 North Street. The fee was broken down into a \$5 service fee, \$5 monthly service, and a \$10 refundable deposit (Black Springs 1956). Even after the system's installation, the water pressure was so low that it sometimes disappeared, and Sweatt continued to make improvements. In 1961 he installed a 2,000-gallon pressure tank and improved the pump house (REG 9/14/1961:19).

According to J.E. Sweatt's son John W. Sweatt, his father had intended for the water system to be a joint venture with the parcel owners. To create it, he dug a main well, possibly at the site of the original Black Springs, and then built a holding tank and pipelines to move the water from the well to the tank and then to the separate properties (See Figure 4). Sweatt's son added that his father had died penniless due to the unanticipated expenditures involved in having personally provided utilities to the residents of Black Springs. Once he had installed the system, it became illegal for him to abandon it, and because he did not wish to overburden his lower-income residents, he was never able to generate enough income from the community to fund the system and had to continue to shoulder the cost alone (Furnis 2009: Appendix D).



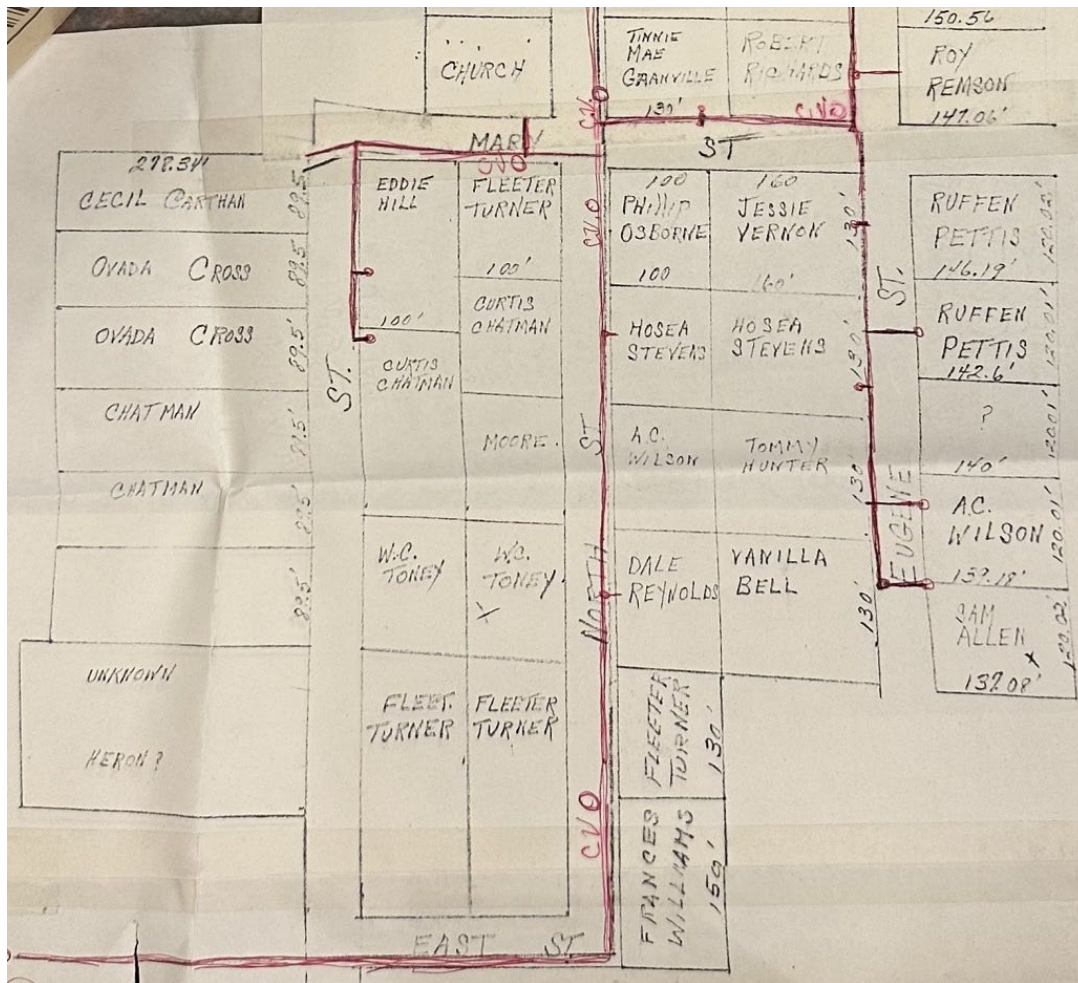


Figure 4

In the 1960s, the residents of Black Springs were in a difficult predicament, living in an unofficial tract carved out of county land many miles outside of Reno city limits. There was little hope of annexation by the City of Reno, even if the residents had desired it, and therefore no prospect of enjoying city services. Lending institutions were wary of issuing home improvement loans to a neighborhood where the streets were private property. But Washoe County would not take ownership of the streets until they were upgraded, which would require widening them, grading them and filling them with gravel, and establishing proper drainage along the sides. The community reportedly tried through the years to accomplish some of these improvements themselves but could not bring them to the required level (Townsell-Parker 2010:53, 73).



Figure 5

A conjunction of several factors beginning in the mid-to-late 1960s brought increased potential for improving the community. Establishing an assessment district for the neighborhood became one possible option to help fund improvements for streets and sewage in 1965, when the state legislature passed legislation enabling assessment districts. But the provisions of that legislation dictated that the cost of the levied assessments could not exceed the value of any of the properties in the designated district. As a result, the low property values of some of the parcels in Black Springs made the establishment of such a district untenable (NSJ 3/27/1967:1).

Still, more attention was being paid to helping Nevada's Black population as their numbers increased. From 1950 to 1960, the number of Black residents in Nevada approximately tripled, from 4,302 to 13,484. That translated into a rate of growth much higher than the state's population as a whole, which increased from 160,083 to 285,278 over the same decade. The same pattern also held true for Washoe County, where the total population increased from 50,205 to 84,743 between 1950 and 1960 and the African American population more than tripled in the same period, from 483 to 1,628. The influx stemmed largely from large-scale in-migration to southern Nevada during World War II to work in industries like Basic Magnesium Inc. (BMI), and to both northern and southern Nevada after the war to support the expansion of the hotel and casino industry (SWCA 2020:71, 72, 75, 80).

Throughout the country, Civil Rights legislation was beginning to help address some of the embedded inequities faced by its minority populations. Established in the mid-1960s, Nevada's

Equal Rights Commission began to call for a state law to enforce the 1964 Federal Civil Rights Act. In 1965, they drew attention to the hundreds of Black residents living in substandard conditions throughout the area, including Black Springs. As the *Reno Evening Gazette* reported:

The commission found that the de facto segregation existing in this area is creating racial “ghettos” of the kind which have troubled America’s major cities. Approximately 400 to 600 people, the majority Negroes, including airmen from Stead Air Force Base, are forced to live in a substandard community north of Reno called Black Springs because better facilities are not open to them in Reno and Sparks. Black Springs has no sewer service, no streets, no lights and no water except community pumps. (REG 1/16/1965:11)



Figure 6

In 1967, a three-part series in the *Nevada State Journal* featured images of the neighborhood’s houses and streets, with the headlines “Black Springs’ Conditions Deplored,” “Challenge Faced at Black Springs,” and “Black Springs Blighted Area Stirs Concern.” Black Springs residents immediately responded in defense of their neighborhood and its residents. In December of 1968, longtime resident and community leader Ollie Westbrook wrote a letter to the Washoe County Commission that he titled “A Black Springs Cry for Help” in which he explained to the commissioners that the images in the paper had shown only “the worse part of the whole,” and that many outsiders had been using Black Springs as a dumping ground, leaving discarded appliances, lumber, furniture, used cars, and other items there under the guise of “gifts.” As he asked them, “I seek your aid now in helping me to make this a better place, a more beautiful place, in which you would be proud to look upon, and I am as proud to live within” (Townsell-Parker 2010:60).



Funding for improvements finally began to reach Black Springs in the late 1960s, through a combination of local and federal efforts. Federal Civil Rights legislation also began to right some long-standing wrongs. While restrictive racial covenants had been rendered unenforceable in 1948, the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968 finally made their implementation illegal.

Federal initiatives that brought more resources to Black Springs in the 1960s included the War on Poverty, anti-poverty programs like the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program, and the programs of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), created by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965. Johnson's War on Poverty initiative through the Office of Economic Opportunity established Outreach Centers in several areas in Washoe County including one in Black Springs. Resident Helen Westbrook was hired as the outreach worker to her own community and was able to devote much more time to navigating the bureaucracy it would take to secure more infrastructure (Townsell-Parker 2010:76). Through Westbrook's office, local residents approached local land developer George Probasco about donating some land adjacent to Sweatt's unofficial tract to the County to serve as a playground for the children of Black Springs. At their request, he offered to donate 1.234 acres in November of 1968 (REG 11/25/1968:17).

Another major improvement to the neighborhood's infrastructure came in December of 1968, when six area trucking and construction companies volunteered labor and equipment to help bring the neighborhood's streets up to county standards by grading and graveling them. Their poor condition had to that point prevented Washoe County from accepting and maintaining the streets, which were formally transferred from J.E. Sweatt to Washoe County in June 1969 (NSJ 12/2/1968:8; NSJ 6/17/1969:3).

Additional help came through the arrival of paid workers. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-452), signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson on August 20, 1964 established the Job Corps Program, which helped to provide much-needed services to economically struggling areas both urban and rural. The VISTA program, founded in 1965, strove to lift communities out of poverty by hiring workers aged 18 and older to work for a year at a time in nonprofit organizations and public agencies dedicated to giving those communities the resources they needed (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2015). In February 1969, the community of Black Springs was assigned a young VISTA worker named Andy Gordon. Among many other activities, he was responsible for writing a grant application to HUD for a new water system and also served on the Volunteer Fire Department (Townsell-Parker 2010:63).

The community's struggle to access a steady water supply had been especially frustrating to residents since the Sierra Pacific Power Company line that carried water from the Truckee River to Stead ran within yards of their neighborhood. Residents had asked from a very early point whether the line could also supply water to Black Springs but were rebuffed, as the Truckee Compact required anyone taking water out from the river to also direct water back in through treatment of sewage. That could not happen without a complete sewer system, which Black Springs did not have. Approximately forty families lived in Black Springs at the time and were still using septic tanks (REG 12/27/1968:7; NSJ 6/27/1969:6; Townsell-Parker 2010:59, 79).

Young Black Springs residents working with Andy Gordon formed an organization called POWER (People Organized to Work for Equal Recognition) and together with the neighborhood's older members embarked on a series of community projects. One was a proposal to rename the neighborhood's streets, which Gordon submitted to the County Commission, securing their approval in July of 1969. At that time, the original street names of Main, North, Eugene, Mary, and East Streets were changed to Kennedy Drive, Westbrook Lane, Medgar Avenue, Coretta Way, and Malcolm Avenue, respectively (REG 7/16/1969:6).

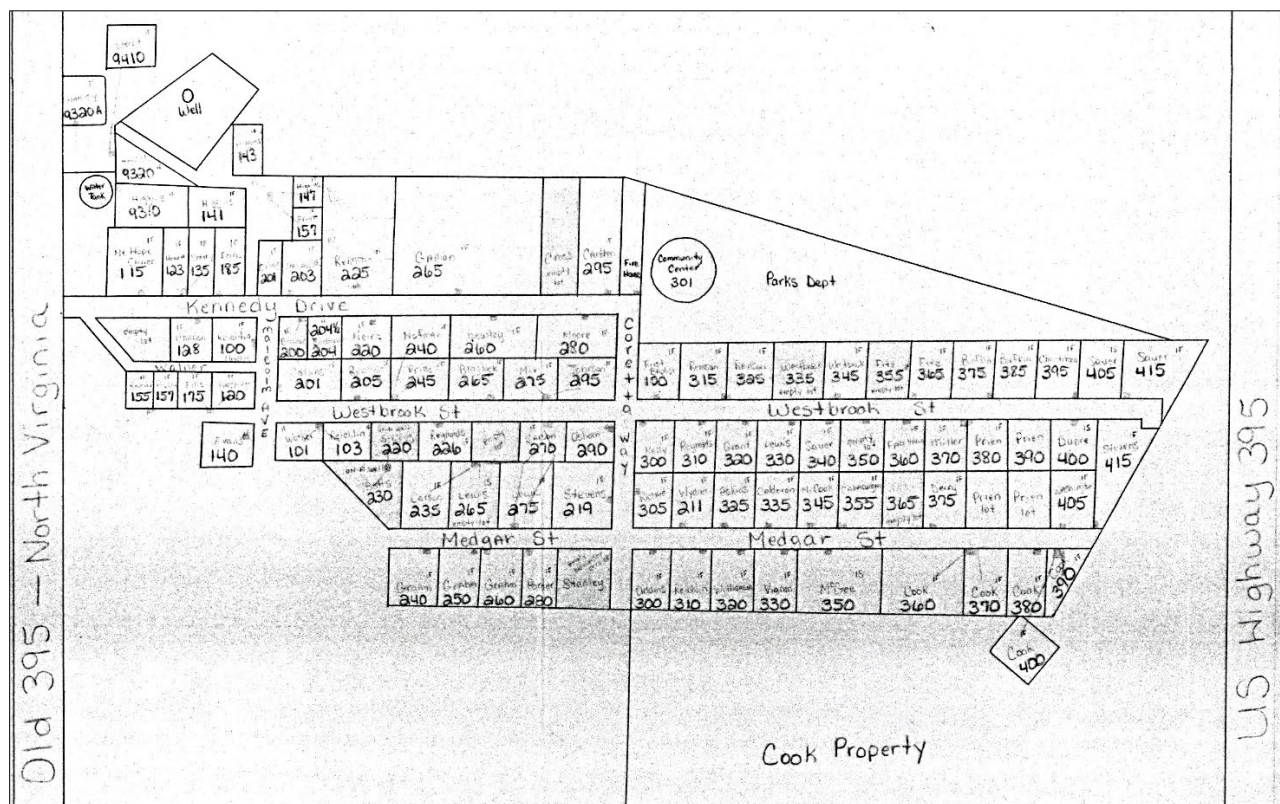


Figure 7

### The Black Springs Volunteer Fire Department

The conjunction of all these new initiatives and funding streams finally helped the community secure its own Volunteer Firehouse. Black Springs had always been vulnerable to fire due to its distance from established firefighting services and personnel. Several factors exacerbated the threat of fire in Black Springs. Most of its houses were constructed of wood, many were not built to code, and many structures stood vacant for years at a time. Additionally, the roads were unimproved, and the water service was subpar with very low water pressure. The distance from other firefighting departments could cause devastating delays in service.

Due to the recognized threat of fire in the arid West, the towns of Reno and Sparks, both established along the line of the transcontinental railroad, had firefighting departments from the

beginning. After years with more informal fire brigades, the citizens of Reno formally established the town's first organized fire service, Engine Company No. 1, in 1875, and a second fire engine company by 1882 (Bertolini 2017: Section E, 19-20). Reno still retained volunteer companies until just after incorporating as a City in 1903, disbanding its various volunteer companies and replacing them with full-time paid firefighters by 1904 (Bertolini 2017: Section E, 20-21). Founded in 1904 and incorporated in 1905, the neighboring city of Sparks had four volunteer fire companies by 1907 (Bertolini 2017: Section E, 17). The town added a second LaFrance pumper truck in 1924 and had partially professionalized by the 1930s but relied on volunteers until 1977 (Bertolini 2017: Section E, 22).

With the gradual development of the North Valleys beginning in the 1940s, several firefighting entities were established to serve the area. They include a firefighting contingent at the Stead Air Force Base. That contingent was later deactivated and transferred to the City of Reno in 1966, and Reno Fire Station 9 was then established in Stead (RGJ 4/30/1993:9). The Reno Fire Department began to add more stations within city limits in a period of rapid expansion after World War II. New facilities included stations at 1500 Mayberry Drive (1950), 3050 Skyline Boulevard (1965), and 3600 Kings Row (1968) (Bertolini 2017: Section E, 22).

The neighboring city of Sparks provided rural fire service to unincorporated areas including Black Springs beginning in 1942 through an agreement with Washoe County that lasted until the creation of the Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District three decades later. The Sparks department often responded to rural fires alongside crews working for the Grazing Service and other federal agencies (Bertolini 2017: Section E, 22-23). Volunteer fire departments often assisted these established forces, and there are indications that the Black Springs community that predated J.E. Sweatt's unofficial tract formed a Volunteer Fire Department in the early 1950s, but it is unclear how long it may have been in operation (REG 10/14/1953:10).

State and federal agencies had long been occupied with fighting fires in the North Valleys and throughout the entire region. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) served as the primary force engaged in wildlife firefighting in Nevada from the early twentieth century through the 1960s (Bertolini 2017: Section E, 34). Two of the worst range fires in area history occurred in 1954: the 2500-acre Peavine fire and a 1500-acre fire on the Anderson Ranch. Those massive conflagrations not only destroyed valuable watershed and grazing cover but in the case of the Peavine fire, resulted in fast runoff of heavy rain waters in the years to follow, leading to flood damage in Reno (REG 7/10/1957:11).

The State of Nevada stepped up efforts to combat wildland fires in 1957, when the Nevada State Legislature established the Nevada Division of Forestry as part of the new Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (Bertolini 2017: Section E, 37). That summer, patrol officers for the new division conducted daily inspections of the Black Springs and Peavine areas for fire hazards, finding that many homeowners' incinerators were unscreened and located in thick cheatgrass (REG 7/10/1957:11).

Another agency, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), began to assume major firefighting responsibilities in the western states in 1957 (Bertolini 2017: Section E, 35). That year, the BLM had a pumper stationed at Black Springs that was enlisted to assist in various wildland fires

throughout the peak fire season (REG 7/25/1957:17; NSJ 8/2/1957:11; NSJ 9/5/1957:8). And in 1959, the State Division of Forestry announced plans to establish a fire station on public land about a mile south of Black Springs, where the BLM intended to move all its firefighting equipment from its existing location in Reno (REG 3/7/1959:9).

The presence of these various forces in the area was an enormous help, but Black Springs residents were eager to have firefighting resources with reliable water even closer to home. Fortunately, one of the duties of the new State Forester was to assist residents with the creation of legally constituted fire protection districts where needed. With Division of Forestry help, the residents of Black Springs filed Articles of Incorporation with the state to establish their own volunteer fire department as a nonprofit organization in 1961. Listed as its president was A.C. Jones (Black Springs 1961). According to his daughter Joycelyn Jones Richardson, Arthur C. Jones was a mechanic who started up the first Black Springs Volunteer Fire Department as a way to give the neighborhood's teenage boys some useful skills. He also gave them work on his crew as a sanitation worker and taught some of them barbering skills, one of his other professions (Richardson 2022).

The newly-formed Black Springs Volunteer Fire Department did not have its own firefighting equipment, but in 1962 its directors entered into an agreement with the Nevada Division of Forestry whereby the Division furnished the volunteers with a 500-gallon fire truck as well as an array of other tools and equipment to use in firefighting, training, and other emergencies. The arrangement required the department to return the truck and equipment to the Division "when freezing weather threatens" unless they could furnish heated housing for it. Black Springs resident William Lobster was listed as the "cooperator," on the agreement, suggesting that he was serving as the department's chief at the time (Black Springs 1962). Born in Teoc, Mississippi in 1932, Lobster was a construction worker who had served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War and only recently had moved to Black Springs with his wife, Johnnie Mae (RGJ 9/22/1986:18).

The new Black Springs Volunteer Fire Department made efforts to secure a permanent shelter for the borrowed equipment, and in December of 1961, they entered into an arrangement with J.E. Sweatt to purchase a plot of land for a firehouse. They even placed a residential structure on blocks on the site, but they couldn't keep up with the payments and Sweatt repossessed the property in 1963 (Black Springs 1963). Nevertheless, members of the department continued to conduct activities intended to reduce the risk of fire in the community. In July 1964, they supervised the launch of a "cleanup campaign" in Black Springs. In an article promoting the event, A.C. Jones, who was identified as the fire chief but was more likely head of the nonprofit organization, explained, "We are asking all residents of the area to cooperate by cleaning up all trash, junked cars, fire hazards, and health hazards around their homes." Residents were asked to pile all trash and unwanted articles in front of their houses for the volunteer firemen to haul away. Jones indicated that any financial donations they received would support the department's fund to purchase "needed equipment" (NSJ 6/27/1964:4). By March of 1967, however, the organization was inactive, and the neighborhood continued to be served by the Sparks Fire Department under the agreement established in 1942 (NSJ 3/26/1967:30).

One persistent obstacle to the effective fighting of fires in Black Springs was the poor quality of the neighborhood's water system. In March 1967, Sparks Fire Chief Bill Farr called the entire neighborhood a "fire trap," citing both the unsafe construction of many residences as well as the lack of reliable water pressure. Many of the community's houses were built before the implementation of Washoe County's building code in 1957-58, making them even more vulnerable to fire (NSJ 3/27/1967:1). As a result, time was of the essence, but the closest fire station was ten minutes away. On Christmas Day of 1968, the Black Springs home of Sam Allen and his family burned down. Firemen called to the scene from Stead and Lemmon Valley were unable to get water from a community fire hydrant because the valves had been tampered with. Captain Robert Shulley of the department said, "The hydrants at Black Springs are useless as fire protection. They are gravity fed. It's a bad situation" (REG 12/27/1968:7).

In January 1969, at the request of the Public Service Commission, the Assistant Chief of the Reno Fire Department and the State Fire Marshal conducted a site inspection of the Black Springs water system and found it sorely lacking. According to the findings, "A minimum acceptable water system for a residential area of this type would require the residential availability of a minimum of 500 gallons per minute for fire protection. This is based on dwellings greater than 30 feet apart in distance which reduce a conflagration hazard." The system at Black Springs was far below this standard, leading the State Marshal to determine, "the water system can not be considered as adequate for fire protection and should be considered a minimal tank reserve. The major problem in this area is compounded by a combination of all of the factors that exist." As the report concluded, "The greatest improvement to the fire protection in this area would be my suggestion that the residents form a volunteer fire department that could make an initial attack on any fire that occurs. This would either extinguish the fire or at least hold that fire in check until the contract fire department can arrive at the scene." (Townsell-Parker 2010:71). As if to reinforce the findings, another house in Black Springs was destroyed by fire in 1969, at least in part because the water pressure was too low (REG 8/25/1970:11).

By 1969, J.E. Sweatt said he had invested about \$25,000 into the water system. In order to keep resident expenses low, he charged the 38 families in the neighborhood a flat fee of \$5 per month but often had difficulty getting paid (REG 3/1/1969:1). Stating that he was financially unable to make the necessary \$25,000 worth in upgrades to the water system, Sweatt began conversations with the community about transferring ownership of the Eugene Street Water Company to them (Townsell-Parker 2010:73). At the same time, the Sierra Pacific Power Company offered to provide the community with free engineering advice, aid in securing a grant, and possibly some financing to support a new water system. But in order to secure federal funding for the system, residents would have to create a non-profit corporation or similar organization to apply for a grant and operate the water company (REG 3/1/1969:1).

The creation of the Black Springs Civic Improvement Corporation (BSCIC), formally registered in May of 1969, was a momentous step as it allowed the community to receive funds including grants and to manage some of their own utilities, specifically water (Black Springs 1969a). Its stated aim, deliberately broad in scope, was "for the charitable purpose of engaging in the advancement of civic, commercial, industrial, and agricultural activities." Black Springs residents Jeff Townsell, Barbet Bufkin, Ollie Westbrook, D.C. Benson, Beverly Carthen, and William Lobster served as its original trustees (Black Springs 1969a). That same month, Sweatt

altered his will to leave his interest in the Eugene Street Water Company to the BSCIC. These steps gave further momentum to the effort to upgrade the neighborhood's water system. Washoe County submitted an application to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on behalf of the BSCIC to fund the new water system, which was projected to cost \$150,000. At the same time, the County submitted an application to the Fleischmann Foundation for the required matching funds (Townsell-Parker 2010:132-133).

By the late 1960s, the Black Springs community had lost ten structures in ten years to fire, a statistic that carried even more dire repercussions, as the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) would not insure loans for home construction in an area with inadequate fire protection. Lending agencies similarly would not extend lines of credit to anyone in the neighborhood. In the words of the County's application to the Fleischmann Foundation, "The improvement of housing conditions in Black Springs is contingent upon adequate fire protection and this in turn hinges to a large degree upon an ample supply of water. In a sense, then, it seems that the rehabilitation of the community is caught up in a vicious circle with every turn in some manner involving the proposed new water system. From this, it is clear that the proposed system is affecting the development of new programs and has hampered the implementation of ongoing projects" (Townsell-Parker 2010:84-85).

In the fall of 1969, while these efforts to upgrade the water system were still underway, the neighborhood reorganized the Black Springs Volunteer Fire Department, installing William Lobster as Chief. From all indications, he was the first African American fire chief in the state of Nevada. The U.S. Forest Service again offered to donate a 500-gallon water tank fire truck and to maintain it mechanically if the community could provide adequate shelter to protect it in inclement weather. At first, the community sought a building that they could move to a site in Black Springs but had difficulty finding one of the desired size of 24 feet long, 14 feet wide, and eight feet high. As Chief Lobster appealed to the public through the newspapers, "Last December a family was left homeless here because of inadequate fire protection. There was little or no water pressure and the entire house was burned with all the furnishings and personal belongings. With the gift of the water tank fire truck, we have a fighting chance to protect residents, but we need the shelter, or the forestry department will take it back" (REG 9/29/1969:16).

The local community responded generously. In May of 1969, area land developer George Probasco had added approximately five more acres to his earlier donation of land for a community playground after the County advised that a "large draw," or gully, cut right through much of his original land donation, making much of it undevelopable. The park was located north of Main Street (later renamed Kennedy Drive) and eventually named Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Park (REG 5/6/1969:2). At the community's request, Probasco agreed that a firehouse could be constructed on part of his donated land.

Residents, along with VISTA volunteers and students from a University of Nevada, Reno social services class, formed a Special Committee for Fire Prevention in Black Springs and determined that a site adjacent to the new park would be ideal for the fire station (REG 4/25/1970:11). After unsuccessfully requesting the donation of a small building at Stead that was scheduled to be demolished, the community decided to build a new protective structure from the ground up (Black Springs 1969b). The Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) agreed to provide \$1,500 to



the cause if the County would agree to lease the site. VISTA volunteer Andy Gordon asked the County for an expedited public hearing to consider the request since the need was so dire (REG 11/18/1969:2). On December 5, the County Commissioners voted to lease the land to the Black Springs Volunteer Fire Department for a fee of \$1 per year, which Commissioner J.C. “Specs” McKenzie paid on the spot (REG 12/10/1969:25).

The committee had blueprints drawn up and began to solicit private donations of money and materials, receiving initial contributions from Helms Construction, contractors Capriotti-Lemon, and the Walker Boudwin construction company (REG 4/25/1970:11). Construction began in May of 1970. A final tally of donated materials and service documented by the community included concrete from the CG Concrete Co., lumber from Home Lumber Co. and Copeland Co., 16 trusses and 36 beams from Home Lumber Co., cement and copper wire from Commercial Hardware, a paddle cement mixer from Ace Rents, six buckets from Lee Lumber, use of a concrete mixer from Bob Mortensen, rental of a compressor from Cerco Equipment, supplies from Apex Saw Works, 90 cinder blocks and rebar from Sam Basta and Lynette Watne, and a door from Thomas E. Judd. The community also documented contributions of labor from several dozen individuals. At the same time, residents arranged for the relocation of a house from a site in Reno to a spot right beside the new firehouse to renovate into the first Black Springs Community Center. (Black Springs 1970a).



Figure 8





Figures 9 and 10

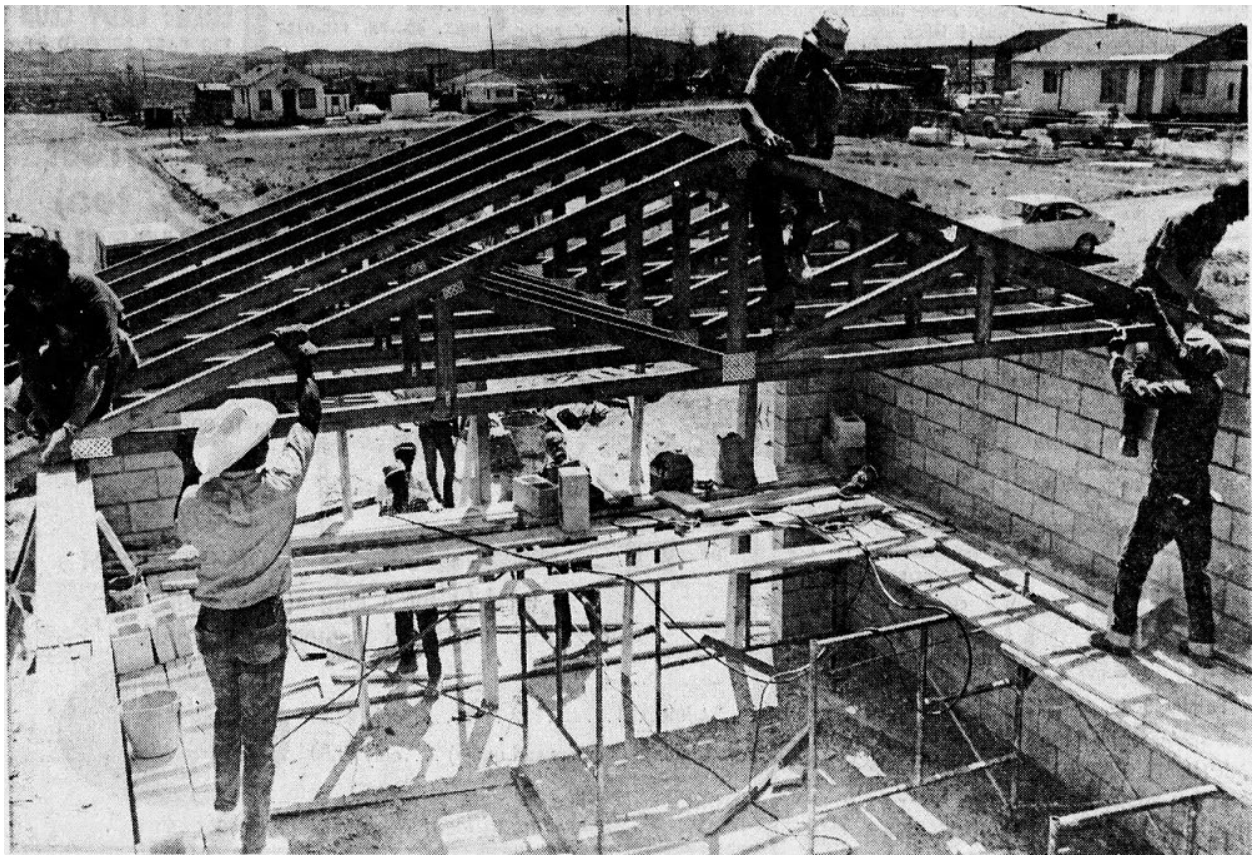


Figure 11

The building's modest size and simple form were typical of the firehouses erected in the mid-twentieth century in rural Nevada communities like Caliente, just large enough to house one



motorized fire truck and associated equipment, with a door that had to be opened manually (Bertolini 2017: Section E, 32).



Figure 12

As a neighborhood station, no sleeping quarters or other amenities were required. Soon after the building was erected, the Volunteer Fire Department got permission from owners of some dilapidated houses in the neighborhood to burn them down as a means of both training and community clean-up (Black Springs 1970b).



Figure 13

With the completion of the Volunteer Firehouse, the community could now house its borrowed fire truck year-round, allowing for a much faster response to any nearby structure or wildland fire. Residents recall that after receiving an emergency call, one of the volunteers would hand crank the building's siren to alert the other volunteers as well as the broader community. The assembled firefighters would then quickly dress in their protective gear, check the equipment, and set out to the site of the fire, whether within the neighborhood or elsewhere in the North Valleys. Upon return, they would check the hoses for cracks, make sure the couplings were in working order, roll the hoses and place them back on the truck, and then refill its water tank. After the equipment was prepared for the next emergency call, the department would conduct a discussion on their performance along with a review of training drills and basic first responder procedures (Northern Nevada African American Firefighter Museum).



Figure 14

More operational support for the Black Springs Volunteer Fire Department came within just a few years. In May 1971, Nevada's two U.S. Senators, Alan Bible and Howard Cannon, announced that HUD would be providing \$97,200 toward the construction of the Black Springs water system (REG 5/15/1971:1). The Fleischmann Foundation agreed to provide another \$65,000 (NSJ 11/15/1972:24). The Washoe County Commission approved an ordinance creating the Black Springs General Improvement District in November 1972. A board of trustees was appointed and were trained by County employees and the Sierra Pacific Power Company to operate the water system that was then under construction (REG 11/16/1972:10).

In 1972, the Nevada State Legislature passed Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) 474, which established the Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District (TMFPD). Its initial coverage area comprised 550 square miles. Governed by the Washoe County Board of Commissioners, it was initially a volunteer-only force that included ten organized Volunteer Fire Departments that could all be called in to help each other when needed. In addition to Black Springs, they included Washoe Valley, Pleasant Valley, Brown Huffaker, Hidden Valley, Sun Valley, Panther Valley, Lemmon Valley, Silver Lake, and Cold Springs. In 1974, the District hired its first professional firefighters (Truckee Meadows 2023).

The Black Springs Volunteer Fire Department fought many wildland and structure fires throughout the 1970s, both alone and in conjunction with forces from other Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District crews. The department was still active in 1980, when the community was considering plans to acquire a better fire truck, new hoses, nozzles, ladders, and fire



extinguishers, as well as to add a multi-purpose room to the Community Center to be used for Volunteer Fire Department and other meetings (Townsell-Parker 2010:211).

Residents agree that the department disbanded sometime in the early 1980s, but it is difficult to ascertain precisely when, since news reports of firefighting activities in the North Valleys in the 1980s generally identified participating crews as belonging to the Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District without identifying their individual jurisdictions. In July of 1981, a fire that destroyed a wood house in Black Springs was said to have been combated by firefighters from the Nevada Division of Forestry and the Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District, which may or may not have included a crew from the Black Springs Volunteer Fire Department (REG 7/16/1981:24). Records at the Nevada Historical Society indicate that the department was active at least through spring of 1983. According to former Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District firefighter Mark Poirier, the TMFPD continued to use the rig that was housed in the Black Springs firehouse after the Black Springs Volunteer Fire Department dissolved, finally vacating the building around 1988 (Poirier 2023).



Figure 15

In the years to follow, the building was used by Washoe County as a maintenance shop for Washoe County neighborhood parks in the vicinity, and maintenance staff used it to work on signs, mowers, and other equipment and to store tools and irrigation supplies (Wallace-Burnum 2023).



Figure 16



Figure 17

In 2021, the nonprofit organization Our Story, Inc. approached Washoe County to ask permission to use the building to house a small museum. They received permission to lease the



building for use as a museum in January 2022 and on April 26, 2022, Our Story, Inc. hosted the grand opening of the Northern Nevada African American Firefighter Museum.



Figure 18

Like many rural areas in Nevada, the valleys north of Reno are still served by a number of volunteer fire departments who cover the unincorporated areas (Bertolini 2017: Section E, 30). As of 2023, three professionally staffed fire stations were located within five miles of the Black Springs neighborhood: Truckee Meadows Fire Station 44 at 10575 Silver Lake Road; Reno Station 9 at 14005 Mount Vida Street; and Reno Station No. 10 at 5250 N. Virginia Street.

### *Conclusion*

The Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse is significant as an outstanding example of an underrepresented community coming together for its own protection and betterment in the face of hardship and discrimination. It is also associated with Nevada's first African American Fire Chief, William Lobster. The building is recognized for its contribution to local history in the areas of Community Development and Ethnic Heritage as the first and only firehouse in the predominantly Black neighborhood of Black Springs from its community-led design and

construction in 1970 until it was vacated in the mid-to-late 1980s. Despite minor modifications to its exterior elements, the building retains sufficient integrity to convey its importance as a symbol of the community's self-determination and self-reliance. Just as the community came together to build the Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse in 1970, it came together again in 2022 to recognize and rehabilitate the building. The Volunteer Firehouse is now home to the Northern Nevada African American Firefighters Museum, which held its grand opening on April 26, 2022.

**Primary location of additional data:** Other State agency. Name of repository: Nevada Historical Society

## **7. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 0.20 acres

### **Verbal Boundary Description**

Located just west of the intersection of Coretta Way and Kennedy Drive, the property is bounded by the Westbrook Community Center to the north, a privately owned parcel to the south, Kennedy Drive to the east, and a ravine to the west. It is contained within APN 570-281-01, a 5.97-acre parcel in unincorporated Washoe County owned by Washoe County in Section 9, Township 20 North, Range 19 East. The parcel also includes Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Park and the Westbrook Community Center.

### **Boundary Justification**

The boundaries of the Black Springs Volunteer Firehouse were selected to include the firehouse building as well as the paved area around it, including the driveway that provides access to it from Kennedy Drive and the associated parking spaces located to its northwest. The boundaries are based on property lines and modern roads.

## **8. Form Prepared By**

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### **Additional Documentation**

#### **Photographs**





Photo 1 of 7



Photo 2 of 7





Photo 3 of 7



Photo 4 of 7





Photo 5 of 7



Photo 6 of 7





Photo 7 of 7

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

## 1. Name of Property:

Historic name: LULAC Multi-Purpose Senior Center

Other names/site number: Arturo Cambeiro Senior Center, Nevada Adult Day Healthcare Centers at the Arturo Cambeiro Senior Center

## 2. Location

330 N. 13th Street, Las Vegas, Nevada, County: Clark

## 3. Classification

**Ownership of Property:** Public – State

**Category of Property:** Building(s)

**Number of Resources within Property:** 1 Contributing, 1 Structure, 1 total.

## 4. Function or Use

**Historic Functions :** SOCIAL/Civic

**Current Functions:** HEALTH CARE/Sanitarium

## 5. Description

**Architectural Classification:**

Spanish Colonial Revival

**Materials:** Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: Concrete

Walls: Stucco with tiled frieze

Roof: Faux Spanish tile

Other: Metal, Glass

### **Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

### **Summary Paragraph**

The Nevada Adult Day Healthcare at the Arturo Cambeiro Senior Center (ACSC) is located in Las Vegas, Nevada, a Certified Local Government in Clark County. The property is sited at the southeast intersection of N. 13th Street and E. Marlin Avenue (Assessor's Parcel Number 139- 35- 212-122). The parcel contains one single-story Spanish Revival style building, completed in 1986 as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) Multi-Purpose Senior Center (commonly called the LULAC Senior Center and known subsequently as the Arturo Cambeiro Senior Center). The property currently functions as the Nevada Adult Day Healthcare Centers at the Arturo Cambeiro Senior Center. Despite a change of use and ownership requiring an addition on the building's north end in 2015, the original 1986 massing and key architectural features, namely an irregular plan with an octagonal tower, a low-pitched, Spanish tile roof, a parapet with tiled frieze, round arch windows, corbelled arch arcade, and asymmetrical facades of white stucco, are present (Figure 1; Figure 2; Photo 0001).

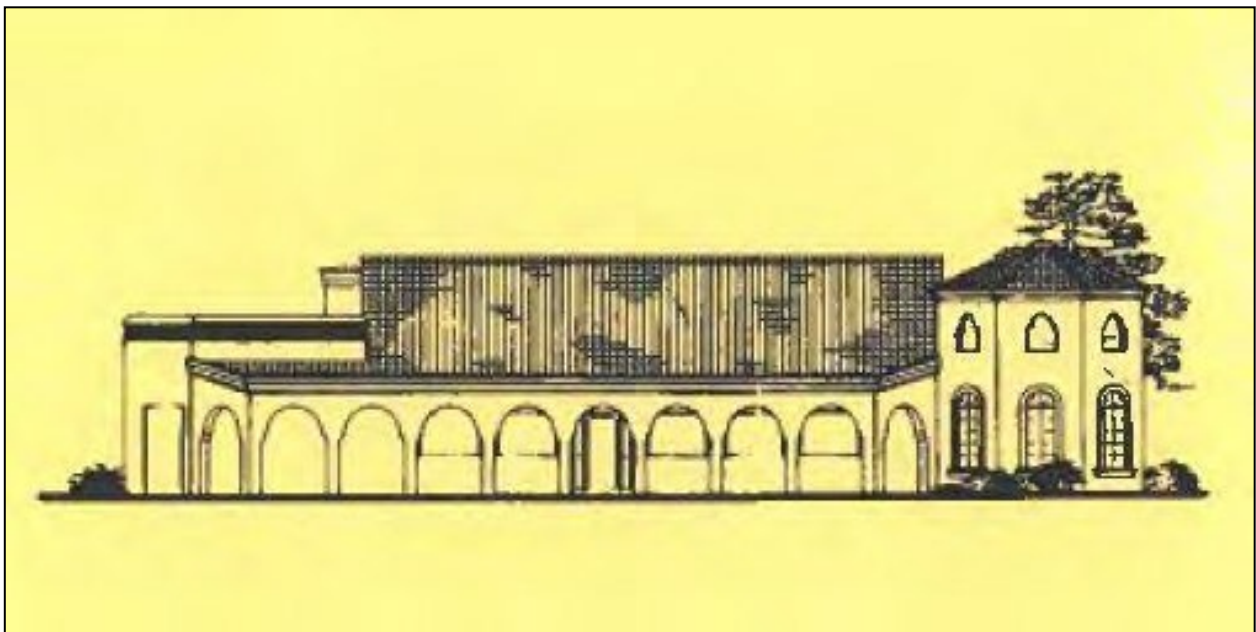


Figure 1:



Figure 2:

## **Narrative Description**

### *Setting*

The ACSC is located on the east side of N. 13th Street in Las Vegas, between Stewart Avenue and E. Mesquite Avenue. The building is sited in the 14th Street City Addition to the City of Las Vegas, which was platted in 1929 and built-out during the 1940s and 1950s. Presently, the surrounding neighborhood is zoned as medium-density residential, with a mix of single-family homes, multi-unit residential complexes, and commercial buildings interspersed with numerous vacancies. This area is largely defined by the elevated United States (U.S.) Interstate 515/U.S. 95 corridor (constructed concurrently with the senior center), located approximately 300 feet north of the building, and which gives the area an industrial feeling (Photos 0002 and 0003).

The building is in an irregular parcel within an irregular block that is bounded by Stewart Avenue (south), E. Marlin Avenue (north), N. 14th Street (east), and N. 13th Street (west). The building shares this block with the Stewart Pines Senior Apartments and the Latin Chamber of Commerce Aner Iglesias Building (Photo 0004). The ACSC occupies the northwest one-third of the 0.71-acre parcel in which it sits; the east and south two-thirds of the parcel are occupied by an asphalt parking lot. The property is surrounded (except at the curved north end) by an iron fence added between

2019 and 2021 (based on Google Street Views). There is also a concrete and steel security wall that encloses a small courtyard along the arcade on the west side of the building. The perimeter of the building is modestly landscaped with gravel, hedges, and several mature trees. The parcel is accessed from the west and north via driveways and entrance gates from N. 13th Street and E. Marlin Avenue (Photo 0005). A simple flagpole is mounted in a short concrete pier at the south end of the building, in front of the original primary entrance.

#### *Exterior – Original Massing (1986)*

The ACSC is a single-story Spanish Revival style building that consists of the original, 4,222 square-foot massing and a 3,014 square-foot addition that was constructed at the north end of the original building in 2015 (Photos 0006, 0007, 0008, and 0009). The original massing has a roughly rectangular plan and is constructed of timber framing with stucco over lathe walls and a front gabled roof (no overhang) that is clad in faux Spanish tiles (Figure 3). The generally rectangular building is situated with its broad west side along N. 13th Street. The building is anchored visually by an octagonal tower at the southwest corner. At the southeast and northeast corners of the original massing are two polygonal (roughly rectangular) wings with flat roofs and short, angled parapets. The building's stucco walls have a hump and bump finish, and all the windows are flush with the wall with wide stucco surrounds and sills (Photo 0010). The building's arched windows are each composed of two fixed panes of glass, although false muntin grills are meant to give the appearance of multiple lights (Photo 0011). There are sliding sash windows on the west wall (Photo 0012). All windows are covered with security screens that were installed sometime before 2008.

Fronting onto the parking lot at the south, the principal elevation reveals the central gable massing with the stout octagonal tower at the west and the polygonal wing at the east (Photo 0013). Off centered on the principal elevation, a portico extends between the tower and the southeast wing. It is supported by one plain, wide, round column and it shelters a glazed door with a sidelite. The door and sidelite are covered with security screens; security screens matching those on the windows had covered this door since at least 2008 but were replaced with the extant set in 2011 (Photo 0014).

The tower has a low-pitched, hipped, octagonal roof with a narrow cornice and short, enclosed arch openings in the top one-third of the five outer walls. These openings held metal vents when the building was constructed but were infilled with plywood (painted white) in 2015. Approximately 18 inches from the bottom of the south, northwest, and west walls are tall and narrow round arch windows with projecting sills; they measure 75 inches high and 32 inches wide. On the southwest wall of the tower is a modern metal door with a window inset. This door replaced the fourth arched window in 2015 (Photo 0015).

The north and southeast wings each have a flat roof with a parapet and tile frieze that is incised with a geometric pattern (Photos 0016 and 0017). There are two round arch windows on the south wall of the southeast wing; they measure 62 inches high and 50 inches wide and are set approximately 28 inches from the bottom of the wall. The rest of the southeast wing is void of fenestration. The north wing is largely concealed by the adjoining 2015 addition, but imagery dating to 2008 shows that at the far north, the west wall of the north wing had a single-leaf door (Figure 4).

The broad east elevation is plain except for utilities, an exhaust fan, and a single-leaf wood door

that accesses the large institutional kitchen that runs along most of the east side of the original massing (Photo 0018). Off the kitchen door is a small wood frame shed with gable roof and asphalt shingles. Attached to the shed on the east side is a painted concrete block trash enclosure. The shed/trash enclosure was installed in 2009 and is a non-contributing feature of the property (Photo 0019).

On the west elevation, a ten-bay arcade extends from the west roof slope to create a covered walkway that leads from the tower to the 2015 addition (Figure 5). The arcade's arches are supported by 12-inch by 14-inch piers with corbels. The arcade shields the west elevation of the original massing, which is occupied by one single-leaf wood door with an infilled sidelite and five sliding windows (Photos 0020 and 0021). A security wall, constructed of alternating steel fencing and concrete block walls with hump and bump stucco finish, encloses the courtyard and prohibits outside access to the north part of the arcade (Photo 0022). Before the addition and the concrete security wall were constructed, the arcade opened onto a narrow sidewalk that extended along the north wall of the building and provided access between the east parking lot and a public transit stop on the sidewalk along N. 13th Street (Figure 4).



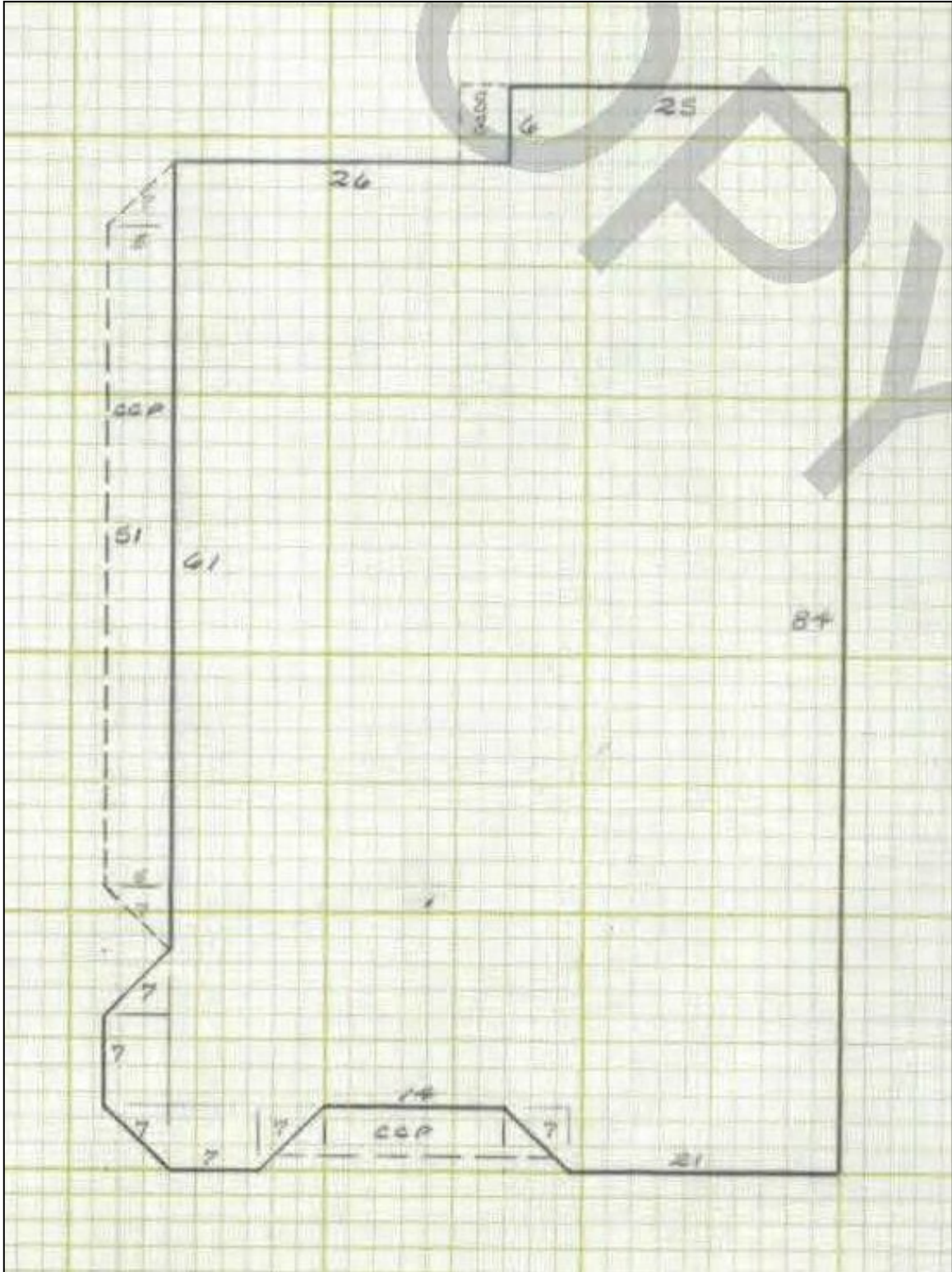


Figure 3:



Figure 4.



Figure 5

#### *Exterior – North Addition (2015)*

The 2015 addition has an irregular plan: a rectangular block extends from the original northeast wing (slightly taller), and from this extends a large, recessed (west) massing with a curved north wall that conforms to fit snugly within the curved parcel (Photos 0023 and 0024 and Figure 7). The addition is constructed of concrete block clad in cement plaster and finished with stucco. A hump and bump finish similar to the original massing is applied to these walls. A plain frieze of red stucco wraps around the addition, which is topped with a flat roof with a parapet wall. Like the original massing, all windows are flush with the wall, with simple, 6-inch-wide stucco surrounds (no sills) and security screens.

The east wall that is flush with the original massing is plain. On the east wall of the recessed massing is a single-leaf door that is flanked by two fixed windows measuring 47 inches long by 41 inches wide (Photo 0025). On the curved north wall are two groupings of fixed windows: a

group of four windows that measure 47 inches long by 41 inches wide and a group of three narrower windows that measure 48 inches long by 30 inches wide. There is one single-leaf metal door on the west side of the curved wall (Photo 0026). The south wall of the 2015 addition, which is directly north of the arcade, has one single-leaf door with an inset window.

#### *Interior – Original Massing*

Prior to the construction of the 2015 addition, the primary entrance (under the portico) opened onto a large, open social space, similar to the current space. The tower housed a library that opened on to the social space. The southeast wing was occupied by an irregular office, a nurse's office, and a laundry. The northeast wing housed a pair of multi-stall men's and women's restrooms. The kitchen and a walk-in pantry lined the east wall between these two wings. A single-leaf door on the west wall provided access to the courtyard, and a third door was at the northwest corner of the northeast wing.

The interior of the original massing has been reconfigured so that the primary entrance is now located on the southwest wall of the tower, which has been converted from a library to the reception area. The reception area is the only interior space that does not have drop ceilings, with the octagonal roof form reflected in the high, open ceiling (Photo 0027). Interior floors are vinyl, installed in 2009. An interior door on the northeast wall of the tower leads to the large, open, social space in which the daily activities take place (Photo 0028). The original primary entrance of the original massing (under the portico) currently enters into the director's office, which was created by installing an interior wall at the north (Photo 0029). The offices that once occupied the southeast wing were combined to create the extant staff break room. Along the east wall, the kitchen, walk-in pantry, and multi-stall restroom are unchanged, although an office was created directly west of the pantry by installing an interior wall (Photo 0030).

#### *Interior- North Addition (2015)*

The interior of the north addition is also centered around a large, open hall in which activities for adults with additional needs take place (Photo 0031). This can be accessed from the interior by two doors at the northwest and northeast end of the original massing (the original egress door at the northwest corner of the northeast wing). Access from outside is through a single-leaf door on at the northeast or a single-leaf door at the southwest. The addition has drop ceilings, vinyl floors, and plaster walls that are covered with plastic panels on the bottom half. At the northwest corner of the open hall is a medical office and at the south end is an administrative office. A restroom, laundry room, and storage closet run down the west side of the north addition. A multi-stall restroom is at the southwest corner of the addition, adjacent and north of the original northeast wing.

#### *Alterations*

The property underwent several alterations when it transitioned from a senior center to an adult day healthcare facility in 2015, namely the construction of the 3,014-square-foot addition on the north end of the original massing (Figure 7; Figure 6; Figure 8). The transition also involved enclosing the courtyard with a wall and installing a security fence around the property. While these alterations have had obvious impacts to the building's integrity of design, they have also

had a minor impact on the integrity of setting by enclosing the formerly open outdoor space surrounding the building. Other exterior alterations include replacing one tower window with a door, covering the small, arched vent openings at the top of the tower, and installing security screens on all windows.

To accommodate the medical care that is now provided onsite, along with the attendant increase in staffing, the interior of the original massing has also undergone several alterations (Figure 6 and Figure 8). The southeast wing was converted to a staff break room, and the original entrance, which provided access to the main central hall, was enclosed and turned into an office. With the original entrance no longer accessible to clients and visitors, the primary entrance is now on the southwest wall of the tower, where a door has replaced one of the arched windows. The relocation of the entry changed the approach from the parking lot and circulation through the building, with the tower now serving as a lobby where staff may greet clients and visitors.



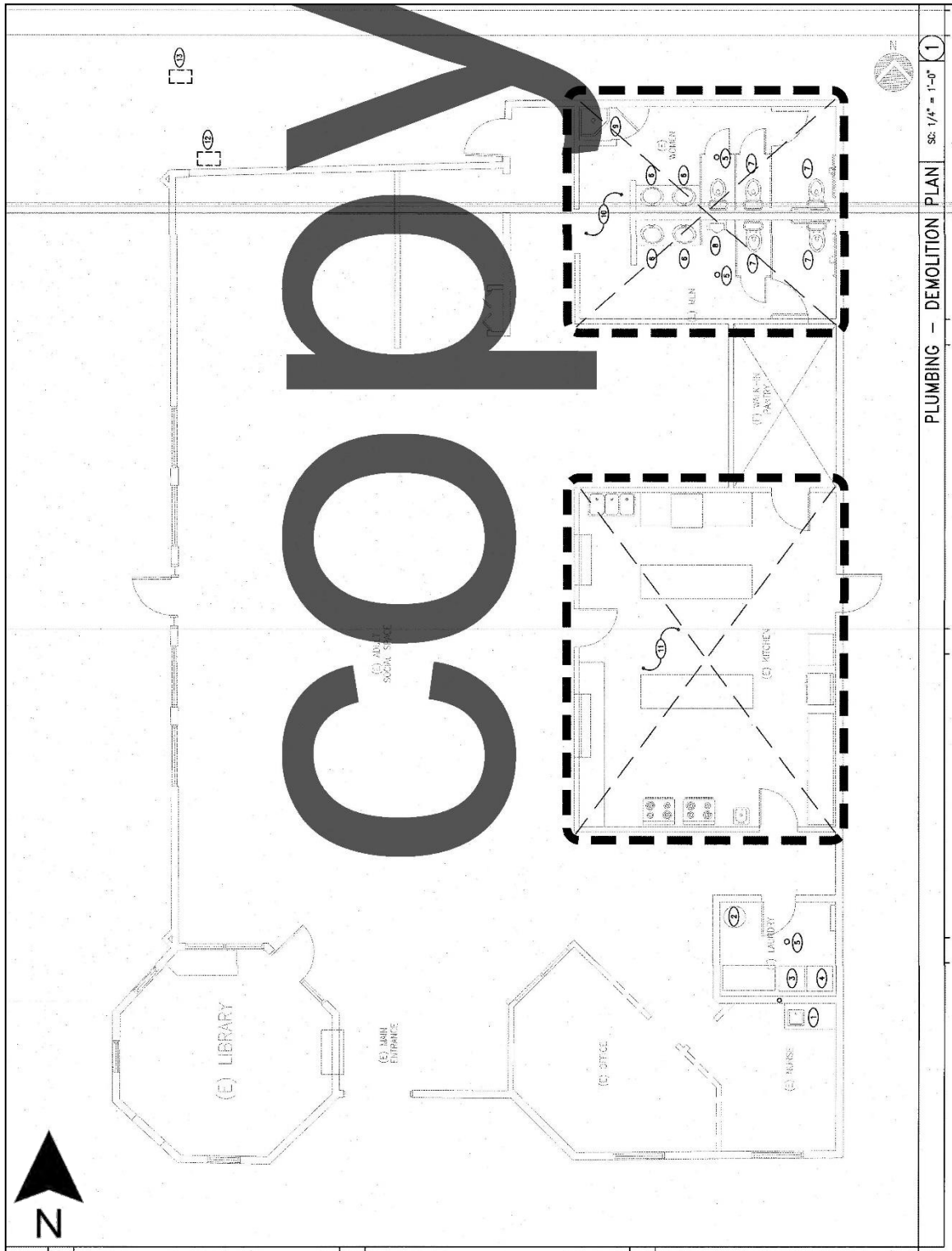


Figure 6

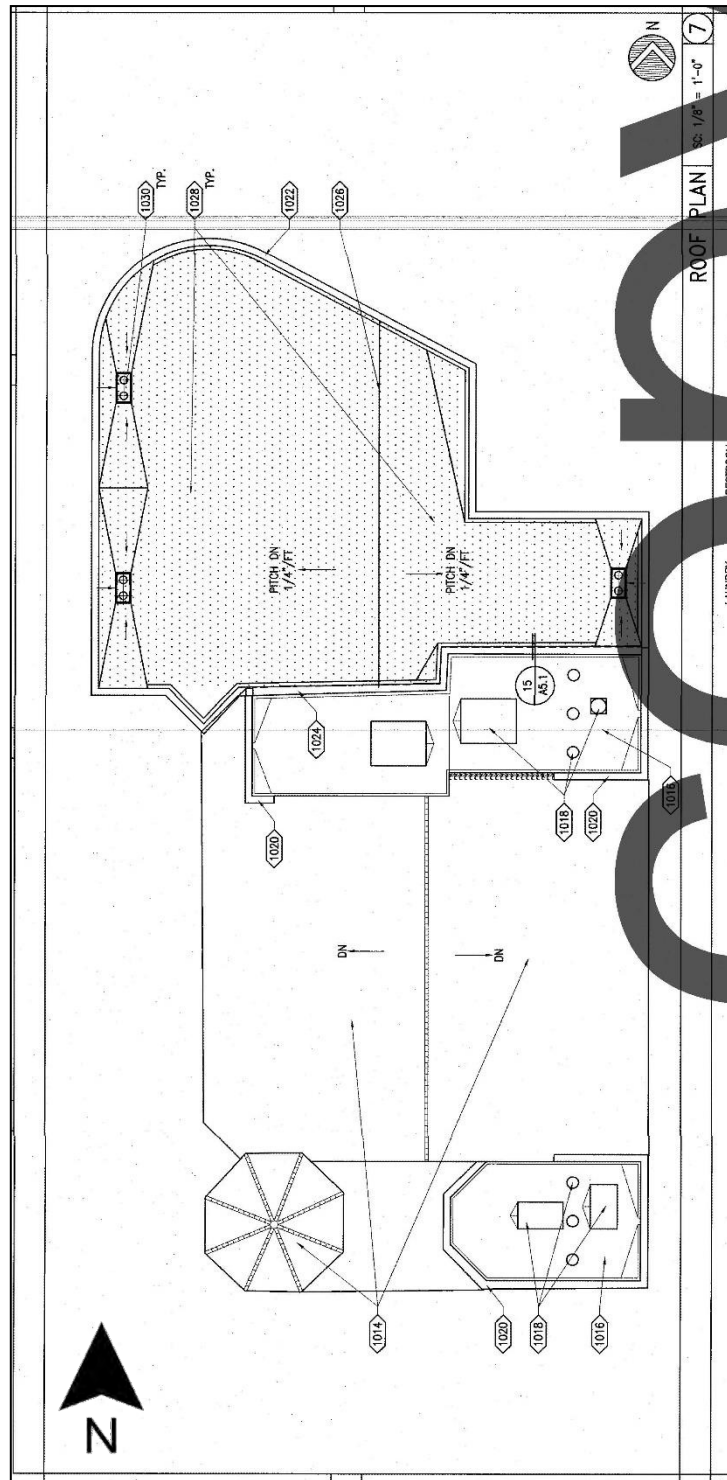


Figure 7

Figure 8:

### *Integrity*

A resource's NRHP eligibility is a function of its applicability to one or more of the four federally mandated Criteria of Significance (36 CFR § 60.4), and its ability to convey its significance through its retention of its key character-defining features, or "historical integrity." The NRHP concept of integrity includes seven aspects (location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association) within which a resource's character-defining features can be evaluated. The ACSC is recommended eligible under Criterion A, under the theme of Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic and Social History, as the first known example of a community support building constructed by a Latino civil rights organization in Las Vegas. Furthermore, it is one of two known senior centers constructed by LULAC (the oldest Latino civil rights organization in the U.S.) nationwide. Aspects of integrity that are most critical under Criterion A include integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association, as these are important to communicating associative significance related to Ethnic Heritage. Aspects of design, materials, and workmanship are less critical, especially if the integrity of other aspects remains high. The ACSC retains integrity of location, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association. A discussion of the seven aspects of integrity, as they apply to the ACSC, is below:

### *Location*

Location is the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred. The ACSC has not moved from its original locations and therefore retains integrity of location.

### *Design*

Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property. The ACSC retains most of the original windows, the decorative tile frieze, the corbelled arch arcade, a Spanish tile roof, and the hump and bump exterior stucco finish; however, due to the construction of a large addition on the north end of the building in 2015, as well as other alterations, including enclosing the courtyard with a wall and installing a security fence around the property; relocating the original entry; replacing an original arched window with a door; enclosure of the arched openings along the top of the tower; and interior alterations to the original floor plan and circulation through primary spaces within the building to accommodate the change in use, the ACSC no longer retains integrity of design.

### *Setting*

Setting is the physical environment of a historic property and refers to the character of the place in which the property played its historical role. Despite the enclosure of the courtyard and installation of a security fence, as well development occurring on adjacent lots to the east and south of the building between 2000 and 2003, the ACSC generally retains its integrity of setting. The property continues to be surrounded by low-density, small-scale, single- and multi-family residential properties on the northwest, east, and southeast, with slightly higher-density multi-family and commercial uses to the southwest and northwest. The NALA building, constructed in 1979, maintains its presence directly across the street from the ACSC to the northwest.

### *Materials*

Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property. Although the ACSC retains its hump and bump stucco finish, the majority of its historic windows, and the decorative tile frieze, it no longer retains integrity of materials as all of the arched vent openings located on the top of the tower have been removed and the openings filled in, and one arched window previously located in the lower level of the tower has been replaced with the new entrance.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the rear (north) addition resulted in the removal of the rear wall.

### *Workmanship*

Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in prehistory or history. The ACSC has modest character-defining elements of workmanship; however, these are still present, including the hump and bump texture of the exterior stucco; the decorative tile frieze; the arcaded walkway with corbelled arches; and the original arched windows on the lower level with projecting stuccoed sills. Therefore, the ACSC retains integrity of workmanship.

### *Feeling*

Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time. It results from the presence of physical features that, taken together, convey the property's historic character. The ACSC retains sufficient physical features that convey its historic use as a community support building constructed by a Latino civil rights organization in Las Vegas. The building retains key elements of the Spanish Revival style, a popular style of the era for community buildings, especially in the western U.S. Additionally, the style was chosen by LULAC for its relevance to the Latino community in Las Vegas. Therefore, the development retains its integrity of feeling.

### *Association*

Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property. The ACSC retains essential physical features that convey its historic character and illustrate its significance for its association with the LULAC organization. These include the massing and materials that are elements of the Spanish Revival style; its location within the heart of the then-burgeoning Latino community; its continued use as providing public services within what is now an entrenched Latino community; and its continued association with the early Latino community organization, LCC. Additionally, the ACSC retains integrity of location, workmanship, setting, and feeling. While the 2015 addition has impacted the integrity of the building, it still has an easily recognizable historic appearance, demonstrated by its irregular plan

<sup>1</sup> It is not known if the existing Spanish-style roof tile is original; however, it appears to be a modern composite material due to its thin cross section and even coloring.



with an octagonal tower; low pitched, red-tiled roof; round arch windows and arcade; and asymmetrical facades of white stucco. Members of LULAC Council #11081 would recognize the Senior Center if they were to come to the neighborhood today.

## **6. Statement of Significance**

### **Applicable National Register Criteria**

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

### **Criteria Considerations**

- A. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

### **Areas of Significance**

Ethnic Heritage - Hispanic

## Social History

### **Period of Significance**

1986-1993

### **Significant Dates**

1986 – Groundbreaking (May 5)

1986 – Dedication (November 2)

1993 – Las Vegas Housing Authority assumed management of senior center

### **Architect/Builder**

Tim Mansanari Group (Architect)

Stoddard Construction Company (Contractor)

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The ACSC is locally significant under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic and Social History (National Park Staff 1997).<sup>2</sup> The property derives its significance from its association with the influential actions of the local LULAC council aimed at promoting the welfare and improving the support systems available to Spanish-speaking seniors in Las Vegas. LULAC is a nationwide Latino civil rights organization established on February 27, 1929, in

<sup>2</sup> In NRB 16A, the National Parks Service (NPS) defines Hispanic (as a subcategory to the Ethnic Heritage Area of Significance) as “the history of persons having origins in the Spanish-speaking areas of the Caribbean, Mexico, Central America, and South America.” However, in subsequent publications (including the American Latino Heritage Theme Study) the NPS uses the terms Hispanic and Latino interchangeably. The body of this nomination uses Latino as an all-encompassing term to reference communities that are Spanish-speaking or descended from Spanish-speaking ancestors. Use of the term Latino is meant to emphasize the shared history of the people from the Americas rather than Europe while acknowledging the multi-cultural and multi-national diversity of Latino communities, particularly in Las Vegas. Many of the primary sources that were consulted for this nomination use the term Hispanic, a term that was defined in the early 1970s as part of efforts by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund and other organizations to simplify self-identification in the census. The term Hispanic is used in this nomination when citing relevant reference data and in fields that require NPS-defined data categories.

Corpus Christi, Texas. With 525 councils nationwide, LULAC is the “largest and oldest Hispanic organization in the United States” (LULAC, n.d.). The ACSC, originally the LULAC Multi-Purpose Senior Center, is one of only two senior centers nationwide designed and built by LULAC (the other is in Topeka, Kansas built in 1973). The ACSC is locally significant as the first known example of a building that was constructed by a Latino community organization for providing services to Las Vegas Latino community members. In the 1970s and 1980s, Las Vegas’s Latino senior citizens were culturally and socially isolated as a result of language and cultural barriers, and the Multi-Purpose Senior Center was developed based on a statistically identified need for a fully bilingual senior center. It was the first bilingual staffed senior center in Nevada (LULAC Council #11081 1985a; 1986; Ramos Jr. 2018, 38). The building was conceived by the Las Vegas council of LULAC (Council #11081) in 1984, funded in 1985, and constructed in 1986. LULAC Council #11081 operated the facility from 1986 through 1993, when its management was transferred to the Las Vegas Housing Authority. The period of significance is 1986-1993, marking the span of time that LULAC was involved in constructing and managing the property.

Because the period of significance is less than fifty years ago, the National Register of Historic Places Evaluation Criteria requires the application of Criteria Consideration G, which allows properties that are less than fifty years old to be listed if they are exceptionally important. While the National Register Criteria for Evaluation encourage the nomination of recently significant properties if they are of exceptional importance to a community, the criteria do not define exceptional. However, National Register Bulletin 22 describes a range of applications for Criterion Consideration G, including as a function of the relative age of a community or as a reflection of an unusually strong associative connection between a resource and a community. (Sherfy and Luce 1998). The phrase “exceptional importance” may be applied to the extraordinary importance of an event or to an entire category of resources so fragile that survivors of any age are unusual. The phrase “exceptional importance” does not require that a property is significant on a national level, but is a measure of a property’s importance within the appropriate historic context (National Park Staff 1997, 42).

The significance of Latino history in the U.S. is widely researched and recognized, and has been addressed at a national level through the NPS Latino Theme Study (National Park Service 2013). Within the NPS Latino Theme Study, the *Struggles for Inclusion* essay addresses the formal and informal efforts by nineteenth- and twentieth-century American Latino groups to achieve full political and civic inclusion. The essay highlights the influence of LULAC as one of two organizations that laid the foundation for the civic and political gains that Latinos would achieve during the second half of the twentieth century (National Park Service 2013; DeSipio, n.d.). While LULAC was active in other states since it was founded in 1929, Las Vegas’s small, decentralized Latino community precluded the organization of a Las Vegas (or Nevada) LULAC council prior to the 1970s. Between 1950 and 1970, the number of Latinos living in Las Vegas rose from 3,174 to 9,937; this number more than tripled again to around 35,000 by 1980, and in 1990, rose to almost 83,000 (U.S. Census Bureau 1952; 1973; 1982; Tuman et al. 2021). During this period, members of Las Vegas’s Latino communities created a network of community-based organizations to demand civic and political inclusion and to address the myriad of issues that

were not sufficiently addressed by government institutions. The LULAC Council #11081 was one such group, established in 1978. The LULAC Multi-Purpose Senior Center was conceived, funded, and constructed through the organizing efforts of the Las Vegas Council #11081. The building reflects a community effort, through the organizational framework of LULAC, to address the social and economic needs of the growing elderly Latino population in Las Vegas during the 1980s. It was the first building project in Las Vegas undertaken by a Latino community organization and is one of only two senior centers (nationwide) ever constructed by LULAC (Rodriguez 2014, 41). As a resource that is associated with the relatively young Latino community of Las Vegas and as an example of a rare resource type, the ACSC meets the requirements of Criteria Consideration G.

### **Narrative Statement of Significance**

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Constructed as the result of the effort of members of the Latino community, through the LULAC organizational structure, to promote the welfare of Latino seniors, the ACSC represents an important aspect of Las Vegas's social history while also specifically reflecting Latino history and heritage. NPS guidance suggests that the ACSC is locally significant under Criterion A in two areas, Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic and Social History (National Park Staff 1997). Because the property represents the effort of Las Vegas's Latino communities to develop community-based support systems to augment traditional government welfare institutions, these areas are intertwined.

#### *Mutual Aid Societies*

People that share common interests like ethnicity, race, occupation, religion, etc., have for centuries pooled their resources to provide for one another in times of need. Such organizations have roots in kinship groups that functioned historically as both production and marketing vehicles (as in crafts guilds) as well as social welfare collectives (Rivera 1984, 1–2). Historically, Latino mutual aid societies (and their white counterparts—fraternal orders) were formed by the working class and typically had an economic component, where dues were collected in order to support and benefit members in the case of sickness, unemployment, and death (Simmons et al. 2018, 10). There is, however, a distinct ethnic realm in which mutual aid societies were formed by migrants and immigrants to provide the supports listed above while also working to mitigate the effects of racism (Mondragon-Valdez 2000). In the case of Latino groups (e.g., Mexican Americans), mutual aid societies (*mutualistas*) pooled members' resources in order to provide services that would fulfill those needs that local institutions (public and private) did not fulfill (e.g., low-cost life insurance, funeral benefits, low interest loans). In addition to these tangible benefits, *mutualistas* generally supported immigrants adjusting to a new way of life and often sponsored community events, which provided a space for building social networks. Such groups also provided forums for discussing local issues, and eventually platforms for political associations and labor unions (Hernandez 1983, 8–9). In the 1920s, these organizations oriented themselves to politics, and *mutualistas* became a significant force in protecting and advancing working-class interests and advocating for the ability to participate equally in American society (Hernandez 1983, 84; DeSipio, n.d.). LULAC is one such group.

### *LULAC Organizational History*

LULAC is a national civil rights organization with a complex administrative structure that operates on national, regional, state, district, and local levels. LULAC was founded in Texas in 1929 as the state's growing Mexican middle class rose to resist racial discrimination and advocate for full social, political, economic, and education rights for Mexican Americans (Yarsinske 2004, 7; DeSipio, n.d.). While other contemporaneous Latino mutual aid societies like the *Sociedad Protección Mutua de Trabajadores Unidos* were generally apolitical and offered their members material rewards like life insurance policies, burial insurance, and access to credit unions, LULAC's primary reward was the potential for equal opportunity. From early on, LULAC members were middle- to upper-class Mexican American citizens who generally held capitalist and conservative values and believed that racism (not class discrimination) was the primary obstacle to equal opportunity. They were interested in expanding opportunities for Mexican Americans in employment and education, and took on a pragmatic approach that sought to eliminate the most blatant forms of discrimination so that Mexican Americans were on a level playing field with the rest of Americans (Rook 2013, 55; Marquez 2014, 2; Simmons and Simmons 2018).

To work towards this level playing field, LULAC had to address the political disenfranchisement, racial segregation, and racial discrimination that was pervasive in Texas in the 1920s; however, the group took on a somewhat deferential and assimilationist stance. LULAC'S early members simultaneously sought to retain their Mexican heritage while placating public suspicion of immigrants and minorities by advocating that Mexican Americans become proficient in the English language, maintain loyalty to the United States, and participate in American civic and social activities (Yarsinske 2004, 8–9). LULAC's early actions were focused on gaining the most basic civil rights for Mexican Americans, as these were seen as the prerequisites for participating in the American system (Marquez 1993, 3).

In its first decade, LULAC leadership urged its local councils to address matters like “education, health, social hygiene, housing concerns, the poll tax, juvenile delinquency, low wages, and home beautification” (Marquez 2014, 26). Throughout the 1930s, the organization held voter registration drives, participated in public relations and letter writing campaigns and other lobbying efforts, and put legal pressure on discriminatory employers and local governments (Marquez 2014, 27). By 1940, LULAC had a membership of 2,000, with councils in Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, and California (Marquez 2014, 36). This early mobilization period was short lived, however, with the beginning of World War II prompting the closure of many of the league's councils as members either volunteered or were drafted into the armed services (Yarsinske 2004, 10).

Following the war, with Americans of all ethnicities immersed in ideals of freedom and equality, several Mexican American political organizations were created (e.g., Community Service Organization and Coordinating Council for Latin American Youth) and LULAC was reinvigorated. LULAC increased its membership and engaged its volunteer base in pursuing educational reform, providing citizenship and English classes, raising money for local charities,



and conducting campaigns to integrate public facilities like dance halls, restaurants, and swimming pools (Marquez 2014, 40). Local councils promoted agendas focused on charitable and community projects that were designed to assist the Mexican American community. Councils hosted well-attended banquets and dances and organized food, toy, blood, poll tax, and funding drives. Above all, however, LULAC's primary area of activism was in education (Marquez 2014, 50). During the 1950s, LULAC's leadership developed the Little School of the 400 (the precursor to the Headstart Program) as well as a funding arm to raise money to expand the program. Through the volunteer efforts of member attorneys and their staff, the organization also pursued a series of successful lawsuits challenging school segregation throughout the Southwest (Marquez 2014, 52–53). Their efforts at desegregation faced resistance from the white community in the 1950s, and, although LULAC and other organizations established successful legal precedents, they were difficult to implement (Marquez 2014, 101).

Nonetheless, believing they had successfully challenged the legal forms of discrimination, many of LULAC's rank and file members considered the organization's goals as met. Generally satisfied with their own standard of living (i.e., their individual goals of upward mobility had been reached), rank and file members became disengaged with active participation in political activities and were drawn instead to LULAC's social activities (Marquez 1993, 56–58). By the end of the 1950s, LULAC'S general membership drifted away from activism, their numbers dwindled, and the leadership core of the organization began to focus on non-controversial issues that would benefit not only Mexican Americans but the entire nation (Marquez 2014, 57–58).

By the 1960s, LULAC was seen by some as a “conservative organization for elitist Hispanics,” and had an agenda that did not seem to motivate its members (Marquez 1993, 62). Furthermore, while the Chicano movement drew activists dissatisfied with LULAC and thus challenged LULAC's primacy as the predominant Mexican American political organization, old guard members doubled down on LULAC's conservative stance and resolved to remain non-political, non-sectarian, and non-partisan (Marquez 1993, 68–70). While Chicano activist groups challenged dominant institutions, political principles, and elected officials, LULAC maintained its fundamental platform of Mexican American integration into mainstream American society (Marquez 2014, 65). It was exactly this conservative stance that arrested LULAC's decline. LULAC's non-threatening posture towards the status quo made the organization an acceptable recipient of the government sponsored social service programs that became abundantly available during the mid-1960s. Not only was LULAC a national network with a membership and tradition that was seen as respectable and moderate, but it was also one of the few Latino groups that had a leadership that was equipped to navigate the procedures for applying for public funding. It was from within this context that LULAC entered the realm of federally sponsored social service programs and secured millions of dollars in funding for employment, housing, legal aid, and education (Marquez 2014, 72).

The political climate of the 1960s and the availability of federal funds for social programs allowed LULAC's small but active leadership core to introduce social service initiatives without increasing the demands of its members (Marquez 1993, 61). Among these initiatives were the SER-Jobs for Progress, an employment training program created in cooperation with the

American GI Forum in 1966; the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) in 1968; and the National Educational Service Centers, a student counselling service, in 1973. LULAC councils also constructed over two dozen affordable housing projects during the 1960s (Yarsinske 2004, 11–12).

While the accomplishments of the 1960s and 1970s gave the appearance that LULAC was more involved in political activity than ever, by the 1980s, LULAC political and civil rights activities conducted by rank-and-file members were no longer a prominent part of the group's agenda. Despite the involvement of LULAC's leadership core in these (and other) multimillion-dollar service programs, membership dwindled and the group's annual national income was a mere \$17,000 from 1965 to 1969 (Marquez 2014, 80). By the late 1980s, the leadership of the organization used LULAC's institutional framework to secure government and corporate funding for projects that bore the LULAC name. But while the group was still one of the most well-known and active groups in Mexican American politics, and its housing projects, education agencies, and job training programs operated with million-dollar budgets, it averaged only 4,500 members nationwide throughout the 1980s (Marquez 2014, 11–12, 87). As the LULAC leadership labored to secure outside funds for their projects, other political entities such as MALDEF, the National Council of La Raza, and the Industrial Areas Foundation rose to the forefront of Mexican American politics" (Marquez 1993, 11–12). Nonetheless, through at least the 1990s, LULAC was generally seen by the mainstream media as a mouthpiece for Latino affairs, and its leaders were considered experts on Mexican American politics (Marquez 2014, 110).

LULAC is still a volunteer-based organization that advocates for Latino civil rights in the areas of immigration, social services, education, and economic opportunity (LULAC n.d.). However, "increased levels of economic and social mobility among Mexican Americans and the class differentiations it creates has made it more difficult for any organization to represent the entire Mexican American community" (Marquez 2014, 109).

### *Latino Community Growth in Las Vegas*

The area that comprises present day Nevada was part of Mexico until the end of the U.S.- Mexican War in 1848, when Mexico, through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ceded fifty-five percent of its territory to the U.S. (present-day California, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, most of Arizona and Colorado, and parts of Oklahoma, Kansas, and Wyoming). As land titles and land rights (i.e., property) were confiscated from Mexicans now in U.S. territory as a result of the treaty, a flood of non-Mexican immigrants from the eastern United States poured into this territory in the ensuing decades (Miranda 2005, 37; Diaz 2005, 4). Travelers along the Old Spanish Trail formed the first communities in Las Vegas. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, modest numbers of Mexicans, and later, immigrants from all countries in Central and South America, came to Las Vegas when opportunities presented themselves, especially when push factors (those factors that drive people to leave their home countries) coincided with pull factors (those that draw or entice people to come to a new country).

By the 1875 census, the Latino population in the nine existing Nevada counties was only 311 out of the nearly 42,500 non-native residents, of which nearly half (48 percent) came from Mexico.

It is unclear how many Latinos resided in and around what is now known as Clark County, but by this time, 12 percent of the state's 311 Latinos lived in Lincoln and Nye counties (the former of which Clark County was carved from), suggesting the number was quite small, if any (Miranda 1997, 59–61). These numbers, along with the overall population of Las Vegas, would rise significantly as Las Vegas's primary economic drivers served as pull factors to immigrants and migrants. During the first half of the twentieth century, pull factors were the events that drove the overall growth of Las Vegas, including the construction of the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad between 1901 and 1905; the legalization of gambling in 1931; the construction of the Boulder Dam (later Hoover Dam) between 1931 and 1936; the Bracero program in 1942; the establishment of the Las Vegas Army Air Force Gunnery School (later Nellis Air Force Base) in 1941; the development of the Basic Magnesium Incorporated (BMI) plant in what is now the City of Henderson in 1941; the birth of the Las Vegas "Strip" in 1941, and its subsequent, massive, tourism-related development beginning shortly thereafter.<sup>3</sup> Overlapping these major milestones, overall growth related to New Deal projects and postwar prosperity also served as pull factors while severe economic problems in Mexico and other parts of Central America were push factors (T. C. Wright, Tuman, and Stevenson 2011; Tuman, Damore, and Agreda 2013; Miranda 1997).

Latino populations in Las Vegas were relatively low during World War II and the early-postwar period, despite Nevada's growth related to military development, and despite the large migrant network that was established through the western U.S. as a result of the Bracero Program of the 1940s. Unlike other cities in the southwest where larger, more established Latino (namely Mexican and Mexican American) populations were residentially ostracized and isolated in barrios, the Latino community in the Las Vegas valley remained small and scattered throughout much of the first half of the twentieth century. Those Latinos that came to Las Vegas during the first half of the twentieth century found low-wage jobs and were generally not able to purchase homes or establish enough personal stability to be able to organize politically. As a result, a centralized Latino community (like the one eventually formed by African Americans in the Westside neighborhood of Las Vegas) did not develop prior to the 1960s (Moehring 2005, 14; Green 2015, 297; Miranda 2005, 57; Gallardo 2000, 11).

Of a total population of 48,283 residents in the Las Vegas Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA – a census delineation of a core city surrounded by smaller communities that are tied economically and socially) recorded in 1950 by the U.S. census, 3,174 were Hispanics.<sup>4</sup> These

<sup>3</sup> The Las Vegas "Strip" is defined as Las Vegas Boulevard from the "Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas" sign (near Russell Road) on the south to Sahara Avenue on the north. It began as Highway 91, the road to Los Angeles, and was reportedly nicknamed The Strip by a local business owner after the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles (D. Wright and Moor 2008).

<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to develop an accurate and comprehensive accounting of the Latino population in Las Vegas because of the nature of available data. Nationwide, from 1790 to 1850, the only census categories for race or ethnic origin were White and Black (Negro). Between 1860 and 1890, American Indians, Chinese, and Japanese were also identified separately. Starting in 1910, Asian and Pacific Islander categories were added, and in the 1930 census

numbers increased steadily beginning in the 1960s, partially as a result of changes to immigration law (e.g., the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962 and Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965), but also because of the opportunities provided by the concurrent dramatic transformation of the Strip and subsequent rapid urbanization of Las Vegas during the 1970s (Miranda 2005, 60; U.S. Census Bureau 1952). Between 1950 and 1970, the number of Hispanics counted in the census in the Las Vegas SMSA more than tripled to 9,937, and between 1970 and 1980, this number ballooned to nearly 35,000 (U.S. Census Bureau 1973; 1982). Las Vegas's booming job market of the 1980s (flush with jobs that did not require fluency in English, nor formal education or existing skills); severe economic problems in Mexico and other parts of Central America (due in large part to trade liberalization); and civil wars and repression in El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1980s; provided complimentary push factors to immigration reform (T. C. Wright, Tuman, and Stevenson 2011, 8; Tuman, Damore, and Agreda 2013, 6; Moehring 2005, 7–10; Titus and Wright 2005, 32; Miranda 2005, 60).

These push and pull factors established a foundation on which migrants built networks that connected those that immigrated to the U.S. to friends and family in their country of origin. Miranda (2005, 62) describes the evolution of migration networks as they develop gradually, “when a few workers returning to Mexico with cash and material goods describe the economy and the job opportunities they have found.” A new worker will take an entry level position in a low-paying occupation but will soon become aware of their low social and economic status. This awareness will motivate them to take steps to improve their status, and once they have found a more secure and well-paid position, they will settle permanently and will bring their family to live in the U.S. The old job is often passed onto a friend and the migrant chain expands. Las Vegas has become a major hub for Latino immigration, thanks, in part, to these chains and the familial and social networks they have established (Miranda 2005, 62–63). Sheer population growth is a testament to this: when the Latino population in the Las Vegas SMSA rose to almost 83,000 in 1990, Spanish-speaking residents became the largest minority in the city. By the late 1990s, Las Vegas had the fastest growing Latino population in the country (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

#### *Las Vegas's Elderly Latino Community and Services*

The social service needs of America's elderly were first addressed at a national level in 1965, with the Older Americans Act (OAA). This legislation authorized a wide array of service programs through a nationwide network of state agencies. The act established the Administration on Aging, which administered state-level grant programs designed specifically for community

only, there was a category for Mexican (the race category of Mexican was eliminated in 1940). While several criteria that may serve as indicators for at least a portion of the Hispanic population in decennial censuses (e.g., data on mother tongue, Spanish surnames, and the designation of Mexican as a race in the 1930 census), it was not until 1970 that the first attempt was made to identify the entire “Hispanic origin population”; however, this question appeared only on the long form sent to a sample of the population. In 1980, the Hispanic origin question was moved to the short form that was distributed to all households, and in 2000, the term Latino was added to the question (Gibson and Jung 2005; Cohn 2010).

planning and social services, research and development, and personnel training in the field of aging (Select Committee on Aging 1995, 251). The OAA is still the main vehicle for providing social, nutritional, and other services to the elderly. The Nevada Division for Aging Services was established in 1971 under the OAA as an agency that would develop, implement, and coordinate programs for Nevada's seniors. Established in 1983, the Commission on Aging is the policy making body for the Nevada Division for Aging Services. Among a variety of administrative functions, the Commission on Aging was established to assess the needs of Nevada's seniors so that OAA funding, as well as other public and private funding, would be applied to services that effectively and efficiently serve the needs of Nevada's older persons. As the primary governmental advocate for Nevada's seniors, the Nevada Division for Aging Services manages grants, addresses elder rights issues, oversees community-based care, and manages the funding that is provided by a variety of sources, including block grants and the Nevada General Fund (Nevada Commission on Aging Services, n.d.).

In 1980, there were 833 elderly Latinos in Las Vegas, which accounted for 28 percent of Nevada's elderly Latino population. Many of these seniors moved to the state with their children or grandchildren (LULAC Council #11081 1985a, 3; Select Committee on Aging 1992). While projects funded and/or managed by the initiatives described above broadened the support offered to elderly Americans at the state and national levels, language and cultural barriers resulted in low minority senior participation. While several national non-profit organizations provided services specific to the Latino elderly since at least the 1970s (e.g., National Association for Hispanic Elderly, National Hispanic Council on Aging) these services were generally not available to the Latino seniors of Las Vegas until the 1990s (Asociacion Nacional Pro Personas Mayores 2011).

#### *Latino Organizations in Las Vegas*

LULAC was one of several community-based groups formed by Las Vegas Latino community members during the late 1960s and early 1970s to address the socioeconomic disparities between Latino community members and their white counterparts. Other groups include the Nevada Association of Latin Americans (NALA), formed in 1969, the Latin Chamber of Commerce (LCC) in 1976, and the Mexican Social Club (also known as the Mexican Patriotic Committee) in 1980. While disparities had long existed in Latino communities throughout the American southwest, the explosive growth of the Latino population in Las Vegas during the 1970s amplified them. Acknowledging that the social and economic disparities experienced by Latinos were the result of systemic and institutional failures, the primary objectives of the Las Vegas NALA and LULAC councils were twofold: to address the immediate needs of the community and to make institutional changes that would allow Latinos to address the long-term needs of their community through the existing framework of mainstream American society (i.e., they were not breaking the system, they were creating networks so they could work within it) (Gallardo 2000, 3–5). The LCC operated in a slightly different capacity, as its primary focus was the economic advancement of the Latino community (Miranda 1997, 156).

A group of four men and one woman (Fernando Romero, Robert James Agonia, Horacio Lopez, Joseph Zamora, and Eva Garcia Green) established the Las Vegas Council of LULAC in May of



1978 (LULAC Council #11081); the council was incorporated as a non-profit corporation in the state of Nevada two months later. Based on its articles of incorporation, the Las Vegas council was organized for the purpose of “developing educational opportunities for the Hispanic community in order to promote individual and religious freedom, the right of equality of social and economic opportunity, and development of an American Society wherein the cultural resources, integrity, and dignity of every individual and group contribute to the American way of life” (Romero et al. 1978).

#### *LULAC Multi-Purpose Senior Center*

The mid-1980s was a watershed period in Latino organizational activism in Las Vegas, especially among LULAC, NALA, and the LCC. LULAC Council #11081 sponsored multi-year analyses of both the City and County Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Programs (June 1984), and council members established the *La Mesa Redonda de Hispanos* (Hispanic Roundtable) in August of 1984. Members authored *A Profile of Hispanics in Nevada: An Agenda for Action* in September of 1984, and established the Latin Association of Women group in October 1984. Council members also worked with NALA to prepare a grant to fund a new initiative, *Proyecto Esperanza* (Project Hope) in October 1984. The same year, council members were awarded a Nevada Humanities grant to produce the photodocumentary project *A Profile of Hispanics in Nevada*. A council member began *Quien es Quien - A Who's Who Directory of Hispanics in Nevada* in January 1985, and LULAC members began negotiating with the Clark County School District, Community College of Southern Nevada (now College of Southern Nevada), and University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) to establish a LULAC Council #11081 School Success/College Preparatory Program in June 1985 (LULAC Council #11081 1985b).

Of most relevance to the senior center was the 1984 publication of *A Profile of Hispanics in Nevada: An Agenda for Action*, which was sponsored by the LCC, funded by private corporations and individuals, and researched and written by then LULAC Vice-President Thomas Rodriguez. The publication reflected LULAC's overall historical ideology, noting that Hispanics wanted to achieve the American dream of a good job, a nice home, a family life, and security while maintaining their language and culture. However, systemic issues like a lack of economic opportunities, limited political representation, increasing school dropout rates, and low college/university enrollment prohibited Latino Nevadans from achieving the dream. *A Profile of Hispanics in Nevada* detailed the political, social, economic, and employment issues that Nevada's Latinos were facing and outlined a blueprint for change. Among the issues identified in the publication was the neglect of elderly Hispanics (Rodriguez 1984, 1-3,33)

Using the 1980 census data, the *Agenda for Action* identified that there were 1,902 elderly Hispanics (65 years and older) living in Clark County, with 833 living in Las Vegas, and one-quarter of those living on incomes at or below the established poverty levels. Before the ACSC was constructed, there were six senior centers and 17 senior nutrition sites in Clark County. None employed bilingual staff members, and all were underutilized by Hispanic senior citizens, who reported to LULAC members that language barriers, as well as social and cultural incongruities in the predominantly English-speaking environments at the other programs,

prohibited them from participating in these programs (LULAC Council #11081 1985a, 7; Rodriguez 2014, 31).

Furthermore, although they were often unemployed and living at the poverty level, Hispanics “pervasively neglected to take advantage of public assistance programs” (LULAC Council #11081 1985a, 6). Despite high poverty levels among Hispanic seniors, only 81 of the total 2,170 people in Las Vegas that were served by the Nevada Division for Aging Services Senior Nutrition Program between October 1983 and 1984 were Hispanic. As a result, LULAC concluded that many Hispanic seniors were not receiving adequate nutrition (LULAC Council #11081 1986; 1985a, 3). LULAC did not reach this conclusion on its own. In 1985, the State of Nevada Division for Aging Services (which distributed funds to agencies focused on elder care throughout the state under the OAA) identified increased senior minority participation as one of its major objectives (Ernst 1985; Rodriguez 1984, 33).

The *Agenda for Action* called on Nevada’s governor to acknowledge and address the issue of underutilization of social service programs by the Hispanic elderly; to increase the number of bilingual staff at state departments that served the elderly; to publicize the services available to seniors in both Spanish and English and explain how Hispanics might utilize such services; to appoint Hispanic staff to boards that serve the senior community; to give the Hispanic elderly proportional representation on boards that administer OAA funds; to obtain U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds to construct a housing project for Spanish-speaking elderly in Southern Nevada and to form an entity to oversee such a project; to petition the Nevada Historical Society to fund a large-scale project to produce a History of Hispanic People in Nevada (sourced by those then 55 and older); and to petition the University of Nevada, Reno to undertake a similar study (Rodriguez 1984, 34).

The mere distribution of *An Agenda for Action* forced the community leaders and politicians that received them to at least acknowledge or become aware of the potential political strength of the Latino community. Following the publication and distribution of *An Agenda for Action*, and a specific admonition by the LCC that a Latino be appointed to the Las Vegas CDBG board, the Las Vegas City Manager convened a meeting to discuss ways of bringing more Latinos into city and county government.<sup>5</sup> By January 1985, LCC member and author of *An Agenda for Action*, Thomas Rodriguez, and LULAC Council #11081 president John Lujan, were appointed to the Clark County Community Development Board, and LULAC Council #11081 member Corrinne Gutierrez was appointed to the Las Vegas Community Development Board (Miranda 1997, 161– 67; Rodriguez 2014, 32–33). These appointments were critical to the senior center project, which, after eight months of intense lobbying on behalf of these board members, was granted \$250,000 by the City and County CDBG programs.

<sup>5</sup> Beginning in 1974, the HUD CDBG program provided funding to rehabilitate neighborhoods and housing, improve infrastructure, provide public services, and create jobs. These programs were administered at the federal level by HUD’s Office of Community Planning and Development but were designed at a local level to meet specific needs. Las Vegas and Clark County participated in the HUD Block Grant Entitlement Program, which gave local boards “broad discretion over the shape of their community development programs” (Office of Program Analysis and Evaluation 1988, 149).

Within two months of the release of *An Agenda for Action*, LULAC initiated efforts to develop a facility to provide services that addressed the problems faced by Spanish-speaking elderly caused by language and cultural barriers (e.g., low access to services, social isolation, nutrition deficiencies). The facility would primarily serve Spanish-speaking seniors in the Las Vegas/Clark County area, focusing on those from low to moderate income households and those with the “greatest social need.” The “greatest social need” is a category defined by the Nevada Division for Aging Services, as “the need caused by non-economic factors which include physical and mental disabilities, language barriers, [and] social isolation, including that caused by racial or ethnic status” (LULAC Council #11081 1985a).

Having been involved in a similar project in Topeka, Kansas, two members of the LULAC Council #11081 (Corrine Gutierrez and Thomas Rodriguez) proposed a bilingual senior center project to the LULAC Board of Directors and to the Hispanic Roundtable in November of 1984, and both groups immediately endorsed the project (Rodriguez 2014, 31). The Latin Chamber of Commerce also offered its support to the project (Merida, n.d.). While these endorsements came somewhat easily, support from outside of the Latino community was hard-earned, and LULAC members engaged in a great deal of lobbying to secure government and private partners and their funding.

The first hurdle was to establish enough legitimacy to be able to pursue funding for the project. LULAC negotiated with the Catholic Community Services of Nevada – South, who had operated senior programs in Las Vegas since the 1940s, and who eventually agreed to co-sponsor the project. With the Catholic Community Services partnership lending legitimacy to the project, City Councilmen Ron Lurie and Al Levy caught wind of it and lent their support, petitioning the Las Vegas Housing Authority in January of 1985 to lease a plot of land for the senior center. Finally, within only four months of the publication of *An Agenda for Action*, Thomas Rodriguez prepared applications for Clark County and City of Las Vegas Community Development Block Grants, both of which were recommended for funding by April 1985 (Rodriguez 2014, 31–33).

LULAC Council #11081 initiated the construction of the LULAC Multi-Purpose Senior Center as a joint community project between themselves and the Catholic Community Services of Nevada – South, who was the co-sponsor and fiscal administrator of the project. LULAC obtained funding and support from the Las Vegas Housing Authority, Clark County, the City of Las Vegas, and the State of Nevada Division for Aging Services (LULAC Council #11081 1985a). The Las Vegas Housing Authority leased the land to LULAC for \$1 per year, and Clark County and the City of Las Vegas each provided \$125,000 through the CDBG program. The State of Nevada Division for Aging Services provided \$50,000 for a commercial kitchen and furniture (LULAC Council #11081 1985a; Rodriguez 2014, 32). Funding for one 15 passenger van and driver to provide seniors with transportation to and from the senior center, medical appointments, shopping, and other recreational activities was provided by a subsequent City of Las Vegas CDBG (LULAC Council #11081 1986). The LULAC Council #11081 Construction Committee, headed by member Corrine Gutierrez, designed a building in the Spanish Revival style to reflect the organization’s Mexican heritage. These plans were executed by the Tim

Mansanari Architectural Group and the Stoddard Construction Company (Rodriguez 2023; 2014, 34).

LULAC hosted a groundbreaking ceremony on May 5, 1986. The groundbreaking was publicized in the local press as a “major milestone” for southern Nevada’s growing Latino senior community (Matheis 1986). Intentionally held on the anniversary of Mexico’s victory over the French at the Battle of Puebla in 1862 (*Cinco de Mayo*), the groundbreaking was attended by Clark County Commissioners and Council Members, the Las Vegas City Manager, a Nevada Division for Aging Services representative, print and television outlets, and nearly all members of LULAC Council #11081 (Figure 9; Figure 10). A dedication ceremony was held in November 1986 that was noted as a well-attended and “festive event.” The dedication ceremony drew a prestigious crowd, including Nevada’s senator, governor, and congressman; city and county officials; Latino leaders; and again, nearly all members of LULAC Council #11081 (Rodriguez 2014, 34–39). In their 1988 State Reports on the CDBG programs, HUD’s national Office of Program Analysis and Evaluation held up the LULAC Multi-Purpose Senior Center as Nevada’s example of “what an energetic community group using Block Grant Entitlement funds to generate assistance from other sources can accomplish” (Office of Program Analysis and Evaluation 1988, 150). Similarly, the primary grant writer for the senior center, and then Vice- President of LULAC, Thomas Rodriguez, considered the ability of the Latino community itself to identify a specific community need and then obtain federal, state, and local funds to address that need one of the most important achievements of the project (Rodriguez 2014, 54).

In his “Memoir of the First Golden Era of Hispanic Activism in Las Vegas, Nevada,” Rodriguez asserts that interest in the senior center waned nearly immediately after it opened, and it was difficult to keep enough volunteer staff to operate it. Rodriguez also notes a significant drop in LULAC Council #11081 membership around the same time, with only 300 members in Nevada in 1990 (Rodriguez 2014, 39–40; 2018; Paz-Martinez 1990). Nonetheless, through the center LULAC provided daily meals and support services to low-income seniors 60 years and older, still attending to the specific needs of Latinos through the early 1990s. The center offered health and vision screenings, recreational activities, a library, live entertainment, referral services, translation services, child health care, and transportation to the center as well as to banks, food pantries, and drug stores (LVRJ 1988; 1990; 1989). What was likely the most robust service was the daily provision of meals. In a 1992 statement to the Select Committee on Aging, then LULAC Council #11081 president, Vincent Montoya, claimed that LULAC served over 18,200 meals through the senior center the previous year; however, this addressed only a portion of the needs of Latino seniors. Montoya noted that as the community support systems of the barrio were being weakened by a housing shortage, language and cultural barriers continued to compound the problem by prohibiting Latino seniors from seeking and receiving the services they needed. While the Select Committee on Aging representative suggested that LULAC team with the county or city housing authority to construct a senior affordable housing complex near the site of the senior center, Montoya insisted that such a project was beyond the financial means of the organization (Select Committee on Aging 1992, 37–38).

Indeed, only several months after Montoya's testimony, LULAC was no longer capable of operating the senior center, and the Las Vegas Housing Authority assumed its management for a brief period beginning in August of 1993 (LVRJ 1993). NALA took over operations by June of 1994 and renamed it the Arturo Cambeiro Senior Center after Nevada's first licensed Latino architect. They administered a similar program to LULAC's, offering daily meals and activities like arts, citizenship classes, conversational English, crafts, exercise, folkloric dance, table games, and ukelele classes. A notable expansion of activities was a 16-week health and wellness course offered in Spanish in 2002 by the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension (LVRJ 1994; 1996; 2002).

By October of 2004, however, NALA was reportedly operating the ACSC with a \$50,000 deficit (of a \$180,000 operating budget) and was prepared to close its doors. With the LCC headquarters directly south of the ACSC and NALA planning to close the facility because of funding shortfalls, the LCC entered into an agreement with the Las Vegas Housing Authority (who still owned the property), and took over operations in October of 2004 (Casey 2004). At this time, the center was still considered "the only place in Las Vegas where the mission is to provide information, recreation and a cheap meal to Hispanics of retirement age" (Pratt 2004a). When management was transferred to the LCC, the facility was still operating using CDBG and Division for Aging Services funds, as well as donations from private entities like the MGM Mirage, U.S. Bank, and Bentar Construction. Under the leadership of LCC founder and then-president Otto Merida, the Chamber also pursued funds from the National Alliance for Hispanic Health and from the senate (on behalf of then Senator Harry Reid) (Pratt 2004b). The LCC managed the ACSC until the following year, when the Nevada Adult Day Healthcare Centers took over operations. The property currently operates as the Nevada Adult Day Healthcare at the Arturo Cambeiro Senior Center and provides services to seniors and disabled adults. The LCC and the Nevada Adult Day Healthcare Centers still maintain a partnership and the successor to the Las Vegas Housing Authority (the Southern Nevada Regional Housing Authority) owns the property (Casey 2004; Vito 2023).

The inability of LULAC Council #11081 to manage the day-to-day operations of the senior center far beyond its construction is emblematic of the position that the national organization was in by the late 1980s. While at national and local levels, LULAC had developed the organizational framework to secure government and corporate funding for large projects, its membership dwindled to such an extent that it became difficult to run such projects. LULAC acknowledged that its aggressive growth was largely the result of its charismatic leadership of a handful of people and could not be maintained by its membership (Marquez 1993).

Onetime LULAC Council #11081 Vice-President and principal grant writer for the senior center, Thomas Rodriguez, frames the significance of the project not necessarily for its impact on Latino seniors, but, like LULAC's broader national agenda, as an endeavor to operate within the system to advance the status of Latinos (Rodriguez 2014, 41):

From beginning to end, the project utilized the combined talents of many dedicated Hispanic persons, who met regularly over a two-year period to plan the project, to develop the strategies to make the project a reality, and who involved themselves in the political process in order to obtain the funds needed to construct



the senior center. As a result of their historic undertaking, many individuals in the Hispanic community acquired a great deal of knowledge and experience on how to make 'The System' work for them and later on used that knowledge to advance the Hispanic agenda in Southern Nevada.

The ACSC is as a local reflection of LULAC's organizational structure and the initiatives this structure allowed its councils to pursue beginning in the 1980s.



Figure 9



Figure 10

*Summary of Exceptional Significance*

Founded in 1978, LULAC Council #11081 was one of several community-based, non-profit organizations formed between the late 1960s and the early 1980s to improve the quality of life of Las Vegas Latino community members. Other groups include the Nevada Association of Latin Americans formed in 1969, the Latin Chamber of Commerce in 1976, and the Mexican Social Club (also known as the Mexican Patriotic Committee) in 1980. The activities of such groups are associated with the areas of Ethnic Heritage and Social History and are best understood in the local context of Latino social activism through non-profit organizations. Properties associated with such groups generally include meeting spaces and places where services were offered, and prior to the 1980s, these were often located in private homes, shopping centers, and commercial buildings. Extant properties include:

- A unit in a small commercial plaza constructed in 1978 that housed the first meeting space for the Mexican Social Club during the 1980s (11 N. Mojave Road) (Salgado 2023).
- A unit in a large, 1973 commercial plaza that housed a NALA office during the 1970s and was a meeting space for the Mexican Social Club during the 1990s (Unit 120 in Stewart Plaza/4341 Stewart Avenue) (Reid 1978; Salgado 2023).
- The Erma O’Neal Community Center, which housed, among other things, the NALA headquarters from 1979 through 2010 (334 N. 11th Street – across the street from the LULAC Multi-Purpose Senior Center). NALA operated a pre-school and childcare facility out of this building, which they leased from the Las Vegas Housing Authority (later the Southern Nevada Regional Housing Authority) for \$1 per year (LVRJ 2010; Rodriguez 2023).
- An early location of the Latin Chamber of Commerce (823 S. 6th Street). The original building is no longer extant, and the current building was constructed in phases between 1987 and 2005. It was purchased by the United States Consulate to Mexico in 2009.
- Freedom Park, a 68-acre park that was developed in 1972 and has been the site of an annual gathering celebrating Mexican Independence since at least 1974 (850 N. Mojave Road). The event has been sponsored by various Latino organizations, including the Mexican Social Club/Mexican Patriotic Committee.

There are other Latino related resources in Las Vegas that may be significant in the areas of Ethnic Heritage and/or Social History but do not reflect the context of Latino social activism through non-profit organizations. For example, the Culinary Workers Union Local No. 226 is significant in the area of Ethnic Heritage, but is best understood for its association with Latino Labor History (specifically the Latino experience in Las Vegas’s gaming and tourism industries) (Matuk et al. 2000, E 17).<sup>6</sup> St. Anne’s Catholic church may also be significant in the area of Ethnic Heritage, but is best understood for its association with everyday Cuban life in Las Vegas (i.e., as a place where many Cubans attended services, were married, and attended school) (Guzman 2018). The Thomas & Mack Center, designed by prominent Cuban architect Arturo Cambeiro (for whom the current ACSC is named for) may be significant in the area of Ethnic Heritage but is best understood as the work of a master. Neighborhoods that exhibit what urban planner James Rojas (2014) has coined “Latino vernacular,” along with sites of non-extant public housing complexes, may also be significant in the area of Ethnic Heritage but are best understood for their association with neighborhood life (specifically in respect to the formation of the social networks that are indicative of barrio urbanism).

<sup>6</sup> The Culinary Union is currently being nominated to the NRHP under an NRHP Multiple Property Submission (MPS) that addresses Latinos in Nevada. At the time of this nomination, the MPS draft was in review by the Nevada SHPO.

While all these examples are Latino-related resources that are likely to be significant in the area of Ethnic Heritage, the senior center is unique in that it was conceived and constructed by a Latino civil rights organization. The construction of the ACSC is a local reflection of a national trend in which the leadership within a local LULAC council used LULAC's organizational framework to obtain federal funding for projects that advanced the objectives of the organization (Marquez 2014, 72; DeSipio, n.d.). The ACSC is the first example of a building that was constructed by a Latino civil rights organization for providing services to Las Vegas's Latino community. It is also only one of two senior centers constructed by LULAC, nationwide (Rodriguez 2023). For all of these reasons, the ACSC meets the threshold of exceptional significance.

## **7. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property**    0.71 acres

**Verbal Boundary Description**



The ACSC is located at 330 N. 13th Street, Las Vegas, Nevada, Clark County (Assessor's Parcel Number 139-35-212-122). The site is bounded by E. Marlin Avenue at the north, N. 13th Street at the west, the Latin Chamber of Commerce property at the south, and the Stewart Pines Senior Apartments at the east.

### **Boundary Justification**

The boundary is the legally recorded boundary lines of Clark County Assessor's Parcel Number 139-35-212-122 and represents the historic and current extent of the property. The property is owned by the Southern Nevada Regional Housing Authority (previously the Las Vegas Housing Authority), who has leased the parcel to the operators of the facility since its construction.

### **11. Form Prepared By**

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322-7969 date: 7/26/2024

### **Additional Documentation**

#### **Additional Items: List of Historic Figures**

**Figure 1:** A rendering of the LULAC Multi-Purpose Senior Center from the 1985 flyer announcing the groundbreaking ceremonies (pictured here). University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Special Collections, MS-01017.

**Figure 2:** PH-00442\_007. Scott Henry Photographs of the Las Vegas, Nevada Latinx Community, approximately 1983-2000. PH-00442. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada. <http://n2t.net/ark:/62930/d12j6c888>

Original caption reads:

Officers of Council #11081 stand in front of completed LULAC Multi-Purpose Bilingual Senior Center building. Nick Flores, Grace Salazar, Bob Agonia, Corrine Gutierrez, Gus Ramos, Tom Rodriguez, and Delia Martinez (identified from left to right): photographic print, 1986 May 05

**Figure 4:** PH-00442\_006. Scott Henry Photographs of the Las Vegas, Nevada Latinx Community, approximately 1983-2000. PH-00442. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada. <http://n2t.net/ark:/62930/d16973321>

Original caption reads: Happily celebrating a dream come true for southern Nevada's Hispanic community are the 1985 and 1986 Officers of Council #11081 of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). These officers were responsible for writing the grants to seek funding for the center and then lobbying funding grants from the City of Las Vegas, County of Clark, and the State Division on Aging to construct the \$475,000 senior center. The center is the first fully bilingual-staffed senior center in the State of Nevada. Today in 2019, the former LULAC Senior Center is operated by the Latin Chamber of Commerce of Nevada and has been renamed the Arturo Cambeiro Senior Center.

**Figure 5:** PH-00442\_005. Scott Henry Photographs of the Las Vegas, Nevada Latinx Community, approximately 1983-2000. PH-00442. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada. <http://n2t.net/ark:/62930/d1b27sw6c>

Original caption reads: On May 5, 1986, "Cinco de Mayo Day," members of LULAC Council #11081 and a group of elected officials and VIPs met at the site of the future LULAC Multi-Purpose Bilingual Senior Center located at 13th and Rue Streets. L to R: Bob Agonia, Department of Energy, Corrine Gutierrez (deceased), Chairperson, Construction Committee, Tom Rodriguez, Vice-President, LULAC Council #11081, Manny Cortez (deceased), Clark County Commissioner, Thalia Dondero (deceased), Clark County Commissioner, Ron Lurie, Mayor, City of Las Vegas, Al Levy (deceased), City of Las Vegas Councilman, Tom Moore, Catholic Community Services, Pat Shalmy, Clark County Manager, John Lujan, President, LULAC Council #11081, Delia Martinez (deceased), Executive Director, Nevada Equal Rights Commission, and Ashley Hall, City Manager, City of Las Vegas.

**Figure 6:** PH-00442\_004. Scott Henry Photographs of the Las Vegas, Nevada Latinx Community, approximately 1983-2000. PH-00442. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada. <http://n2t.net/ark:/62930/d1ft8hq19>

Original caption reads: Acknowledged as one of the most popular and influential political leaders in the State of Nevada, Manuel J. "Manny" Cortez, a 44-year resident of Las Vegas and native of Las Cruces, New Mexico, is shown above speaking at the groundbreaking of the now completed LULAC Senior Center. As a four-term Clark County Commissioner, Cortez has been highly instrumental in the development and funding of many such projects as well as in the overall dynamic growth of Las Vegas and Clark County, Nevada.

## **Photographs**

### **Photo Log**

Location of all original digital files:

Broadbent  
&  
Associates,  
Inc. 5450  
Louie Lane  
#101  
Reno, NV 89511

Photo 0001

Photographer: Lauren King

Photographed: May 6, 2023

Description: ACSC, showing character defining features, looking northwest from N. 13th Street.

Photo 0002

Photographer: Lauren King

Photographed: October 7, 2023

Description: Overview of surrounding neighborhood from south with Interstate 515 overpass in background and ACSC at right, looking north from N. 13th Street.

Photo 0003

Photographer: Lauren King

Photographed: October 7, 2023

Description: Overview of surrounding neighborhood from north with Interstate 515 overpass in background, looking south from Maryland Parkway

Photo 0004

Photographer: Lauren King

Photographed: September 20, 2023

Description: Overview of southwest corner of Stewart Avenue and N. 13th Street with Latin Chamber of Commerce Aner Iglesias Building in foreground, Stewart Pines Senior Apartments in background center, and ACSC in background left, looking northeast from Stewart Avenue and N. 13th Street.

Photo 0005

Photographer: Lauren King

Photographed: October 7, 2023

Description: Overview from north showing landscaping, fence, and north entrance gate, looking south.

Photo 0006

Photographer: Margo Memmott

Photographed: November 8, 2023

Description: Southeast oblique showing original massing at left and 2015 addition at far right, looking northwest.

Photo 0007

Photographer: Margo Memmott

Photographed: November 8, 2023

Description: Northeast oblique showing original massing at left and 2015 addition at right, looking west.

Photo 0008

Photographer: Lauren King

Photographed: October 7, 2023

Description: Northwest oblique showing 2015 addition at left and original massing at far right, looking southeast from N. 13th Street.

Photo 0009

Photographer: Lauren King

Photographed: October 7, 2023

Description: Southwest oblique showing original massing at right and 2015 addition at left, looking east from N. 13th Street.

Photo 0010

Photographer: Margo Memmott

Photographed: November 8, 2023

Description: Southeast oblique showing southeast wing, hump and bump finish, tiled parapet, and window surrounds, looking northwest.

Photo 0011

Photographer: Lauren King

Photographed: September 20, 2023

Description: Interior of tower showing window glazing and door opening in place of original arched window, looking southwest towards front. entry.

Photo 0012

Photographer: Margo Memmott

Photographed: November 8, 2023

Description: Sliding window (with added security grill) and arcade with corbelled arches on west elevation, looking east from outside fenced courtyard.



Photo 0013

Photographer: Lauren King  
Photographed: September 20,  
2023

Description: South elevation with tower at left and southeast wing at right, looking north.

Photo 0014

Photographer: Margo Memmott  
Photographed: November 8, 2023

Description: South entrance with portico column, and gable; tower at left and southeast wing with tiled parapet at right, looking north.

Photo 0015

Photographer: Margo Memmott  
Photographed: November 8, 2023

Description: South three walls of tower showing infilled vents and one original arched window replaced by a door, looking north.

Photo 0016

Photographer: Margo Memmott  
Photographed: November 8, 2023

Description: Southeast wing with incised parapet tiles and arched windows with added security grills, looking north.

Photo 0017

Photographer: Margo Memmott  
Photographed: November 8, 2023

Description: Northeast wing at center with 2015 addition at right, looking northwest.

Photo 0018

Photographer: Lauren King  
Photographed: September 20,  
2023

Description: East elevation of original massing with kitchen door and margin of 2015 addition denoted by taller parapet wall, looking southwest.

Photo 0019

Photographer: Margo Memmott  
Photographed: November 8, 2023

Description: Shed and trash enclosure with original massing and kitchen door at right, looking southwest.

Photo 0020

Photographer: Margo Memmott

Photographed: November 8, 2023

Description: Arcade with corbelled arches, only one rake tile remains, looking northeast.

Photo 0021

Photographer: Margo Memmott

Photographed: November 8, 2023

Description: Arcade with corbelled arches and windows on west elevation with security wall enclosing courtyard at left, looking east.

Photo 0022

Photographer: Lauren King

Photographed: October 7, 2023

Description: Overview showing security wall enclosing courtyard, 2015 addition at left, original building and arcade at right, looking southeast from N. 13th Street.

Photo 0023

Photographer: Margo Memmott

Photographed: November 8,  
2023

Description: East elevation of 2015 addition (distinguished by taller parapet wall) showing margin with northeast wing of original massing, looking west.

Photo 0024

Photographer: Lauren King

Photographed: September 20, 2023

Description: North elevation of 2015 addition showing curved plan, looking south from N. 13th Street.

Photo 0025

Photographer: Lauren King

Photographed: September 20, 2023

Description: East elevation of 2015 addition (right) showing fenestration and parapet tiled frieze matching parapet detail on original massing (left), looking west.

Photo 0026

Photographer: Margo Memmott

Photographed: November 8, 2023

Description: West elevation of 2015 addition with security wall in foreground, looking northeast.

Photo 0027

Photographer: Lauren King

Photographed: September 20, 2023

Description: Interior of tower, which presently functions as a lobby, looking northeast from lobby entrance.

Photo 0028

Photographer: Lauren King

Photographed: September 20, 2023

Description: Central activity room in original massing; kitchen, offices, and restrooms are along the east (right) wall, looking north from south end of building.

Photo 0029

Photographer: Lauren King

Photographed: September 20, 2023

Description: Original primary entrance, which presently leads to the Program Director's office, looking west towards office and lobby.

Photo 0030

Photographer: Lauren King

Photographed: September 20, 2023

Description: Kitchen (window to central activity room at back left), looking north from south end of kitchen.

Photo 0031

Photographer: Lauren King

Photographed: September 20, 2023

Description: Central activity area in north wing (medical office at far left), looking northwest from southeast corner of north wing.