

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

**1. Name of Property**Historic name: Las Vegas Mormon Fort (Additional Documentation)Other names/site number: Las Vegas Ranch; NRIS 72000764 and 78003379

Name of related multiple property listing:

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(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**2. Location**Street & number: 500 E. Washington AvenueCity or town: Las Vegas State: Nevada County: ClarkNot For Publication: ☐Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide \_\_\_ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

\_\_\_ A \_\_\_ B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D

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**Signature of certifying official/Title:****Date**

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**State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

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In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of commenting official:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Title :**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**State or Federal agency/bureau  
or Tribal Government**

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- \_\_\_ entered in the National Register  
\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_ removed from the National Register  
\_\_\_ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☐

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☒

Public – Federal

☐

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**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s) ☐

District ☐

Site ☒

Structure ☐

Object ☐

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1 (reconstruction)</u>	<u>5</u>	buildings
<u>1 (entire site)</u>	<u>          </u>	sites
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	structures
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>5</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1 (adobe)

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/ranch

GOVERNMENT/research facility

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

NO STYLE

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

ADOBE

STUCCO

CONCRETE

STONE

WOOD

### 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

The Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort is a Nevada State Park located in a developed urban area of Las Vegas. It consists of a large, open area anchored by an original adobe building and a partial reconstruction of the 1855 fort's walls and northwest bastion. Other buildings are modern, including a visitor center, two standalone restroom buildings, a maintenance building, and a large workshop. Landscape features are also modern, among them reconstructed caliche walls, a concrete-lined stream with wooden bridges, a garden and tortoise habitat, various shade and fig trees, picnic tables, and commemorative monuments. The property retains sufficient historic integrity to convey its significance, although some aspects of integrity—particularly those of setting, workmanship, and materials—have been diminished by the site's change over time.

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### Narrative Description

The Las Vegas Mormon Fort was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. The nomination included a description of the standing adobe building. The nomination does not specify a clear period of significance outside of the year 1855, nor does it define significance criteria. In 1978, the boundary for the listing was increased to include the entire site.

This additional documentation establishes a period of significance, applicable criteria, updated site description and inventory, and additional historical information and significance of the property.



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The Las Vegas Mormon Fort is centrally located in the urban sprawl of modern Las Vegas, Nevada at the corner of East Washington Avenue and Las Vegas Boulevard. The site is accessed from Washington Avenue through a parking lot. There is a small car roundabout at the end of the parking lot; situated in front of the maintenance building is a Nevada State Historical Marker stating a brief history of the site. The site landscape approaching the visitor center entrance reflects the quiet and modest desert landscape with grasses, mesquite trees, and rockwork.



*Figure 1: Reconstructed fort walls and northwest bastion.*

For centuries prior to the construction of the 1855 fort, the land was regularly occupied and utilized by the Indigenous Ancestral Puebloan peoples and later the Paiutes. This is confirmed by extensive archaeological research and excavations on the site. Before its dedication as a state historic park in the 1990s, that site had many different eras and uses: a stockade and missionary station, a ranch, a tourist resort and swimming pool, a concrete testing laboratory for the

Hoover Dam, and a recreational area. Despite its early and often repeated recognition as a historically significant site, decades passed before its preservation was guaranteed.

The southwest quadrant of the property includes the original adobe building, as well as the partially reconstructed fort walls and northwest bastion. These resources open onto a courtyard that replicates the historic appearance of the open area within the stockade (Figures 1 and 2).

To the north and east are non-historic buildings and landscapes associated with the state park. A reconstruction of



*Figure 2: Original adobe building.*

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the Las Vegas Creek and wooden bridge crossings defines the southern portion of the property.



*Figure 3: Blocks representing the Gass-Stewart Ranch House in foreground, caliche walls and fig trees at background right.*

Modern buildings that occupy the site include the visitor center, two restroom buildings, a workshop, and a maintenance building. Some of these non-historic facilities are clearly new construction designed to complement the historic period structures, while others closely resemble historic structures. Other elements that occupy the site are the reconstructed creek, caliche rock walls, mesquite

and fig trees, picnic tables, wooden bridges, a garden, a tortoise habitat, and concrete adobe blocks that represent the Gass-Stewart Ranch House that once occupied the site (Figure 3).

Five commemorative monuments are on the site. Two are within the park's walls. One was installed by the International Society Daughters of Utah Pioneers at the park in 1939 and later rebuilt in 1994. Another monument from 1952 commemorates the Bringhurst Post Office. The third is outside of the park on the east side of the visitor center and was placed by the Latter-day Saints in 1997.<sup>1</sup> The fourth is Nevada State Historic Marker #35, which was rededicated in the parking lot roundabout in 2008. The fifth, erected in 2015, is a monument consisting of a statue of Helen J. Stewart and a plaque detailing the contributions she made to the development of early Las Vegas.

Archaeological Features (Contributing)

The property includes intact archaeological deposits associated with five cultural periods – the Native American Period (Formative and Protohistoric), the Las Vegas Mission Period (1855-1858), the Ranching Period (1865-1902), the Railroad Period (1903-1955), and the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) Period (1928-1933). Major archaeological features from each period are summarized below based on previous archaeological studies of the site.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lisa Leavitt Messenger, *The Old Ranch: A Brief History of the Las Vegas Ranch after 1902*, Second edition, (Self-published, 2023), 180.

<sup>2</sup> Robert G. Elston and Alvin R. McLane, *Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort: Historical and Archaeological Perspectives*, (Carson City: Nevada State Parks, 1993); James R. Hinds, *One Hundred and Twenty-five Years at Las Vegas' Old Fort: A Historic Structures Report of Las Vegas Fort and Ranch*, Manuscript on file at Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, (Carson City: Division of State Parks, 1980); John W. Hohmann, *The Founding of Las Vegas*,

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Archaeological materials associated with the **Native American Period** include a pit structure and three discrete artifact scatters (Artifact Scatters 1, 2, and 3). The pit structure dates to the Protohistoric Period, likely representing intensified use of the site by Paiute groups; more work is needed to determine the exact function(s) of this Native American feature. Artifact Scatter 1 represents a Protohistoric-age seasonal or permanent encampment, also a likely remnant of the Paiute occupation of the site. Artifact Scatter 2 dates from the late Formative to early Protohistoric Periods, whereas Artifact Scatter 3 dates to the late Formative Period. The functions of Artifact Scatters 2 and 3 are less clear – they may represent encampments or midden areas.<sup>3</sup>

**Las Vegas Mission Period** (1855-1858) archaeological features include foundation elements of the northwest bastion, upper portions of the southeast bastion renovated during the Ranching and BOR Periods, the ruins of all four fort walls, a series of foundations along the southern interior wall of the fort believed to be the fort mess rooms, and the remnants of an adobe corral.

Archaeological features from the **Ranching Period** (1858-1902) include the stone foundations of the Gass-Stewart Ranch House, the south wall during this period, two wooden bridges, a corral and stable, and a metal trough. A concrete septic tank, a redwood pipeline, and a stucco modification to Gass-Stewart Ranch House are features dating to the **Railroad Period** (1903-1928). Archaeological features associated with the **BOR Period** (1929-1932) include a wood septic tank, two concrete block/masonry rooms, and the standing adobe building, which, due to extensive modification, is most representative of the BOR Period rather than the Mission or Ranching Periods. Additional subsurface archaeological features have not been definitively assigned to any specific cultural period.<sup>4</sup>

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*Nevada: Phase II Archaeological Investigations at the Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Historic Park, Clark County, Nevada*, Cultural Resource Group Research Report No. 24, (Las Vegas: Louis Berger & Associates Press, 1995); John W. Hohmann and James C. Lowe, *A Phase I (Class III) Archaeological Survey and Testing for a Proposed Temporary Parking Area Located on 1.1 Acres of the Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Historic Park, Clark County, Nevada*, Cultural Resource Group Clearance Report No. 43, (Las Vegas: Louis Berger & Associates Press, 1995); Tara S. McCarty, *Archaeological Reconnaissance of the Las Vegas Mormon Fort*, (Las Vegas: WESTEC Services, Inc., 1981).

<sup>3</sup> John W. Hohmann, Don W. Ryden, and Margaret "Peg" Davis, *Preservation Plan for the Cultural Resources of the Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort*, (Carson City: Nevada Division of State Parks, 2000), 38.

<sup>4</sup> Hohmann et al. 2000, 30-33, 60-61.



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Adobe Building (Contributing)



*Figure 4: East and north elevations of adobe building.*

The only extant architectural resource from the historic period is an adobe building on the site's southern edge (Figures 4 and 5). Its long, rectangular form measures approximately 74 feet long by 12 feet wide with a short ell taking shape at the southern portion of the building, extending to 18 feet in width. While not fully Spanish Colonial, the building evokes that style with its flat parapet roof. The roof is built from sawn, dimensional lumber joists with a wood plank deck resting on the adobe walls. The

exterior and interior walls are coated with a layer of mud plaster applied in 1980. Prior to that, the adobe brick remained exposed. Since 1980, a layer of new concrete plaster has been applied to the walls every few years by the State of Nevada. The building's exterior walls are approximately two feet thick at the base and gradually become one foot thick at the roof line. The adobe building consists of three rooms aligned on a north-south axis. The southern-most room is the surviving, though heavily modified, portion of the original southeast fort bastion.<sup>5</sup>

All fenestrations on the building feature modest casings painted in a rouge brown and date from the 1929 Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) extensive reconstruction and rehabilitation of the building. Eight openings are found on the east elevation. Moving from south to north, these include a five-panel wood door, a one-over-one single-hung sash window, an identical five-panel wood door, three individual windows all identical to the prior, another five-panel wood door, and a singular window again identical to its counterparts. Moving to the north elevation is one door, identical to its east elevation counterparts, centered on the short 12-foot span.

<sup>5</sup> Bureau of Reclamation, *Concrete Testing Laboratory Plan of Building*, 1929; Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 78.

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Continuing to the west elevation, starting from the north and moving south, are two individual windows, identical to the east elevation fenestrations, a five-panel wood door, then two more individual windows before reaching the short jog of the ell shape at the southern portion of the building. The 13-foot span in the west elevation of the ell shape only features a chimney extending from grade level to above the roof elevation. This feature was likely added by rancher O.D. Gass after 1865 when he modified the ranch house and likely was altered again



*Figure 5: West and south elevations of adobe building.*



*Figure 6: Interior of adobe building facing southwest.*

sometime after. On the south elevation, facing the Las Vegas Creek replica, is a singularly centered, one-over-one, single-hung sash window. The entire interior is concrete slab flooring from the BOR work done in 1929 (Figure 6).<sup>6</sup>

The adobe building that stands today has changed since it was first constructed in 1855 as part of the fort's east wall and southeast bastion. Beginning in the 1860s and through the 1920s, it generally was used as ancillary storage on the ranch. In the late 1920s, the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) leased the site, conducting major rehabilitation of the building. Although the original adobe building was in ruins when the BOR began their renovations, construction plans honored the resource's historic layout, scale, and construction materials. The thicker portions of the building's western wall are remnants of the fort's east wall.

What remains of the building today is most representative of the 1929 to 1932 tenure of the BOR rather than the Mission or Ranch Period occupations, but some of the original 1855 fabric of the building remains, as well as the ranching era building additions.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> OLVMF Historic Photograph Collection.



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Reconstructed Northwest Bastion and Fort Walls (Contributing)

The northwest bastion and fort walls are reconstructions of the 1855 fort, rebuilt between 1997 and 2000. Archaeological features of the fort include foundation elements of the northwest bastion, the southwest bastion, the ruins of all fort walls (north, east, south, and west), and a series of foundations along the southern interior wall.



*Figure 7: Overview of fort reconstruction looking southwest.*



*Figure 8: Courtyard (interior) view of fort reconstruction facing northwest.*

What stands today is a partial reconstruction of the original fort walls (west, north, and east) and a two-level bastion in the northwest corner of the reconstructed walls (Figures 7 and 8). The foundation, which maintains many of its original foundation stones, is constructed of stones and clay mortar. The rest of the wall construction is of concrete-stabilized adobe brick and clay mortar. Centered along the north reconstructed wall is the north gate entrance (Figure 9).

The gate is constructed and framed with wood. Along all three fort walls are small, strategically represented openings at the very upper parts of the walls. The fort's interior courtyard is represented in this partial reconstruction and



*Figure 9: Reconstructed north gate facing northeast.*



*Figure 10: Reconstructed northwest bastion facing northwest.*

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includes a conjectural wooden perimeter breezeway. The reconstruction of the fort walls and bastion started in 1997 and was fully completed by 2000.<sup>8</sup>

The reconstructed northwest bastion represents one of the site's original bastions. Historically, a nearly identical second bastion stood at the southeast corner, which was eventually modified into the previously described single-story adobe building. The reconstructed northwest bastion is constructed out of the same stone and clay mortar foundation with stabilized adobe brick and clay mortar walls (Figure 10). It sits two levels tall with two small window openings at each elevation, one per level. The door into the bastion is found on the interior side of the fort on the south elevation. The roof is substantially low-pitched with extending timber eaves on all sides.<sup>9</sup>

Maintenance Building (Non-contributing)

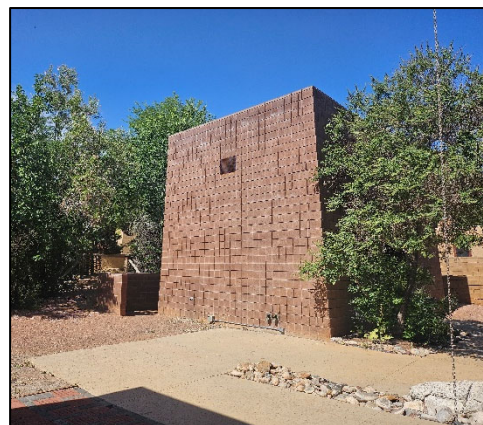


*Figure 11: Modern maintenance building facing south.*

The maintenance building is a small, semi-dugout building located within the parking lot roundabout. It is used for maintenance purposes. It has a front-gabled roof with widely overhanging eaves. The eaves are open, revealing exposed rafter tails. It has concrete block walls partially clad with cultured stone. A sign on the building clarifies that it is not a historic building, suggesting that it is often mistaken for one (Figure 11).

Restroom Building 1 (Non-contributing)

Restroom Building 1 is located in the southeast corner of the site, next to the modern visitor center and park entrance (Figure 12). It is a modern non-historic building, built in 2005 alongside the visitor center, designed to complement and blend in with the historic environment without creating a false sense of history. The building is only accessible once inside the park. The building is an elongated rectangular volume with a tall presence provided by the flat roof and extended parapet. It is constructed of reddish brown, square concrete blocks with poured concrete flooring throughout. Water fountains are located inside at the restroom entry points.<sup>10</sup>



*Figure 12: Restroom Building 1 facing southwest.*

<sup>8</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Historic Aerial Imagery, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, and 2005.



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Restroom Building 2 (Non-contributing)



*Figure 13: Restroom Building 2 facing north.*

Restroom Building 2 is located in the group use area just outside the fort gate on the northwest corner near the corner of Las Vegas Boulevard and Washington Avenue (Figure 13). It is a modern, non-historic building designed to complement and blend in with the historic environment, although it could be confused as a historic building by the general public. The roof is a primitive-looking timber and beam construction resting on two separate, small adobe-style

structures, each housing one restroom. Both restrooms are accessed through the open-air breezeway bisecting the two standing structures. Two water fountains are in the open-air breezeway with electric sconce lighting and concrete flooring throughout. The building was constructed between 1999 and 2000 to serve visitors to the state park, coinciding with the fort reconstruction project.<sup>11</sup>

Shop Building (Non-contributing)

The shop building is located at the north side of the park near Washington Avenue and is accessed from inside the park (Figure 14). The building was built at the same time as Restroom Building 2, between 1999 and 2000. The building is a large, rectangular volume with a corrugated metal gable roof. Like Restroom Building 2, this building is a modern non-historic building designed to complement its historic surrounds and



*Figure 14: Shop Building facing north.*

blend in with the site. The exterior wall finishes are a mix of stone similar to the stone foundations on the fort walls and bastion, concrete block, and a concrete veneer in imitation of adobe. It features small window openings on the north, south, and rear elevations of the building that resemble the reconstructed fort wall openings.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Historic Aerial Imagery, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, and 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Historic Aerial Imagery, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, and 2005.



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Visitor Center (Non-contributing)

The visitor center is a large, modern building located at the east end of the park, also acting as the entrance point. The building was designed by Assemblage Studio, an architecture firm based in the local area, who described the design as:



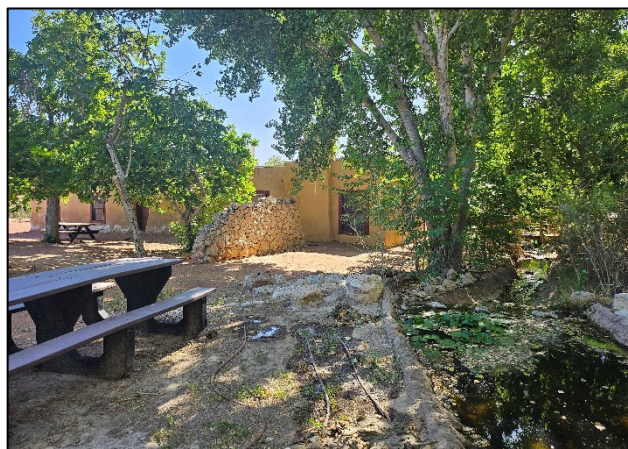
*Figure 15: Visitor Center facing northwest.*

...an evolution of the fort typology – solid, concrete and CMU exterior walls, and an inward focus into a central courtyard. The wall's bastions enable occupants to view arriving visitors, creating a vantage point which connects the fort's interior to the view toward the valley's entrance [the visitor center] to the northeast. The materials were selected to participate in the narrative telling of the building's history. Component materials connected to the history of the fort are incorporated into the walls: concrete block to represent the stacked adobe, the poured concrete of the dam building era, steel to represent the mining of ore, the heavy wood trusses of the original fort, and canvas duct work to represent early shelters and wagons.<sup>13</sup>

The building was built in 2005 at the same time as Restroom Building 1. Its design is appropriately sensitive yet distinct from the historic site and its resources (Figure 15).

Creek Reconstruction (Non-contributing)

The Las Vegas Creek is a replica of what would have been once there, although its location is not historically accurate (Figures 16 and 17). The natural Las Vegas Creek was a year-round water source creating an oasis in the desert. The creek was fed by a series of springs, the major being Las Vegas Spring, located a few miles to the west. The oasis created by this spring-fed creek was a lifeline for humans who occupied and traveled through the valley from prehistoric times until well after the founding of the City of Las Vegas.<sup>14</sup>



*Figure 16: Las Vegas Creek reconstruction at right, facing east toward adobe building.*

<sup>13</sup> assemblageSTUDIO, "Old Mormon Fort Visitors Center," Accessed August 7, 2024. <https://assemblagestudio.com/projects/mormon-fort>.

<sup>14</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 2000, 14.

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*Figure 17: Creek reconstruction facing west.*



*Figure 18: Bridge replica over re-created Las Vegas Creek.*

The original creek bed is no longer evident at surface level, as it was backfilled and constructed upon by the 1960s Elks Lodge building. Archaeological excavations have discovered evidence of multiple bed alignments and a small wandering creek.<sup>15</sup>

Today, the creek replica runs west to east along the southern portion of the park property, forming a small pond at the most eastern point. Two modern wooden bridges span the creek to evoke the historic ranch environment. They are reconstructions of historic bridges found during archaeological investigations (Figure 18). One of the bridges discovered was originally part of the Mission Period canal alignment, and the second was found to the south of the site when excavations were in progress of the Las Vegas Creek re-creation. Riparian vegetation has been planted along the creek, and picnic tables are provided for visitors.<sup>16</sup>

Garden (Non-contributing)

Three small interpretive garden plots in the northeastern corner of the site are marked with a sign (Figure 19). This interpretation provides context for the site signifying the historical importance of agriculture to the pre-historic and historic era. The site today plants the same crops as were grown here historically. The gardens are planted in the spring and fall to produce fruits and vegetables throughout the year.



*Figure 19: Overview of modern garden facing northeast.*

<sup>15</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 2000.



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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☒ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☒ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

AGRICULTURE

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

ENGINEERING

ARCHEOLOGY/HISTORIC-NON-ABORIGINAL

ARCHEOLOGY/PREHISTORIC

**Period of Significance**

C.E. 300 – 1955

**Significant Dates**

1855-1857 (Las Vegas Mission)

1865-1881 (O.D. Gass Ranch)

1882-1902 (Stewart Ranch)

1903-1955 (Railroad owns ranch, leasing to tenants)

1929-1932 (Bureau of Reclamation leases adobe building from railroad)

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

Ancestral Puebloan (Anasazi)

Nuwuvi (Southern Paiute)

**Architect/Builder**

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

The Las Vegas Mormon Fort is locally significant under Criterion A for its association with the exploration and settlement of Las Vegas. Established and occupied by the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1855 to 1857, it transformed into the Las Vegas Rancho under the auspices of the community's early founders, O.D. Gass and Archibald and Helen J. Stewart. In addition to functioning as a working ranch and homestead, the property served as a resting stop for travelers until Stewart sold the property to the railroad in 1902. A few years after acquiring the land, the railroad leased the property to numerous tenants who operated it as a successful ranch and occasional resort until 1955. It is additionally significant for its contributions to engineering for its role as a concrete testing facility for Hoover Dam when the Bureau of Reclamation leased and inhabited the remaining building on the site between August 1929 and March 1932.

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The site is additionally eligible under Criterion D for its archaeological potential. Archaeological investigations confirm its occupation and use by Indigenous people from A.D. 300 until the mid-1800s, when Euro-Americans arrived in the valley. The Ancestral Puebloan, Patayan, and Nuwuvi cultures are represented in the archaeological record at the site. Successive investigations have uncovered ruins and artifacts spanning from the prehistoric and protohistoric periods into the historic period, reflecting its occupation and use by missionaries, ranchers, railroad representatives, and the Bureau of Reclamation between 1855 and 1955. The potential for the Las Vegas Mormon Fort to yield new and important archaeological information is very high.

The period of significance for the site spans centuries, from 300 to 1955. This represents its prehistoric significance during its occupation by the Ancestral Puebloan and Nuwuvi cultures, and it continues through the Latter-day Saints' arrival in 1855, their two-year occupation of the site, and the next several years of the Fort ruins being used as a campsite by Indigenous people and travelers along the Salt Lake Trail. The period of significance additionally encompasses the site's agricultural use by Euro-Americans, specifically when O.D. Gass acquired the property in the 1860s and began operating it as a successful ranch and rest stop for travelers. This proceeds through the Stewart Ranch era, as the site continued to serve as an important local ranch and rest stop from the time Archibald Stewart took over the property in 1882 until Helen Stewart sold it to the railroad in 1902. Its significance continued as the railroad leased the property to ranchers, farmers, and dairymen meeting the community's ever-growing demand for fresh meat, produce, and milk. The significant period ends in 1955, when the railroad sold all its Las Vegas Ranch holdings, signaling a departure from its century of agricultural activity and ushering in a new era of intensive modern development.

Overall, the site retains sufficient integrity to express its significance. Although the property has experienced many modifications, some that date to the period of significance and others that postdate it, reconstruction and interpretation activities at the site allow it to convey its historical significance.

The property meets Criteria Consideration E as an accurately reconstructed feature located in a suitable environment.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance**

The 1972 nomination for the Las Vegas Mormon Fort summarizes the site's history from its establishment as a mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, through its Las Vegas Rancho Period under the ownership of Octavius Gass and then the Stewart family, until Helen J. Stewart sold the property to the railroad. It does not specify a period of significance nor significance criteria for the property. History and architecture are noted as areas of significance for the site.

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This additional documentation includes a cultural context for the Indigenous people who utilized the creek at the site, informing its significance as a prehistoric site. It also offers supplemental historical information from the Mission Period, Ranching Period, and Railroad Period, until the fort was partially reconstructed in 2000. Finally, this update defines a period of significance and significance criteria for the property.

Cultural Beginnings: The Native American Period (C.E. 300-c.1850)

Located on a spring-fed creek with a natural meadow and grove of mesquite trees, the eventual site of the Las Vegas Mormon Fort was known and used by local Indigenous people for centuries before the arrival of the first non-aboriginal explorers and settlers. As one of the only water sources for miles around, the creek and its grasses nourished the earliest inhabitants of the Las Vegas Valley. The Ancestral Puebloan (Anasazi) and Nuwuvi (Southern Paiute) cultures both left evidence of their activities at the site, which was used as a dependable water source and seasonal campsite for centuries before the arrival of Euro-Americans.<sup>17</sup>

*Formative Period (300-1500)*

The Formative Period begins with the arrival of Ancestral Puebloan people in the Las Vegas Valley around 300 C.E. However, Indigenous peoples have lived in southern Nevada since time immemorial, as is evidenced by multiple Clovis projectile points found in the area, as well as oral histories of the region. As a growing population seeking farmland for maize agriculture, Ancestral Pueblos sought proximity to water and arable land. This is reflected in a large Ancestral Puebloan encampment at the Las Vegas Mormon Fort site, in addition to a variety of seasonal camps documented across southern Nevada. The available water made the area an appealing locale for farming. In addition to excelling in horticulture, the Ancestral Pueblos engaged in foraging. The Ancestral Puebloan encampment in this area is evidenced by two sherds of Moapa brownware dating to between 1100 and 1300 C.E., as well as chert and obsidian debitage. Additionally, the proliferation of the Ancestral Puebloan throughout southern Nevada is evidenced through archaeological sites like Lost City, in addition to oral history traditions of modern Indigenous peoples.<sup>18</sup>

The Ancestral Pueblos abandoned the area between 1200 and 1250 C.E., likely due to rising aridity in the region and increased difficulty in farming, although a definitive reason for their disappearance is unclear. Although the Patyan culture's presence in the region overlapped that of the Ancestral Puebloan, beginning in 500 C.E. and continuing until 1500, there is no evidence that they occupied the site at any point in time, despite being in the region.<sup>19 20 21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 2000, 14.

<sup>18</sup> Elston and McLane, *Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort*, 118.

<sup>19</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 2000, 15-16.

<sup>20</sup> Joe Weber, *Mapping Historical Las Vegas: A Cartographic Journey*, (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 2022), 25-26.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth von Till Warren, *The History of Las Vegas Springs, A Disappeared Resource*, Dissertation, Washington State University, 2001, 27, 33.

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*Protohistoric Period (1500-c.1850)*

The Protohistoric Period begins in 1500, when the Nuwuvi culture arrived in the area. This reflects the time immediately before European settlement in the region, although Spanish exploration and trading in California and the Southwest impacted the area long before permanent European settlement occurred. Importantly, an Indigenous burial has been recovered from the Mormon Fort area. The burial dates to either the late Formative Period or early Protohistoric Period and highlights the importance of this site to local Indigenous peoples. While the burial was excavated and reinterred elsewhere, the discovery nevertheless reflects the cultural significance of the site.<sup>22</sup>

Semi-nomadic and relying on a seasonal subsistence strategy, the Nuwuvi lived in small bands of several families, moving to different springs and elevations throughout the year across much of the Great Basin. While various Nuwuvi bands occupied the Las Vegas Valley, the Pegesits band was most prevalent in the area. The Nuwuvi grew crops along the Las Vegas Creek and Springs using irrigation ditches, in addition to hunting small game and gathering mesquite pods and other plants. The complex irrigation systems built and managed by the Nuwuvi were noted by early settlers, speaking to their prominence on the landscape. Mesquite beans were often ground on metates and cooked into cakes that were simple to transport, reflective of the semi-nomadic nature of the Nuwuvi.<sup>23 24</sup>

The Nuwuvi camped at the Las Vegas Springs (Parampaiya) in brush wikiups, and the eventual Mormon Fort site served as an intermittent occupation site with its reliably clean and available water. Various archaeological materials from the Protohistoric Period evidence Nuwuvi activity at the site. The Protohistoric Period brought a proliferation of ceramic production and use by the Nuwuvi. This ceramic production is evidenced by precontact brownware recovered in excavations at the fort, including micaceous brownware. Additionally, chert, basalt, and obsidian debitage was recovered, including biface fragments. Such debitage demonstrates that Nuwuvi peoples stayed in this locale for varying periods of time and engaged in tool-making activities at the site. The Nuwuvi were present when the first Euro-Americans entered the valley in the mid-1800s, which marks the end of the Protohistoric Period and a time of significant change and difficulty for the Native people. In the words of the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe: “White settlers and a booming railroad town brought an end to the Paiute’s free movement and traditional way of life, making them landless laborers in their own land.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 2000, 15, 37.

<sup>23</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 16-17; Las Vegas Paiute Tribe, “History & Culture,” available at <https://www.lvpaiutetribe.com/history>.

<sup>24</sup> Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, *Nuwuvi: A Southern Paiute History*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1976), 119.

<sup>25</sup> Elston and McLane, *Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort*, 107, 132; Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 16-17; Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, *Nuwuvi*, 119; Warren, *The History of Las Vegas Springs*, 34, 44; Weber, *Mapping Historical Las Vegas*, 27.

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### Explorers and the Spanish Trail (1829-1848)

The Spanish Trail crosses the site of the Las Vegas Mormon Fort. When Mexican trader Antonio Armijo led a sixty-man commercial caravan along the Spanish Trail to Los Angeles in 1829, the travelers became the first non-native people to pass through the Las Vegas Valley. The abundant artesian spring water discovered there shortened the Spanish Trail to Los Angeles and eased hardships for traders. While Armijo's party did not stop at the Las Vegas springs specifically, later travelers along the trail did. Their diaries provide similar accountings of the verdant meadows and fast-running creek watered by four large springs.<sup>26 27</sup>

The word "Vegas" first appears in reference to this area on explorer John C. Frémont's 1844 map. On May 13, 1844, he camped at the Las Vegas Springs as he led an overland expedition west. He was not alone – the springs remained a popular resting place for both humans and animals passing through the region, offering grassy expanses shaded by willows and cottonwood trees and plenty of water for bathing and drinking. Las Vegas translates to "The Meadows" in Spanish, and the term "Vegas" described the meadow-like setting of this watered desert area, alerting travelers to the presence of water and grasses.<sup>28</sup>

At its height, the Spanish Trail transported a steady volume of livestock, goods, and people. During the 1830s and 1840s, a profitable slave trade along the trail terrorized the Nuwuvi people, who were captured and trafficked by New Mexican and Ute slavers. The demographic impact of the trade is not known, although the transportation of enslaved Paiutes became ingrained in the annual trading caravans along the trail during this period.<sup>29</sup>

Trade along the Spanish Trail abruptly ended in the spring of 1848 when the United States won the Mexican-American War, acquiring the territories through which the route traversed. While trade ended on the trail, travel did not. The Donner Party's misfortune in the Sierra Nevada mountains over the winter of 1846 made many California-bound emigrants nervous about crossing those mountains. The former Spanish Trail—now called the Southern Route to the Coast or the Southern Trail—presented an alternative to the northern California Trail and was heavily used by emigrants seeking their fortune in California from the late 1840s into the 1850s.<sup>30</sup>

Indigenous occupants of the Las Vegas valley cautiously avoided contact with traders and emigrants during this period. After enduring years of slaving caravans throughout their territory, the Nuwuvi deliberately hid from foreigners, and there are no surviving accounts of direct contact between travelers and natives in the Las Vegas Valley. The local springs utilized by

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<sup>26</sup> Stanley Paher, *Las Vegas: As It Began - As It Grew*, (Las Vegas: Nevada Publications, 1971), 13-15.

<sup>27</sup> Weber, *Mapping Historical Las Vegas*, 32-34.

<sup>28</sup> Paher, *Las Vegas*, 15-16; Weber, *Mapping Historical Las Vegas*, 34.

<sup>29</sup> Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, *Nuwuvi*, 36, 49; Weber, *Mapping Historical Las Vegas*, 34.

<sup>30</sup> Paher, *Las Vegas*, 14-16; Weber, *Mapping Historical Las Vegas*, 34-35.



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caravans and wagon trains were also traditional Nuwuvi hunting and gathering areas, campsites, and water sources, and the presence of non-native travelers inadvertently disturbed Nuwuvi access to these resources.<sup>31</sup>

Las Vegas Mission (1855-1857)

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were the first non-indigenous people to settle in the Las Vegas Valley, although they followed a circuitous path to establishing their eventual outpost there. Fleeing religious persecution, the Saints founded Salt Lake City in 1847 and sent scouting parties into the Great Basin to explore potential settlement locations. In 1851, they purchased the Rancho de San Bernardino in Southern California to serve converts and missionaries from their Pacific missions. The Southern Trail, redubbed the Mormon Trail (alternatively, the Mormon Road), connected these two important outposts to one another – and connected the Saints to the outside world.<sup>32 33</sup>

During the 1850s, the Mormon Trail represented an important, well-traveled route. In addition to missionaries and emigrants, the road transported mail from Salt Lake City to Southern California. Beginning in 1852, mail from Salt Lake to California was rerouted south along the Mormon Trail to avoid the travails of the Sierra Nevada in winter, and Congress established a monthly mail route from Salt Lake to San Diego along the trail in April 1854. The same year, the government funded construction of a military road from Salt Lake City to the California state line, largely following the Mormon Trail.<sup>34</sup>

Recognizing that the route was poised for renewed commercial traffic, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints established a string of forts along the Mormon Trail. This series of waystations became known as the Mormon Corridor. The forts served as safe places for missionaries, mail riders, and other travelers along the road to rest and refresh their supplies. In addition, the outposts increased the Saints' influence over the route.<sup>35</sup>

During a general conference held in Salt Lake City on April 6, 1855, Church leader Brigham Young called thirty Latter-Day Saints from the Utah Territory to Las Vegas to build a mission fort for the purpose of establishing a strategic waystation along the route to San Bernadino, with secondary objectives of spreading their religion to the local Indigenous population and establishing an agricultural community. At that time, the region was part of the New Mexico Territory, which had been organized as an incorporated territory of the United States on

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<sup>31</sup> Warren, *The History of Las Vegas Springs*, 59-61; Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, 119.

<sup>32</sup> Fred E. Woods, *A Gamble in the Desert: The Mormon Mission in Las Vegas, 1865-1857*, (Salt Lake City: Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, 2005), 11-15.

<sup>33</sup> Paher, *Las Vegas*, 16; Weber, *Mapping Historical Las Vegas*, 35.

<sup>34</sup> Paher, *Las Vegas*, 16-18.

<sup>35</sup> Weber, *Mapping Historical Las Vegas*, 37; Woods, *Gamble in the Desert*, 11.

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September 9, 1850. Appointed by Young, William Bringhurst led the party of faithful settlers on their journey. The travelers set out on May 10, 1855.<sup>36 37</sup>

The missionaries arrived at the Las Vegas Springs on June 14, 1855. Following the creek several miles east, the party established their mission upon a natural terrace with a year-round water source. Work commenced immediately, beginning with a simple willow shade structure. By the third day, missionary John Steele surveyed the site, laying out fifteen five-acre farm lots with additional quarter-acre garden lots. Some men dug irrigation ditches; others cleared brush to prepare and plant their gardens in anticipation of a summer crop. On a slope of a scarp just south of the creek, a group of Saints marked the location of a 150-foot square fort to be constructed after they started their crops.<sup>38</sup>

This sustained, disciplined activity and organized division of labor followed a general pattern of the Latter-day Saints' colonization during this time. After the missionaries arrived, they would prayerfully dedicate the land, construct a fort or stockade for shelter and security, and then organize themselves into groups to dig ditches, raise crops, and build roads and fences – and, eventually, homes.<sup>39</sup>

With their fields of corn and vegetables well-established, the Saints shifted their focus to construction in mid-July. Bringhurst led a party of eight men into the mountains to procure timber, which was used to build three bridges over the creek. Next, the missionaries fenced their farms by digging trenches, filling them with thorny mesquite brush, and covering all but the tops with dirt. Finally, they built an adobe brick corral adjacent to the planned fort site to secure their livestock at night.<sup>40</sup>

By August 1855, it was time to build the fort. With the mission's crops growing steadily and animals protected, the Saints turned their attention to their own permanent shelter and security. The men spent the month making sunbaked adobe bricks for the fort walls, commencing construction of those walls on September 4. Built on a stone foundation, the walls measured two feet thick at their base and one foot thick at the top. The 150-foot square walls were oriented with an entrance on the north side. This front-facing wall measured 14 feet tall, and the three remaining walls were nine feet tall. After the walls were completed, the men packed layers of clay around the base, creating a slope to facilitate drainage away from the fort. Bastions were added to the northwest and southeast corners of the fort enclosure (Figure 20).<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Weber, *Mapping Historical Las Vegas*, 37; Woods, *Gamble in the Desert*, 17-18.

<sup>37</sup> Michael S. Green, *Nevada: A History of the Silver State* (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 2015), 70-72.

<sup>38</sup> Green, *Nevada*, 70-72; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 19-22; Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 18; Weber, *Mapping Historical Las Vegas*, 37; Woods, *Gamble in the Desert*, 50-57.

<sup>39</sup> Woods, *Gamble in the Desert*, 57.

<sup>40</sup> Paher, *Las Vegas*, 23; Woods, *Gamble in the Desert*, 72.

<sup>41</sup> Paher, *Las Vegas*, 23; Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 18; Weber, *Mapping Historical Las Vegas*, 37.

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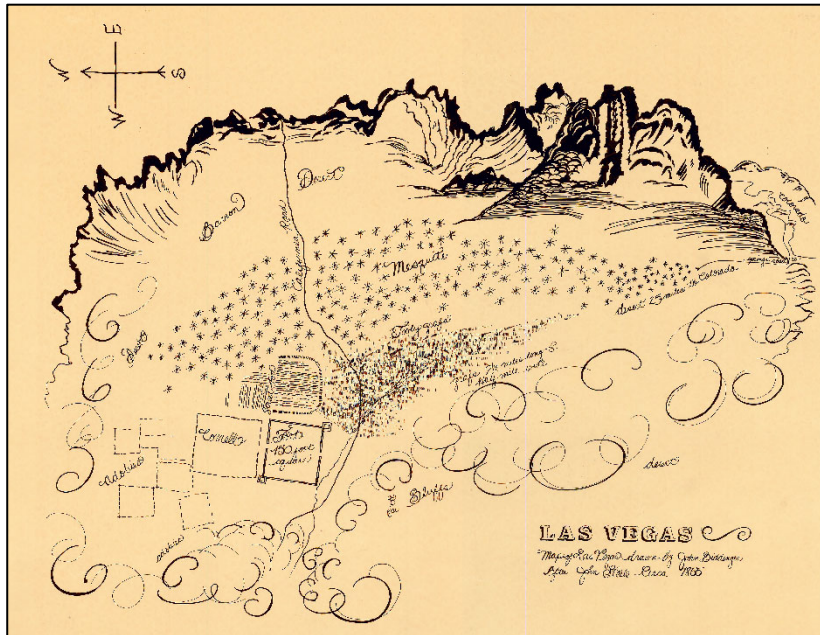


Figure 20: Missionary John Steele drew this map of the Las Vegas Mission circa 1855 (UNLV Libraries).

The missionaries simultaneously constructed adobe brick dwellings and storage buildings inside the fort walls. By February 1856, the fort had eight two-story houses, storage buildings, gates, and bastions on the northeast and southwest corners. The completed fort offered generous views to the north, east, and south. From the west, the mission was obscured from view until travelers along the Mormon Road were only a hundred yards away.<sup>42</sup>

Brigham's men did not build the fort in isolation. They employed local Southern Paiutes to assist in construction in exchange for food and clothing. By all appearances, relations between the two cultures remained civil and generally peaceful. Although the Nuwuvi took grain and crops from the missionaries' fields, as well as flour and meat from their stores, the settlers generally tolerated it while taking measures to better secure their provisions. At the same time, the missionaries proselytized the Indigenous people, conducting baptisms in a "baptismal pool" they had made in the creek near the Fort.<sup>43</sup>

It is not known how many Nuwuvi resided in the valley when the Saints arrived in 1855, although their population likely numbered in the hundreds. Because Indigenous lifeways involved seasonal migration between upper and lower elevations in search of favorable weather and food, no single Nuwuvi band occupied Las Vegas on a permanent basis. Instead, the oasis formed by the springs and creek served as an intermittent camping, farming, hunting, and gathering site for most bands, particularly during the spring planting season when they would tend to their gardens. The local Nuwuvi had grown corn, pumpkins, tepary beans, and wheat for centuries. At least one band, the Pegesits, lived there longer during slow periods of emigrant travel through the valley.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Paher, *Las Vegas*, 22-23; Weber, *Mapping*, 37; Woods, *Gamble in the Desert*, 89.

<sup>43</sup> Paher, *Las Vegas*, 25; Warren, *The History of Las Vegas Springs*, 93; Woods, *Gamble in the Desert*, 129-131.

<sup>44</sup> Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, *Nuwuvi*, 119; Warren, *The History of Las Vegas Springs*, 68.

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Arrival of the missionaries signaled the first long-term disruption of the Nuwuvi's access to the Las Vegas Creek and Springs, as well as a permanent change in traditional concepts of land ownership. Of all the non-indigenous travelers who had stepped foot in the valley, the Saints were the first who intended to stay. The relatively small mission did not threaten or reduce the available water supply, but the settlement initiated the displacement of Nuwuvi farms and farmers, which would intensify in the decades to come. The newcomers did not recognize native rights to the land and water of the valley, and they did not permit Indigenous use of the springs or the creek near the fort. In order to teach the natives Euro-American methods of agriculture, missionaries laid out an "Indian farm" alongside an isolated spring about two miles away from the fort. This was also a strategy to prevent further loss of their own crops at the hands of the Indigenous people.<sup>45</sup>

The Las Vegas Mission strived for permanence. The Saints planted shade trees and new crops, including grapevines and fruit trees from California. After 11 men returned to Utah in November 1855, Young replenished the ranks by calling 30 Saints to Las Vegas in early 1856, permitting them to bring their wives and children. In addition, the first group of Las Vegas missionaries sent for their families, and women and children began arriving in May of 1856. Babies were born, and 103 missionaries resided at the fort by July. The Saints expanded the agricultural fields and irrigation ditches accordingly, laying out additional farms for the new arrivals. In August, they started a school for both native and mission children.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to its evangelical and community-building activities, the mission maintained its connections with the outside world as a waystation and mail stop along the Mormon Trail. Travelers – some alone on foot and others in large trains – stopped at the fort to rest and have their animals shod. In January 1856, the United States established an official post office at the fort, naming it after Bringham. Because the mission was in New Mexico Territory at the time, it was not called Las Vegas, as another town with that name existed in the eastern reaches of the territory.<sup>47</sup>

While the mission made progress as a settlement, it faced hardships that eventually became insurmountable. The Saints constantly battled the heat, aridity, and poor soil of the area in their determination to raise crops. At one point, worms infested the cornfields. Although the missionaries never experienced direct conflict with local tribes, they never gained control over what they perceived as theft at the hands of the Nuwuvi. The missionaries experienced recurrent nighttime episodes of Indigenous people taking crops, animals, and other goods from the fort. Their efforts to convert the native population met with limited success. In addition, the mission was continually undersupplied, work duties were not shared equally, and there was a brewing distrust of mission leadership.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, *Nuwuvi*, 76; Warren, *History of the Las Vegas Springs*, 36, 71-72; Weber, *Mapping Historical Las Vegas*, 26-28, 38; Woods, *Gamble in the Desert*, 121, 132.

<sup>46</sup> Paher, *Las Vegas*, 26-29; Woods, *Gamble in the Desert*, 78-81, 88, 150; Warren, *The History of Las Vegas Springs*, 66.

<sup>47</sup> Paher, *Las Vegas*, 26-27; Woods, *Gamble in the Desert*, 95, 105, 111-117.

<sup>48</sup> Paher, *Las Vegas*, 29-31; Woods, *Gamble in the Desert*, 162-167.

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In February 1857, Church officials in Salt Lake City terminated the Las Vegas Mission. Brigham Young's letter releasing the missionaries from their service arrived at the fort on February 23. After two arduous years in a harsh and unwelcoming climate, the news was met with a general sense of relief and jubilation. The Saints prepared for their impending relocation back to Utah, and their exodus began on March 23.<sup>49</sup>

The fort, with its adobe walls and dwellings, was left to deteriorate. In 1860, the government decommissioned the Bringham Post Office, which effectively closed when the missionaries left in 1857. Local Nuwuvi people and travelers along the Salt Lake Trail (Mormon Road) continued to use it as a shady resting stop, dismantling the mesquite fences for firewood, until a new wave of settlers reclaimed the property.<sup>50</sup>

Military Associations (1858-1869)

Although not a defensive fortification in an official or traditional sense, the Las Vegas Mormon Fort has historical associated with the U.S. military. This period overlaps the Ranching Period detailed later in this document. Like many travelers along the Salt Lake Trail, the Wells Fargo Company stage line used the Fort as a stop between 1858 and 1863. At times, the U.S. military used the property as a patrol base, and military officers traveling on the stage would stop at the Fort. This intermittent use meant that the U.S. military knew of the Fort and its potential utility when the Civil War broke out in 1861.<sup>51</sup>

The U.S. military sought to control travel and communication in the country's far western reaches as the Civil War intensified. Southwestern supporters and outposts loyal to the Confederacy threatened the Union's strength in the West, and securing the Spanish and Mormon trails became a major priority for the Union. Acknowledging the old Fort's important position along a major trade route, Colonel James H. Carleton established a military post there in early 1862. Carleton designated it as Fort Baker, assigning three infantry companies and one cavalry company there. This information was leaked to the California press, which published the news about the new Las Vegas garrison.<sup>52</sup>

Despite its designation as Fort Baker, the Fort was never used during the Civil War, and no military forces were stationed there during the conflict. The Union invented Fort Baker as a ruse to misdirect the Confederates while Carleton's California Column marched through Fort Yuma

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<sup>49</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 18; Woods, *Gamble in the Desert*, 167, 173-175.

<sup>50</sup> Paher, *Las Vegas*, 31-32; Woods, *Gamble in the Desert*, 174-175.

<sup>51</sup> John W. Hohmann, *The Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort: The Founding of a Desert Community in Clark County, Nevada*, Studies in Western Archaeology Number 4, Las Vegas: Louis Berger & Associates, Inc., 1996), 54-55.

<sup>52</sup> Hohmann, *Desert Community*, 54-55; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 33-35.

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to New Mexico and into west Texas. The leaks to the California press were likely intentional. In addition to misleading the Confederates while Carleton planned his march, the ploy assisted the Washington War Department in detecting a suspected Confederate spy in their ranks. Captain George Price confirmed that no soldiers were present at the Fort while camping at Las Vegas in 1864.<sup>53</sup>

The U.S. Army established a true presence at the Fort site after the war, in 1867, to address concerns put forth by area settlers, miners, and travelers about hostilities at the hands of members of the Mohave Tribe. The Mohaves had a reputation for attacking Euro-American settlers as well as other Indigenous groups – particularly the Nuwuvi. Although Mohave territory centered along the lower Colorado River, they were known to enter the Las Vegas Valley on occasion, and early settlers feared them. In May 1867, six men arrived at the old Fort site to find O.D. Gass and two other men living and farming there. The detachment lived in an adobe building and were joined by five additional men from Camp Eldorado in July 1867. The military ordered the post abandoned in May 1869, after concerns about Indian raiding largely subsided.<sup>54</sup>

The final military presence at the Fort site took place during the U.S. Geological Survey led by Lieutenant George M. Wheeler of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Wheeler camped at the site in October 1869 while exploring and mapping the region. He returned with a second party in 1872 on another mapping expedition.<sup>55</sup>

Ranching Period (1861-1902)

One of the original missionaries, Albert Knapp, returned to the fort site to open a general store in 1861. His store served miners who had reopened the former Potosi mine in search of silver, as well as the prospectors flooding into El Dorado Canyon seeking gold. Knapp rebuilt much of the original fort for use as a dwelling and repurposed the central plaza as a corral. He cared for the existing grapevines and fruit trees, selling surplus foodstuffs to the miners. Business dwindled in step with the mining boom, and Knapp relocated to California in 1862. He left his brother, William, in charge of the ranch.<sup>56 57</sup>

Octavius Decatur Gass acquired the ranch sometime between 1865 and 1867.<sup>58</sup> O.D. Gass came west from Ohio during the California gold rush, mining in El Dorado County before relocating to

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<sup>53</sup> Hohmann, *Desert Community*, 55; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 35.

<sup>54</sup> Hohmann, *Desert Community*, 57-58.

<sup>55</sup> Hohmann, *Desert Community*, 58.

<sup>56</sup> Green, *Nevada*, 70-72; Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 18-19; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 31-35.

<sup>57</sup> James Schoenwetter and John W. Hohmann, "Landuse Reconstruction at the Founding Settlement of Las Vegas, Nevada," *Historical Archaeology* 31, no. 4 (1997), 44.

<sup>58</sup> Several sources (Land and Land 2004; Moehring and Green 2005; Paher 1971; Roske and Green 1988) assert that Gass acquired the ranch from his friend

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Los Angeles, where he learned Spanish and worked as a water steward overseeing the town's irrigation ditches. By 1863, he had traveled on to prospect at El Dorado Canyon on the Colorado River, about 50 miles south of present-day Las Vegas. He filed mining claims and invested in Callville, a prospective port on the river, using that locale as his address. Voters elected him to the Arizona Territorial Legislature in 1865, and he served as representative until 1869. O.D. Gass also became interested in ranching in the late 1860s, which led him to the old fort site.<sup>59 60</sup>

O.D. Gass operated his property as a large-scale ranch, naming it the Los Vegas Rancho by 1868.<sup>61</sup> Despite his knowledge of Spanish, he intentionally spelled the name "Los" instead of "Las" to differentiate it from Las Vegas, New Mexico. He repaired and rebuilt the fort buildings with the assistance of other men on the ranch, including his early partners Lewis Cole and Nathaniel Lewis. This work included reconfiguring the adobe fort's southeast bastion into a residence, extending it with an addition to the north and adding a fireplace. Gass retained and expanded the irrigation works, orchards, and vineyards put in place by the Las Vegas Mission. The Los Vegas Rancho operated as a farm, cattle ranch, store, and blacksmith shop. The operation was successful, serving travelers along the old Mormon Trail as well as nearby mining communities.<sup>62</sup>

During the 1860s, the Las Vegas Valley experienced major territorial shifts. Located in New Mexico Territory since the 1848 Mexican Cession, the area became part of the Arizona Territory—created from the western half of New Mexico Territory—in February 1863. During his time in the Arizona Territorial Legislature, O.D. Gass co-drafted a successful bill to create Pah-Ute County out of the northern portion of Mohave County that contained most of present-day Clark County in 1865. Although Nevada achieved statehood in 1864, this southernmost part of the state remained in Arizona Territory until 1866, when Congress shifted the state's borders south to include present-day Clark County and southern Nye County. Although the Nevada State

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William Knapp in 1865, but Warren (2001:97n87, 98n90) notes that no documentary evidence exists to verify this. An 1867 item in the *Arizona Miner* (June 1, 1867:2) mentions that O.D. Gass was "ranching with a company of men at the Vegas ranch." Gass owned at least part of the ranch by 1868, when he advertised it for sale in a Utah newspaper. Apparently it did not sell, although it seems Gass did not reside there permanently until 1872. Historical accounts by William Henry Jackson in January 1867, Lieutenant Wheeler in 1869, and D.A. Lyle in 1871 all noted the site as abandoned when they passed through.

<sup>59</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 19; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 37-38; Warren, *The History of Las Vegas Springs*, 98-99; Webb, *Mapping*, 39.

<sup>60</sup> Ralph J. Roske and Michael S. Green, "Octavius Decatur Gass: Pah-Ute County Pioneer," *The Journal of Arizona History* 29, no. 4 (1988), 371-372, 376, 381-383.

<sup>61</sup> "Correspondence," *Our Dixie Times*, April 15, 1868:1, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=30441437>.

<sup>62</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 19; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 37-38; Roske and Green, *Octavius Decatur Gass*, 371-372, 376; Warren, *The History of Las Vegas Springs*, 98n92.



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Legislature accepted the land in 1867, the Arizona Territory disputed the transfer and continued to represent Pah-Ute County in their territorial legislature until 1871, ultimately recognizing that the annexation could not be reversed.<sup>63 64</sup>



*Figure 21: F.S. Dellenbaugh's 1876 painting of the Gass Ranch. The fort is depicted at left with shortened walls and a dwelling in its southwest corner (Nevada State Museum - Las Vegas).*

O.D. Gass became the Las Vegas Valley's principal land and water owner, acquiring surrounding homesteads as they were either sold or abandoned throughout the 1870s. William Knapp had retained 49 acres of the land inherited from his brother, selling out to O.D. Gass and his wife Mary V. Simpson Gass in March 1876. Gass eventually bought out

Lewis and Cole. After he bought the Spring Ranch in January 1878, he owned all the Las Vegas Springs - the area's primary water source. Wagon train emigrants along the Mormon Road looked forward to camping at the Gass ranch with its abundant water, shade, and provisions. Gass boarded travelers, selling them produce, wine, and brandy from the ranch. He stabled and pastured their animals. He operated a store and blacksmith shop on the premises, serving area miners as well as passers-by. Freighting operations traveling the road kept the ranches well-stocked with supplies.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to repairing and repurposing the existing fort structures, O.D. Gass built himself a ranch house in the southwest corner of the fort stockade (Figures 21 and 22). The house was built atop the fort's original mess rooms. In 1879, he remodeled the residence into what would become the Stewart Ranch house. The back door of the house opened onto the unshaded, 150-foot square plaza, which continued to secure farm livestock overnight. O.D. Gass replaced what

<sup>63</sup> Green, *Nevada*, 96-97; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 50-52.

<sup>64</sup> Dean Heller, *Political History of Nevada*, Eleventh Edition (Carson City: State Printing Office, 2002), 114.

<sup>65</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 19; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 37-38, 46, 52; Roske and Green, *Octavius Decatur Gass*, 379; Warren, *The History of Las Vegas Springs*, 100-102.



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was left of the original adobe walls with rock walls. Animal stalls lined the west half of the north wall of the enclosure. Six adobe buildings and a blacksmith shop were arranged along the east wall.<sup>66</sup> The entrance to the enclosure was relocated to the south side, which was gated and braced with a large wood timber. The stockade ground remained bare, as agricultural fields and orchards were outside of the enclosure.<sup>67</sup>



*Figure 22: O.D. Gass (left) and Mrs. Gass (right) in front of their Las Vegas Rancho. The fort remnant is at left in the background (Huntington Library).*

O.D. Gass employed the local Indians to complete assorted ranch tasks, notably harvesting and hulling beans. After being pulled from the fields, the beans were brought into the stockade, where the Indigenous workers cleaned and loaded them into storage sacks. In return, O.D. Gass paid them with provisions including beans, clothing, and sugar. The Gass family learned enough Paiute to communicate with their native neighbors, and relations between the two were amicable.<sup>68</sup>

By all accounts, O.D. Gass ran a profitable operation at the ranch for nearly a decade before finding himself entangled in financial difficulties. He first mortgaged the property to William Knapp on the same day he purchased Knapp's field and water rights in March 1876. The \$3,000 mortgage included all land owned by the Gasses, including what they had just purchased from Knapp. O.D. Gass paid off this debt and regained title of his ranch by the following April, but his money troubles persisted. While his purchase of the 320-acre Spring Rancho in January 1878 consolidated his control of the Valley's land and water resources, his debts escalated. In 1879, he borrowed \$5,000 in gold from Archibald Stewart, a fellow rancher and businessman in nearby Pioche, with the Las Vegas Ranch and Spring Ranch properties as collateral on the one-year promissory note. Unable to repay the loan within the year, O.D. Gass lost the ranch to Stewart on August 2, 1880. The family remained on the property until June 1881.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> This included the last extant adobe building that stands on the site at present. O.D. Gass remodeled it in the mid-1860s as a storeroom for beans and milk. Milk was also skimmed and churned there.

<sup>67</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 19; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 38, 45.

<sup>68</sup> Paher, *Las Vegas*, 40-41.

<sup>69</sup> Roske and Green, *Octavius Decatur Gass*, 385; Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 19; Warren, *The History of Las Vegas Springs*, 101, 110.

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The Stewart family relocated to the Las Vegas Ranch in April 1882. The previous summer, Archibald sold one-third interest of the holdings to George Hagerty, who moved to the property and made improvements ahead of the Stewart family's arrival. He managed to open a small store for travelers before Archibald took over the ranch operations after their partnership dissolved in March 1882. By all accounts, the ranch prospered under Stewart's tutelage until his untimely death two years later. In 1884, Archibald was shot and killed at a neighboring ranch owned by Conrad Kiel, a murky event that spawned countless myths and speculations about who fired the gun and why.<sup>70 71</sup>

Helen Stewart, Archibald's widow, chose to stay with her children on the ranch. At the time of her husband's death, she was pregnant with her fifth child. Assisted by her father, sons, and hired hands, Helen operated the ranch for the next two decades. Like the Gass family before her, Helen befriended the local Nuwuvi and employed some on the ranch. When the Stewarts acquired the rancho, its orchards and fields boasted a variety of fruits, vegetables, and grains planted during the Mission, Knapp, and Gass periods. Helen also ran a store and roadside stop for travelers, permitting guests to make camp beneath the trees and take meals in the ranch house. In response to increasing ranching, lumbering, and mining activity in the area, a post office opened on the property with Helen serving as Postmaster in 1893. Initially called Los Vegas to avoid confusion with Las Vegas, New Mexico, the name was changed to Las Vegas in 1903.<sup>72 73</sup>

During the Stewart period, the property experienced physical changes, as well as some functional changes. By 1885, the remodeled southeast bastion of the old fort was being used as a blacksmith shop, wine cellar, and camp outfit house. The ranch house, which O.D. Gass had rebuilt in the New Mexico Territorial style in 1879-80, received porches on its east and west elevations. A bunkhouse was added immediately north of the main ranch house, with a breezeway connecting the two buildings. An enclosed privy was installed within the breezeway. Other buildings included an adobe chicken coop, an adobe storehouse, and a canvas storehouse.<sup>74</sup>

The Las Vegas Ranch exemplified agricultural productivity and economic success in the southern Nevada desert (Figure 23). Stewart hired a foreman to oversee the farm and ranching operations until her two eldest sons, Will and Hiram, took over in 1889. The ranch supplied miners in El Dorado Canyon throughout the 1890s, sending bi-monthly wagons loaded with beef, vegetables, fruit, grains, and hay. By 1901, the ranch totaled more than 2,000 fenced acres

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<sup>70</sup> Green, *Nevada*, 156; Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 19; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 55-57.

<sup>71</sup> Carrie Townley, "First Lady of Las Vegas Part 1," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1973), 222.

<sup>72</sup> Green, *Nevada*, 156; Hohmann, *Desert Community*, 11; Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 19; Warren, *The History of Las Vegas Springs*, 114-115.

<sup>73</sup> Helen S. Carlson, *Nevada Place Names* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1974), 153.

<sup>74</sup> Hinds, *One Hundred and Twenty-Five Years*, 51; Hohmann, *Desert Community*, 61.

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*Figure 23: The Stewart Ranch circa 1905. From left to right is the ranch house, south wall, and fort remnant (Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park).*

irrigated by 400 inches of water diverted from the Las Vegas Creek. The ranch focused primarily on raising cattle and ran large herds, ensuring a continual supply of fresh beef. An accounting of farm holdings from 1902 counted 557 peach trees, 114 apple trees, other fruit trees, more than 1,500 grapevines, 40 acres of redtop grass, more than 6.5 acres of wheat, and 2.5 acres of sweet potatoes.<sup>75 76</sup>

In addition to its agrarian pursuits, the Las Vegas Ranch functioned as a retreat for prospectors, miners, and travelers. Stewart

permitted the men to sleep beneath the ranch's trees and charged board of about a dollar a day, which included fresh milk and beef served in a proper dining room, a welcome change from the visitors' regular fare. Freight teams traveling through Las Vegas stopped at the ranch for fresh horses and supplies. A party associated with the Death Valley Survey of 1891 stayed at the ranch during while in the Las Vegas Valley, camping at the springs while surveying local floral, fauna, and soil quality.<sup>77 78</sup>

As more settlers established themselves in the Las Vegas Valley, the Stewart Ranch became a hub of local activity. Other ranches in the valley included the Kiel Ranch and the Sandstone Ranch. Farther-flung desert ranches were located at Indian Springs to the northwest, Pahrump Valley to the west, and Moapa Valley to the northeast. Nearby mines and lumber mills remained active, justifying the establishment of a voting precinct at the ranch in the early 1890s, in addition to the aforementioned post office. The ranch had served as a voting precinct under the ownership of O.D. Gass in the 1870s, counting four voters in 1872 and three in 1874. Such a diminutive voter population deemed the Vegas precinct impractical, and valley residents were made to travel to El Dorado Canyon between 1876 and 1886 to cast their ballots. A precinct

<sup>75</sup> Fran Campbell, "Letters to Tiza: Helen Stewart Tells of Early Las Vegas," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (2006), 212-213; Townley 1973, 237.

<sup>76</sup> Campbell, *Letters*, 312-313; Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 19; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 57-58, 65; Warren, *The History of Las Vegas Springs*, 117.

<sup>77</sup> Campbell, *Letters*, 212-213; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 57-58; Warren, *The History of Las Vegas Springs*, 117.

<sup>78</sup> Carrie Townley, "First Lady of Las Vegas Part 2," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1974), 5.

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returned to the valley at the Sandstone Ranch in 1888, then moved to the Las Vegas Ranch in 1890, where it would remain throughout the Stewart period. In addition to her official role as postmaster of the Los Vegas Post Office, Helen Stewart often received and passed messages for area occupants in an informal capacity. The ranch also hosted dances and holiday celebrations when enough visitors arrived to justify such festivities.<sup>79</sup>

Despite its role as an economic, social, and political cornerstone of the community, the ranch remained relatively isolated, and Stewart was biding her time until she could sell it. Initially hoping to sell to developers, she put the ranch on the market as early as 1887, but none of the interested buyers would agree to her price. She focused on growing the ranch and expanding her land holdings. At the turn of the century rumors of a potential railroad circulated around the valley. Stewart again turned her attention to selling the ranch, this time to a rail company.<sup>80 81</sup>

By 1901, two railroad companies competed to build a rail line connecting southern California and Utah through southern Nevada: the Oregon Short Line (OSL) Railroad Company, associated with the Union Pacific Railroad, and the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake (SP, LA & SL) Railroad, formed by U.S. Senator William Andrews Clark of Montana. The Las Vegas Valley presented an ideal division point with its natural springs and nearby wooded mountains, and a successful railroad would need to secure land with water rights for shop facilities and a town. OSL led the charge, optioning to purchase most of the Stewart Ranch for \$65,000 in May 1901 and putting up \$500 in earnest money. The railroad did not provide the remaining funds, forfeiting its option on the ranch. The prospect of selling the ranch was renewed when the two rival railroad companies agreed to merge construction and ownership of the southern Nevada line in July 1902. Clark assumed responsibility over the railroad's operations.<sup>82 83</sup>

In October 1902, Clark offered Stewart \$55,000 for 1,836 acres of her ranch and its water rights, and she accepted. Clark acquired all of Stewart's agricultural land spanning the old Las Vegas and Spring ranchos, although Stewart retained rights to four inches of water and the "Four Acres" family burial plot, as well as the traditional campsite used by her Nuwuvi workers – which she would sell to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1911 to create the Las Vegas Indian Colony. After the sale, Stewart spent time in Salt Lake City and moved to southern California before returning to the small settlement of Las Vegas, where her son built a house for her near the old family ranch. In addition to holding public education offices, she was an early member of

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<sup>79</sup> Paher, *Las Vegas*, 57, 62; Townley, *First Lady Part 2*, 4-5; Warren, *The History of Las Vegas Springs*, 115.

<sup>80</sup> Campbell, *Letters*, 312-313; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 65; Townley, *First Lady Part 1*, 234-236.

<sup>81</sup> State of Nevada, Land Patents, Patent No. 2794, 4882, and 4883, <https://lands.nv.gov/patent-search-tool>.

<sup>82</sup> Green, *Nevada*, 169; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 65.

<sup>83</sup> Townley, *First Lady Part 2*, 13.

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the town's first women's organization, the Mesquite Club. By the time of her death in 1926, Helen Stewart had earned the title "First Lady of Las Vegas."<sup>84</sup>

Railroad Period (1903-1928)

Senator Clark, a Montana copper baron, purchased Stewart's property for the SP, LA, & SL Railroad. The sale included water rights and all buildings on the property. He had begun construction on the railroad the year prior. The area met all his requirements for a town that would serve as a division point on the railroad: it was on a direct route to Salt Lake City, and it had plenty of groundwater to service the steam engines. Clark partnered with the Union Pacific Railroad, headed by E. H. Harriman, to construct the railroad between 1903 and 1905. Las Vegas was chosen as a stop-off point for the trains to replenish supplies and water.<sup>85</sup>

After the railroad purchased the ranch, Clark installed Dr. Joseph K.W. Bracken as caretaker of the property. The company intended to maintain the ranch until its long-term use could be determined. Bracken arrived in Las Vegas in April 1903, overseeing the daily operations of the ranch. His duties included hiring and managing staff, buying and selling livestock and crops, and overseeing the store. The frugality and firm hand of the railroad company made Dr. Bracken's two-year tenure a frustrating one, and his decisions were often overruled by his corporate bosses.<sup>86</sup>

The railroad ultimately decided to dispose of the property's assets in preparation of leasing the ranch. Representatives sold the store to Norman Kuhn. It was moved with the tent post office in February 1905 to a lot in Clark's Las Vegas townsite. Other buildings sold included the restaurant, butcher shop, and tent houses. They sold the ranch's stock, selling some locally and shipping others to markets in Salt Lake City, as well as wagons, blacksmith tools, hay, and farming implements.<sup>87</sup>

Walter Bracken won the inaugural one-year lease to the ranch in March 1905 (Figure 24). Walter was Dr. Bracken's brother and had worked at the ranch as its foreman. In addition, he served as the Las Vegas postmaster beginning in March 1904, working out of the post office at the ranch until it was moved to the new townsite.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Green, *Nevada*, 156-157, 169; Hohmann, *Desert Community*, 77; Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 20; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 65; Townley, *First Lady Part 2*, 13-14; Warren, *The History of Las Vegas Springs*, 118.

<sup>85</sup> Green, *Nevada*, 169; Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 20; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 65.

<sup>86</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 2-14.

<sup>87</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 14-15.

<sup>88</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 11-13.



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Walter, his brother, and ranch butcher John Tuck became partners in a hay, grain, and meat business in 1905, coinciding with the railroad's auction of lots in Clark's Las Vegas Townsite. The ranch served as the base of operations. In preparation for their new enterprise, Walter had purchased pigs, chickens, and two tent houses from the railroad during the ranch liquidation. With Tuck, he purchased grain, hay, lumber, and a storage tent, and Tuck bought five milk cows. The partners eventually would open a lumber yard and embark on a forwarding business. They named this venture the Las Vegas Mercantile Company, which ran out of a storefront in the townsite on Fremont Street.<sup>89</sup>



*Figure 24: The Las Vegas Ranch House during the Bracken era (Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park).*

In May 1905, another lease was approved for part of the ranch land. Harry Beale entered into a six-month lease on the roadside portion of the property, opening his Las Vegas Ranch Resort. He transformed the area into a luxury retreat “under the Cottonwood trees.” Amenities included an open-air dance floor, dining room, drink and billiards hall, and swimming pool. Overnight guests could choose old adobe buildings or creekside tent houses as their accommodation. In addition, campsites were available for those who brought their own tents. The resort supplied groceries to guests who wished to cook for themselves.<sup>90</sup>

The Las Vegas Ranch Resort, with its abundant shade and water, attracted visitors and locals alike. The large swimming pool was particularly inviting in hot weather. Created by a partial dam on the Las Vegas Creek, the pool measured 150 feet long, 50 feet wide, and 8-10 feet deep. While they waited for permanent housing in town, new Las Vegas residents camped along the creek on the old ranch. This represents a brief episode on the property, as the railroad did not renew Beale's contract. His resort operated for just one season: in November 1905, the railroad offered Walter Bracken a lease on the entire ranch in exchange for the removal of “all buildings, tents, and devices” built in association with the resort.<sup>91 92</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 13-18; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 68.

<sup>90</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 18-19; Paher, *Las Vegas*, 74.

<sup>91</sup> “Celebration at the Ranch,” *Las Vegas Age*, July 1, 1905:3-1; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 19-20, 26; “New Ranch Lease,” *Las Vegas Age*, November 25, 1905:1-4.

<sup>92</sup> The chronology and duration of Bracken's leases in November 1905 are murky. Correspondence to railroad executive Frank Grace suggests that Bracken's lease was extended by one year when Beale's resort closed, whereas newspaper accounts note that the railroad granted Bracken a two-year lease. This does

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No longer operating as a privately-run resort, the ranch nonetheless continued to serve as a community space. The railroad renewed Bracken's lease for five years in 1906, and he ensured public access to the swimming pool and shady picnic areas of the property. Churches, public schools, and social clubs all held gatherings at the ranch. Consolidated Power and Telephone Company installed lighting and provided free electricity to power them. Tents erected near the pool served as bathhouses.<sup>93</sup>

After living on the ranch for three years, Walter and his wife Anna moved into town in August 1908. In addition to his position as Las Vegas postmaster, Walter was appointed local agent of the powerful Las Vegas Land and Water Company and sold his share in the Las Vegas Mercantile Company. He assigned his ranch lease to the Las Vegas Mercantile Company, which became the Vegas Packing Company briefly in 1909 before it closed the same year.<sup>94</sup>

The ranch's recreational uses continued after the Brackens departed. Community Fourth of July celebrations were held on the grounds. Another resort, Las Vegas Park, opened at the ranch in 1909. Locally known as "The Plunge" for its swimming pool, the venue held dances with live music twice per week on a newly constructed dancing pavilion between the road and swimming pool. Transportation to the dances from the post office was provided at 15-minute intervals.<sup>95</sup>

In 1909, Clark County was created from the southern tip of Lincoln County with Las Vegas at its seat. The growing town depended on the ranch's steady production of meat, dairy, grain, fruit, and vegetables. Recognizing this, the railroad continued to lease the property to farmers, ranchers, and dairymen. John Lefurgey, a Californian, acquired the ranch lease after the Vegas Packing Company folded in 1909. He continued producing a bounty of crops, among them alfalfa, figs, apricots, black walnuts, grapes, apples, barley, corn, pumpkins, melons, pomegranates, pears, peaches, plums, and prunes. He took over the Vegas Meat Market ranch operation and storefront on Fremont Street. When the Las Vegas Park resort closed, Lefurgey turned the dance pavilion into a house. He sublet a portion of ranch to Orson Sanford for a dairy operation, which was taken over by Clio Mobley. Mobley purchased the remainder of Lefurgey's lease in 1914, managing the meat and dairy operations until 1917.<sup>96</sup>

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not comport with Bracken's initial yearlong lease, which was not set to expire until March 1, 1906, at which time the railroad approved a renewal of his lease for an additional five years (Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 26).

<sup>93</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 26-29.

<sup>94</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 26-33.

<sup>95</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 29, 34, 46.

<sup>96</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 28-36, 44-46, 50; Weber, *Mapping Historical Las Vegas*, 43-44.

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*Figure 25: A man stands in front of the old adobe during the Bracken era. Ranch house is at left (Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park).*

Throughout these years, the old adobe remnant remained an afterthought to the railroad and its lessees, used as ancillary storage (Figure 25). The first call to preserve the building occurred in 1915. On behalf of the Nevada Federation of Women's Clubs, Delphine Squires wrote to J. Ross Clark requesting that the building be recognized for its role in Las Vegas' heritage and protected by an iron fence. When asked about the building, Bracken recalled that it was used as a tool shed and

harness storage room since the railroad acquired it. The railroad suggested that the Federation of Women's Clubs could build a fence at their own expense. There is no evidence that such a fence was built. Nearly 15 years later, in 1929, the Chamber of Commerce and *Las Vegas Age* appealed for the adobe's preservation.<sup>97</sup>

The railroad's practice of leasing the ranch continued into the next decade. Dwight and Theresa Doolittle acquired the lease from Mobley in 1917, overseeing the ranch and the Vegas Jersey Dairy. In 1923, they turned their attention to the swimming pool and resort, enlarging the pool to accommodate more swimmers and subleasing the dairy to Joseph Foremaster (Figure 26). When they separated in 1925, Theresa took over the lease. The same year, the railroad leased a ten-acre portion of the ranch near its north boundary to the University of Nevada's Agricultural Experiment Station, supervised by field agent Geoge Hardman.<sup>98</sup>



*Figure 26: Franklin Hardman pictured at the Las Vegas Ranch swimming pool in the 1920s (Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park).*

In addition to leasing the ranch, the railroad investigated ways to be directly involved in the land's agricultural production. After plans to

<sup>97</sup> *Las Vegas Age* 7-11-1929:3; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 50, 153.

<sup>98</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 51-53, 56.



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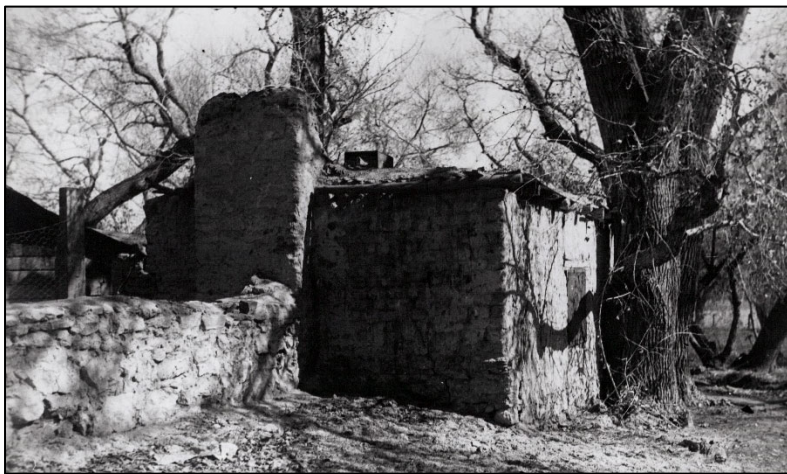
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develop a cotton farm fell apart, the railroad decided to turn the ranch into a demonstration farm, giving notice to Theresa Doolittle and Joseph Foremaster in November 1925. These plans included restoration of the old adobe. The demonstration farm never materialized, and Foremaster acquired a lease for the entire ranch in November 1926. He made improvements to the water system and continued farming and dairying with the help of his family.<sup>99</sup>

Bureau of Reclamation Period (1929-1932)

The Las Vegas Ranch was not immune to the excitement surrounding the impending construction of what would become Hoover Dam. Congress approved the Boulder Canyon Project Act in 1928. The massive public works project re-energized Las Vegas during the Great Depression. Setting up a local concrete testing laboratory was the first order of business, prioritized over establishing offices at the dam site. Engineers identified the ranch as a possible location, which seemed ideal with its abundant shade and relative privacy. Foremaster leased the last remnant of the Mormon Fort on the ranch, the 1855 adobe building, to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation beginning August 1, 1929. The lease included 1,000 square feet of land north and east of the building and access to the creek.<sup>100</sup>



*Figure 27: Fort remnant with chimney pictured in 1929.*

The adobe building required extensive repair and reconstruction work before the Bureau of Reclamation could occupy it (Figures 27 and 28). After more than 80 years in the unforgiving desert climate serving as ancillary storage, the building had not been well maintained by the ranch's various tenants. The local Chamber of Commerce had recently written to the railroad asking them to take measures to

preserve the structure. The ruined east wall consisted of a pile of adobe bricks, and the roof had caved in the center (Figure 28). Cognizant of the adobe's standing as the oldest extant non-native building in Nevada, the government assured that the reconstruction would preserve historic materials to the maximum extent possible.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Elston and McLane, *Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort*, 47; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 58-59, 75-78, 153.

<sup>100</sup> Green, *Nevada*, 224; Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 20; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 80-83.

<sup>101</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 20; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 83-84, 153.

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*Figure 28: Adobe remnant in 1929 (Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park).*



*Figure 29: Adobe remnant in 1929 with rubble of east wall in foreground (Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park).*



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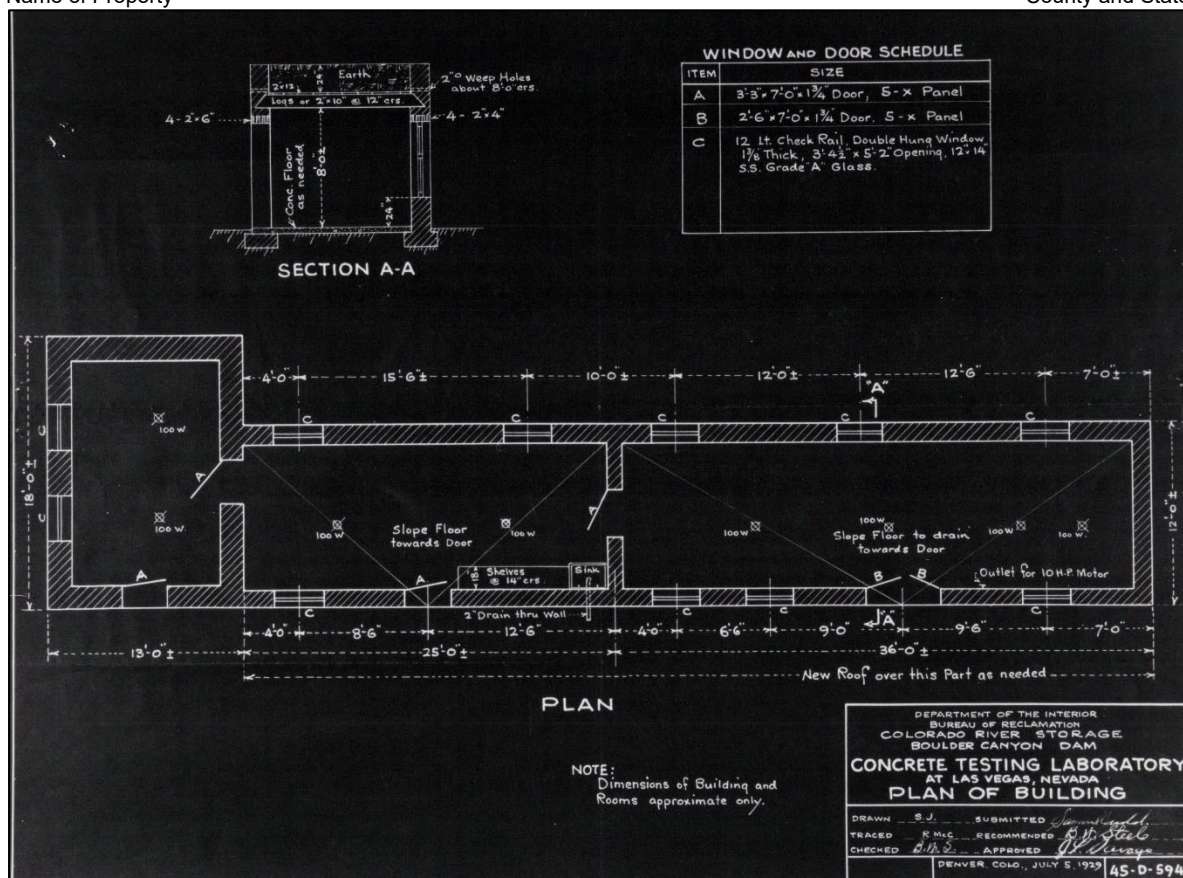


Figure 30: Bureau of Reclamation plans for renovating the old adobe into their concrete testing laboratory (Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park).



Figure 31: Bureau of Reclamation renovation of the old adobe in 1929 (Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park).

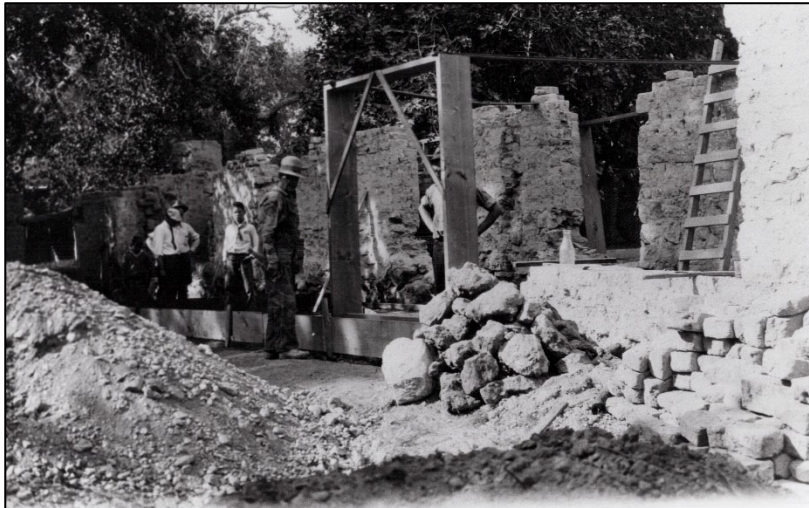
The government prepared a set of construction drawings to transform the old adobe into their concrete testing laboratory (Figure 30). The adobe consisted of a remnant of the fort's southeast bastion and a gable-roofed building from the Ranching Period that housed a blacksmith shop, storage rooms, and tack rooms. The crew installed a concrete foundation, poured concrete over the existing dirt floors, and rebuilt the walls. They reused about half of the original adobe bricks.

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*Figure 32: Bureau of Reclamation renovation of the old adobe in 1929 (Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park).*



*Figure 33: Completed renovation of adobe by the Bureau of Reclamation with new curing room at right (Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park).*

New adobe bricks were differentiated from the old by their lighter color. The roof was replaced and raised by one foot. Plans called for new window and door openings, which were fitted with wood sash windows and paneled doors. The existing fireplace and chimney were repaired (Figures 31 and 32).<sup>102</sup>

The interior plan consisted of three rooms, effectively consolidating the historically separate building units under a single roof. The smallest room, on the south end of the building, served as an office for engineer and laboratory supervisor Orin Patch. The middle room served as the mixing room, and the northern room served as the testing room with a hydraulic press. Workers wired the building for electricity, installing eight light fixtures and an electrical outlet. For plumbing, they installed a sink with a drain. The government added a 35-foot-long windowless curing

room to the north side of the building (Figure 33). Not built to the same specifications as the rest of the building, the curing room began to collapse in 1944 and was removed by 1950.<sup>103</sup>

As planned, the Bureau of Reclamation used the building as a concrete testing laboratory, running its first tests in December 1929 (Figure 34). Specifically, testing involved analysis of local sand and gravel deposits to determine the best aggregate material to use in the concrete mix

<sup>102</sup> Elston and McLane, *Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort*, 47; Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 20; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 86-90.

<sup>103</sup> Elston and McLane, *Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort*, 47; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 86-90, 153, 162.



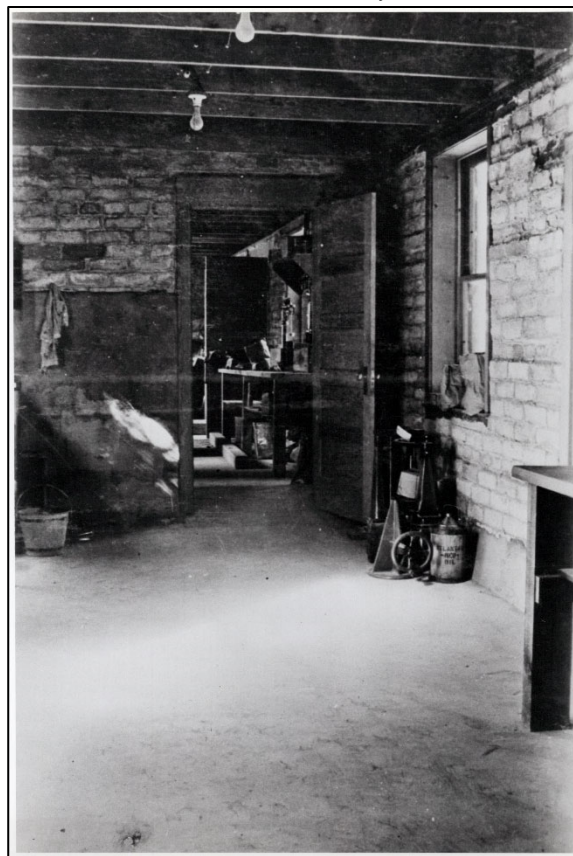
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for the dam's construction. The government hoped that local aggregate could be used rather than shipping in material from elsewhere, as it would save them \$3 million in transportation costs. Testing determined that the aggregate would be sourced from an Arizona gravel pit not far from the planned dam. Later experiments examined the concrete's strength and compression. Testing at the ranch continued for more than two years, concluding on March 31, 1932, when engineers relocated to a concrete screening plant at the dam site.<sup>104</sup>

While the Bureau of Reclamation occupied the old adobe building, Foremaster looked to sell his full ranch lease to a new tenant. As it turned out, subletting smaller parcels was more successful. He leased one area to Donald Bartlett and Donald Stewart, who opened a nine-hole golf course. Edgar Gates bought out the previous proprietors of the swimming pool and lodging business, Dave Holland and H.F. Bruce, in August 1930. Finally, that December, Foremaster transferred his lease to Edwin Carewe, a movie director with a ranching background. Carewe planned to rehabilitate the ranch, renaming it Rancho Grande, and implement a chicken feed production facility. His lofty ambitions were never realized. His tenure marked some improvements on the ranch but ultimately ended when Carewe filed for bankruptcy in 1933.<sup>105</sup>



*Figure 34: Renovated interior of adobe during Bureau of Reclamation era (Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park).*

Final Ranch Leases under the Railroad (1933-1955)

For the next two decades after the Bureau of Reclamation departed, ranch leases characterized the property's history. The Union Pacific Railroad had acquired the ranch property from the San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake Railroad during the Bureau's tenancy and continued to lease the land. Albert Wittwer acquired a ten-year lease on the ranch during Carewe's bankruptcy trial in 1933. Wittwer operated the ranch while organizing the Southern Nevada Meat and Provisional Company cooperative with other area ranchers. He oversaw renovations to the old ranch house, completing them before his death in 1936. His brother William took over the lease, successfully operating the ranch and beef co-op with his family, until his death in 1942. During William

<sup>104</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 80, 83, 92-96.

<sup>105</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 81, 97-104.

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Wittwer's tenancy, the Las Vegas chapter of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers (DUP) installed a ten-foot-tall stone monument near the adobe building to commemorate the old Mormon Fort.<sup>106</sup>

The last ranch lessee under the railroad was Willie T. Stewart, whose tenancy ran from 1942 until 1955. A relative to the Wittwers by marriage, Stewart purchased the remaining year of the Wittwer lease after William's death, signing his own ten-year lease in 1943. He eliminated chicken- and pig-raising on the ranch, shifting its focus to cattle. In 1944, he added commercial horse stables to the ranch, followed by a wildly popular quarter-mile horse racetrack. He acquired the swimming pool and auto camp from Edgar and Marie Gates, inviting his daughter and son-in-law, Jesma and Carlyle Wilcox, to operate that side of the business. The Wilcoxes renovated the swimming pool, connecting it to city water, and added travel trailer parking, a bathhouse, and laundry facilities. They also ran the onsite grocery store.<sup>107</sup>

The DUP continued their work to recognize and preserve the adobe fort building during the Willie Stewart years. The organization requested a lease for the building from the railroad, supported by Stewart. The railroad agreed on condition that the lessees would be responsible for building maintenance and improvements. Once they secured the lease in 1944, the DUP developed a museum, led tours, and hosted events at the old adobe. They rented the building to tenants who served as caretakers from 1947 until 1955. The DUP dedicated a new historical marker commemorating the 1856 Bringham post office in 1952. Nearly three decades after Delphine Squires appealed to the railroad to protect the building, steps were finally being taken to recognize its significance and conserve it for future generations.<sup>108</sup>

During Willie Stewart's tenancy, the railroad frequently altered his lease as it sold off parcels of the old ranch. Wartime defense industries and postwar growth contributed to explosive growth in Las Vegas, and various entities approached the railroad to purchase large and small tracts of land. Between 1947 and 1955, pieces of the old ranch became the Helldorado Days rodeo stadium owned by the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks #1468 (Elks), broadcasting towers for a local radio station, a municipal road, a recreation center for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Rancho High School, and an expansion of Woodlawn Cemetery on the site of Stewart's racetrack. When the City of Las Vegas straightened and widened Fifth Street in front of the ranch in 1953, it required a chunk of the railroad's land. The lease era was ending, and it was time to sell what remained of the ranch.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 20; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 105-116.

<sup>107</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 119-127.

<sup>108</sup> Elston and McLane, *Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort*, 49; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 133-134, 159, 162.

<sup>109</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 134-136.

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Ownership under the Elks (1955-1971)

The Union Pacific Railroad sold all its Las Vegas Ranch holdings in 1955. When the Las Vegas Valley Water District purchased the springs to the west, which supplied the creek running through the ranch property, the railroad lost its water rights and no longer needed the property. Sifting through multiple offers, the railroad sold to three buyers: the Elks, City of Las Vegas, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Elks acquired 20 acres, including the old fort remnant, cluster of ranch houses, and swimming pool. They leased the original Gass-Stewart ranch house to Carl Belding, who ran it as the Old Ranch Supper Club.<sup>110</sup>

Under Elks ownership, the DUP continued their work at the adobe. They hoped to secure a lease as they had under the railroad, but this never materialized. Determined to preserve the building, the group funded repairs and maintenance. After the building sustained damage from rain and hailstorms in 1955, the DUP replaced a door and threshold and repaired cracks in the walls. In 1956, they raised funds and built a wooden canopy to protect the building (Figure 35). The group continued to lease the adobe to tenant-caretakers despite not securing their own lease of the building from the Elks.<sup>111</sup>



*Figure 35: Fort remnant with wooden canopy pictured in 1980 (Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park).*

The Elks did not purchase the cluster of ranch buildings for their historical value and set to demolish them after building their new lodge in 1963. Public outcry ensued over the impending destruction of the Gass-Stewart ranch house. Former governor Vail Pittman asked the Elks to consider a demolition delay to ascertain the full history of the main ranch house, which the Elks contended was a twentieth century structure. The lodge refused postponement, carrying out the demolition by bulldozing the cluster of ranch structures into the swimming pool, then setting fire

<sup>110</sup> Elston and McLane, *Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort*, 49; Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 20-21; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 141-144.

<sup>111</sup> Elston and McLane, *Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort*, 49; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 163-164.



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to the rubble. The Elks spared the old adobe, allowing the DUP to continue hosting tours and events there.<sup>112</sup>

The 1963 demolition did not inspire confidence regarding preservation of the adobe. The Daughters grew increasingly fearful that the Elks would destroy the old fort, as they refused to provide written assurances about its future. The DUP wrote to local and state politicians and consulted an attorney. Relief arrived in 1971, when the City of Las Vegas purchased the fort remnant along with nearby Cashman Field from the Elks.<sup>113</sup>

Preservation and Reconstruction (1972-2005)

Under city ownership, preservation efforts quickly mobilized. Historians, journalists, advocates, and the DUP joined together as the Las Vegas Committee for the Restoration of the Las Vegas Fort, providing historical data to architect Leo Borns to inform reconstruction and restoration plans. City employee Gene Amberg nominated the fort for the National Register of Historic Places, and it was officially listed in 1972. In need of a funding source, restoration efforts stalled. With the project on hold, the city granted a ten-year lease of the building to the DUP at a cost of \$1 per year.<sup>114</sup>

Relations between the DUP and the Elks did not improve after the City's purchase of the adobe building. One source of frustration stemmed from the fact that the city-owned parcel consisted of the adobe's footprint plus a 16-foot buffer, which was surrounded by Elks property on all sides. After the Elks installed grass with a sprinkler system, the adobe was inundated with runoff and mud. The lodge initially denied responsibility, but they built a retaining wall in 1972 under pressure from the mayor. The drainage issues continued, and the City dug a cross-trench in 1974 to mitigate the problem. Concurrently, University of Nevada professor Elizabeth Warren coordinated the first archaeological investigation of the site in an unsuccessful attempt to locate the original walls.<sup>115</sup>

Efforts to preserve and commemorate the site continued throughout the 1970s. Representatives from the Southern Nevada Historical Society, Southern Nevada Museum, DUP, City of Las Vegas, State Parks Commission, City of Las Vegas and State Commissions, American Revolutionary Bicentennial Committee, and the Las Vegas Committee for the Preservation of the Las Vegas Fort created the Association for the Preservation of the Las Vegas Mormon Fort (APLVMF) in 1974. Their mission was to renovate the fort remnant, reconstruct the fort's walls, and build a visitor center before the nation's 1976 Bicentennial. The fort remnant opened to the

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<sup>112</sup> Elston and McLane, *Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort*, 49; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 148.

<sup>113</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 164-165.

<sup>114</sup> Elston and McLane, *Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort*, 49; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 165-166.

<sup>115</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 167-168.

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public for multiple preservation and public history events in 1975 and 1976. During National Historic Preservation week in May 1976, Nevada State Historical Marker #35 was dedicated and installed at the site. The marker recognized the fort as Nevada's oldest building. The same year, the adobe's last tenant-caretaker, Janet Meyer, moved out of the building.<sup>116</sup>

Restoration efforts were complicated by land ownership between the City of Las Vegas and the Elks, as well as a lack of funds. Because the Elks owned the surrounding land and would not sell this property to the City, plans to reconstruct the original fort walls could not be carried out. In 1977, the City offered the Elks \$1,575,000 for the surrounding property. When the Elks counter-offered \$1,900,000, the city demurred.<sup>117</sup>

The City of Las Vegas owned the adobe building, and as a result, work could only be completed on that building. Anna Dean Kepper, APLVMF President, hired San Francisco architectural firm Bernardi and Emmons to complete a study for the restoration of the adobe using grant funds received by the organization. The firm recommended adobe brick repair, removal of cement patches, application of clear exterior sealant, and removal of the wooden canopy and chain link fence. Kepper began fundraising campaigns with the goal of eventually funding the work and hiring an adobe expert.<sup>118</sup>

Conservation work began on September 22, 1980. The City hired Gilbert Sanchez, an adobe expert from San Jose, California, to assess the condition of the adobe and oversee the preservation project, which entailed removal of the wooden canopy and cement patches, repair and selective replacement of the underlying adobe bricks, and application of mud plaster to the exterior walls. On the interior, workers exposed the cement floors; removed drywall, wood paneling, and a false ceiling; and generally restored it to its appearance during the Bureau of Reclamation era. Work concluded in the spring of 1981 at a cost of \$250,000 (Figure 36). Achieving their mission,



Figure 36: Adobe building with new mud plaster pictured in 1992 (Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park).

<sup>116</sup> Elston and McLane, *Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort*, 49; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 168-169, 171.

<sup>117</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 171.

<sup>118</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 168-171.

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the APLVMF transitioned into the regional preservation group Preservation Association of Clark County.<sup>119</sup>

The adobe building was in good working order, but worries persisted about the fate of the property and surrounding Elks-owned land. The DUP's ten-year lease from the city expired in 1981, effectively closing the adobe to the public. A new nonprofit group, the Friends of the Fort, formed to fund the building's reopening. The city awarded a lease to the Friends in 1985, agreeing to pay \$2,500 in maintenance costs each year in exchange for the Friends to operate the museum. In 1987, the Elks sold their surrounding land to a developer, the deal contingent on the buyer acquiring the ¼-acre parcel on which the adobe stood. The Preservation Association of Clark County flew into action, contacting agencies and representatives at the local, state, and federal levels. Senator Bob Coffin introduced a bill in the state legislature to make the adobe a state park. It passed in both the House and Senate. Meanwhile, the city made a deal with the new owner to secure the surrounding land. The Natural History Museum moved into the old Elks Lodge, and the city transferred ownership of the old fort property to the state in 1991.<sup>120</sup>

Nevada voters had approved a bond to fund state parks in 1990, and the Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park received \$2 million. Still intent on reconstructing the fort, the Nevada Division of State Parks hired an archaeological firm to determine the original location of the fort walls. Robert Elston supervised the excavations, which located the walls in 1993. Successive excavations by the Louis Berger Group, directed by lead archaeologist John Hohmann, located the foundations of the fort bastions, mess halls, and the Gass-Stewart Ranch House, in addition to a prehistoric pit structure and several artifact scatters. Hohmann's crew determined that the adobe remnant was part of the southeast bastion with a fireplace likely added by O.D. Gass. They concluded that the adobe building retained material from the 1855 fort, namely that the thicker part of its western wall originally formed a portion of the fort's east wall. In addition, archaeologists located the creek bed 32 feet south of the fort's south wall foundation.<sup>121</sup>

The Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park broke ground on December 13, 1997. It took two years to reconstruct the fort's walls and northwest bastion, create corrals and a garden area, and add landscaping. The reconstruction followed the location of the fort walls confirmed by archaeological investigations. The adobe bricks used to reconstruct the walls and bastion incorporated concrete to ensure durability and long-term performance in the hot, dry, and sunny climate. A concrete-lined stream with running water and riparian vegetation was installed as a recreation of the Las Vegas Creek. Caliche rock walls were built to resemble what appeared on

<sup>119</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 171-172, 174.

<sup>120</sup> Elston and McLane, *Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort*, 49; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 175-177.

<sup>121</sup> Elston and McLane, *Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort*; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 178-179.

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the site during the Ranching Period. The project also included new shop and restroom facilities north of the reconstruction. Officials dedicated the park on May 12, 2000.<sup>122</sup>

A visitor center for the state park was completed in 2005, fulfilling the final piece of the park plan. Along with a freestanding restroom building, it was designed by architect Eric Strain. A dedication ceremony took place 150 years after the missionaries' arrival at the site on June 11, 2005. The state park, with its visitor center, reconstruction, and old adobe building, remains open to the public with a variety of indoor and outdoor interpretive exhibits.<sup>123</sup>

Summary of Significance under Criterion A

The fort site is inextricably linked to the history of the Las Vegas Valley, from precontact to the modern era. This creekside oasis has served as a resting area and source of refreshment for humans since their first appearance in the region. It sustained the Ancestral Puebloan and Nuwuvi people, travelers along the Spanish Trail and Salt Lake Trail, the Las Vegas Mission, and pioneer ranchers of the valley. Along with the nearby Las Vegas Springs, its very existence directly contributed to the railroad's establishment of a division point at Las Vegas, and the ensuing settlement and community development that created the city that exists today.

The adobe building is the oldest standing building in Nevada and the only remaining structure from Las Vegas's earliest days as a mission, ranch, and resting stop for travelers. It stands as a rare physical representation of the area's brief occupation by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1855 to 1857 and its legacy as a pioneer ranch under the founding Gass and Stewart families from the 1860s to 1902. During the railroad era, the property was leased to scores of tenants who developed its agricultural and recreational potential. The ranch was an essential supplier of fresh food for the growing city of Las Vegas until the railroad sold it in 1955. In addition, it served as a community space that hosted dances and picnics, as well as a swimming pool, throughout much of the railroad era.

The property achieved additional significance during the Great Depression as the Bureau of Reclamation's concrete testing laboratory for the Boulder (Hoover) Dam project from 1929 to 1933. The Bureau remodeled the standing adobe, which served as their first workplace while planning the dam. The adobe as it appears today is a result of the Bureau's renovations. Experiments conducted at the laboratory determined the content and composition of concrete used to build the dam, a national historic landmark and a major accomplishment of modern civil engineering.

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<sup>122</sup> Beth Hewitt, personal communication, June 2024; Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 13; Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 181-182.

<sup>123</sup> Messenger, *Old Ranch*, 185.

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Summary of Significance under Criterion D

The Las Vegas Mormon Fort site possesses enormous archaeological potential. The site has been the location of numerous archaeological inquiries and continues to harbor heretofore uncollected archaeological data that is irreplicable at other sites. Prior investigations confirm the presence of intact archaeological deposits representing five cultural periods – the Native American Period (Formative and Protohistoric), the Las Vegas Mission Period, the Ranching Period, the Railroad Period, and the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) Period. According to Hohmann et al, “the entire history of southern Nevada is reflected in microcosm by the various archaeological features and deposits contain[ed] on site.”<sup>124</sup>

Known to have lived in the Las Vegas Valley from time immemorial, Indigenous peoples of southern Nevada have a well-documented history at the site that would become popularly known as the Las Vegas Mormon Fort. The area was particularly active during the Ancestral Puebloan period. Long referred to as the Anasazi period, the Ancestral Puebloan period is evident at the Las Vegas Mormon Fort, as is the Protohistoric Period. Burials, ceramics, and chert and obsidian debitage all demonstrate the archaeological potential of the site. Additionally, historic-age architectural features of the site are inherently archaeological due to their material nature. Many aspects of the fort have been documented archaeologically, including foundations, filled-in ponds, and refuse dump features. Settler-era artifacts likely still present consist of ceramics, glass, and nails, as well as building materials. Such historic artifacts have been recovered in test pit excavations at the Mormon Fort, including a hand-blown bottle dating to as early as 1850. Of course, a plethora of metal has been recovered, including cans and mule shoes. Additionally, various types of ceramics and glass have been recovered.<sup>125</sup>

The long-term use of this site renders it unique and may provide an opportunity for landscape archaeologists to consider the spatial implications of its continuous occupation and how various uses altered the landscape through time. Relatedly, the culture contact between the Nuwuvi and Euro-American settlers at this site may yield important protohistoric artifacts, such as ceramic beads or flint-knapped glass. Because of the recent nature of many aspects of the Las Vegas Mormon Fort’s history, it also holds significant ethnohistoric potential.

The property's potential to yield new and important archaeological information is undoubtedly very high. Further archaeological investigation of the site, including known and previously unidentified features and artifact remains, can inform research about its prehistoric and historic use – and further the understanding of prehistoric and historical development of the Las Vegas Valley, as well as all of southern Nevada. Crucially, there is no site similar to this; the Las Vegas Mormon Fort’s archaeological potential is one-of-a-kind. Archaeological efforts could be coupled with historical/archival research, and the reassessment of extant artifact collections, many of which are stored at the Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Historic Park and the University of Las Vegas, Nevada.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Hohmann et al, *Preservation Plan*, 14.

<sup>125</sup> Elston and McLane, *Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort*, 107, 109, 118.

<sup>126</sup> Elston and McLane, *Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort*, 87.

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### Criteria Consideration E

The reconstructed portion of the fort meets Criteria Consideration E as an accurately reconstructed feature located in a suitable environment. The reconstruction reflects its original configuration and location and is grouped with the remaining historic building. Interpretation of the site explains that the bastion and walls are not original but a reconstruction.

The reconstruction is based upon a well-researched body of historic data. Successive archaeological, architectural, and archival investigations informed the reconstruction. The walls and bastion were constructed in their historic location and configuration. The overall plan, dimensions, and design of the features are historically accurate, as is the spatial relationship between the reconstruction and the historic adobe building. The reconstruction did not fully utilize traditional materials or methods, as the adobe bricks incorporated concrete material to ensure its durability in the desert climate.

### Integrity

Overall, the site demonstrates sufficient levels of integrity to convey its significance. The property contains the oldest non-native standing structure in Nevada. The old adobe is all that remains of the 1855 Mormon Fort, and the reconstructed walls and bastion accurately capture the appearance of the original fort. In addition, the remaining adobe building generally reflects its historic appearance during the Bureau of Reclamation era (1929-1933) when the Bureau renovated it to contain their concrete laboratory.

It has not been moved and retains integrity of location. Originally a remote outpost, it would become proximal to the growing town in Las Vegas by 1905, but even in the 1930s, it was removed enough from the city for Bureau of Reclamation employees to have a sense of privacy and refuge during their time there. After the railroad sold the property in 1955, the surroundings rapidly developed into an urban area, diminishing the property's integrity of setting. The site evokes the historic sense of an early Las Vegas resting stop and ranch and maintains its link with the settlement and development of the area, retaining integrity of feeling and association. The property's overall spatial organization of the adobe building, reconstructed bastion and walls, and open space reflects good integrity of design. While this is somewhat diminished by the introduction of modern buildings, those intrusions are peripheral to the character-defining core of the property (i.e., the adobe, fort reconstruction, and open space). Reconstruction and preservation activities introduced new methods and materials, including the use of concrete in reconstructed adobe bricks and the application of mud plaster to the adobe building's walls, impacting the property's integrity of materials and workmanship without completely destroying those aspects of integrity.

As an archaeological site, the property retains good physical integrity. Known impacts to subsurface components include professional archaeological excavation, modern irrigation and construction excavation, restoration and reconstruction activities, and natural decay and erosion. Despite these impacts, previous archaeological excavation indicates that substantial portions of



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the prehistoric and historic subsurface archaeological materials remain intact. These archaeological components are protected from various environmental and human impacts as they have been capped by a variable-thickness layer of imported fill. Consequently, the archaeological components of this site retain sufficient integrity of materials, workmanship, and association to convey their significance under Criterion D.

### **Summary**

The Las Vegas Mormon Fort is significant under Criterion A as a representation of the Las Vegas Valley's prehistoric and historical development, reflecting its role in the lifeways of the area's Indigenous cultures, as well as trends in early Euro-American settlement and agricultural activities that ultimately contributed to the growth and development of Las Vegas as a community. It is additionally significant for its association as the Bureau of Reclamation's concrete testing laboratory during the planning of nearby Hoover Dam, an engineering marvel that provided thousands of jobs during the Great Depression.

The property is additionally significant under Criterion D for its information potential as an intact site that contributes to our understanding of human history and prehistory in the Las Vegas Valley, reflecting its successive occupations by the Ancestral Puebloan and Nuwuvi cultures, as well as Euro-American settlement and activity from 1855 to 1955.

Finally, as a partially reconstructed property reflecting historic accuracy in a suitable environment, the property meets Criteria Consideration E.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☒ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☒ Other State agency

☐ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☐ Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 3.24 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927    or    ☒ NAD 1983

1. Zone: 11	Easting: 667801	Northing: 4005641
2. Zone: 11	Easting: 667922	Northing: 4005645
3. Zone: 11	Easting: 667780	Northing: 4005563
4. Zone: 11	Easting : 667924	Northing: 4005532

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Las Vegas Mormon Fort site consists of 3.24 acres including Clark County Assessor's Parcels (APNs) 139-26-301-002 and 139-26-301-003. It is bounded by Washington Avenue to the north, the Cashman Complex parking lot to the east, Las Vegas Boulevard to the west, and the Las Vegas Natural History Museum and Heritage Park to the south. It is in Section 26, Township 20 South, Range 61 East. It is located within the city limits of Las Vegas, Nevada.

### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries of the Las Vegas Mormon Fort site were selected to include all Nevada State Parks-owned parcels that comprise the park with its architectural and archaeological components. The boundaries are based on property lines, modern roads, and archaeological evidence.



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## 11. Form Prepared By

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date: 10/29/2024

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## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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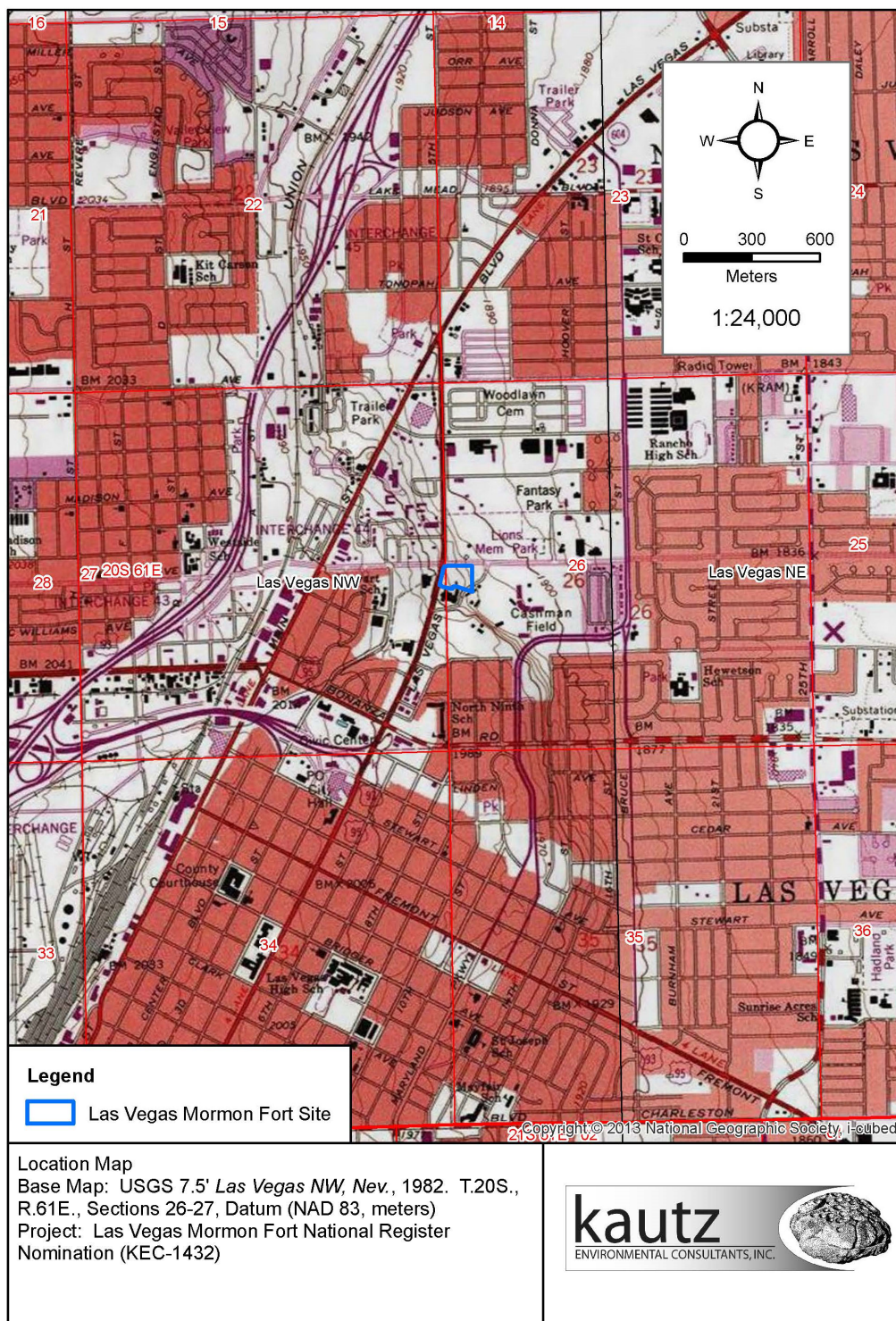
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## Las Vegas Mormon Fort

### USGS Topographic Location Map





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## Las Vegas Mormon Fort Aerial Location Map



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## Las Vegas Mormon Fort Site Sketch Map – Current (2024)

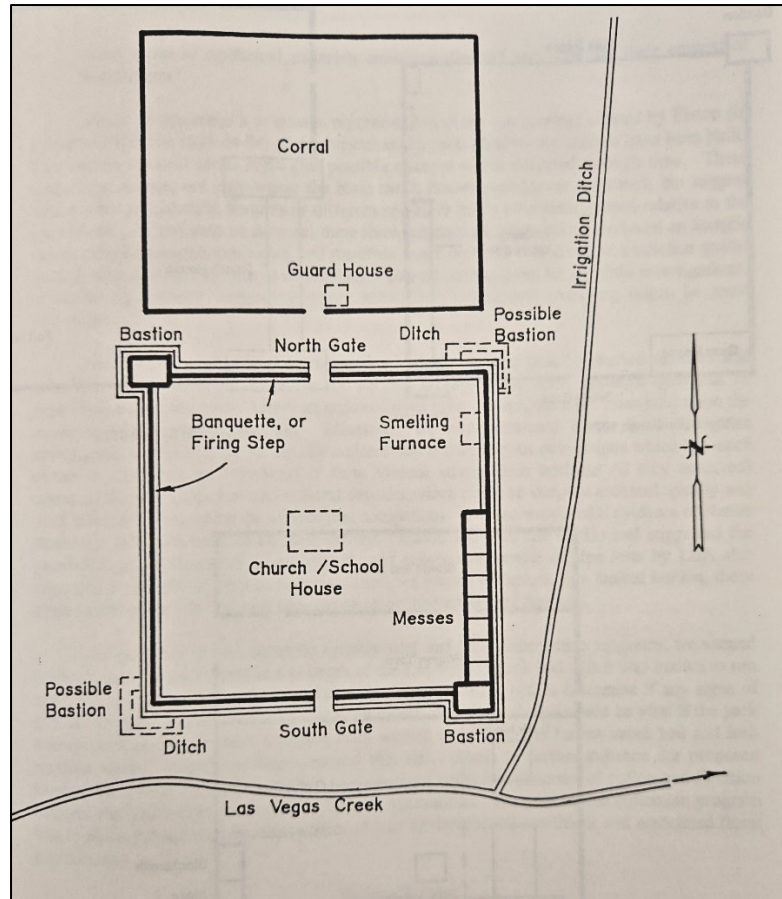


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## Las Vegas Mormon Fort

### Historical Sketch Map – Mission Period (1855-1857)



Schematic drawing of Mission Period Fort from Hohmann (1996)

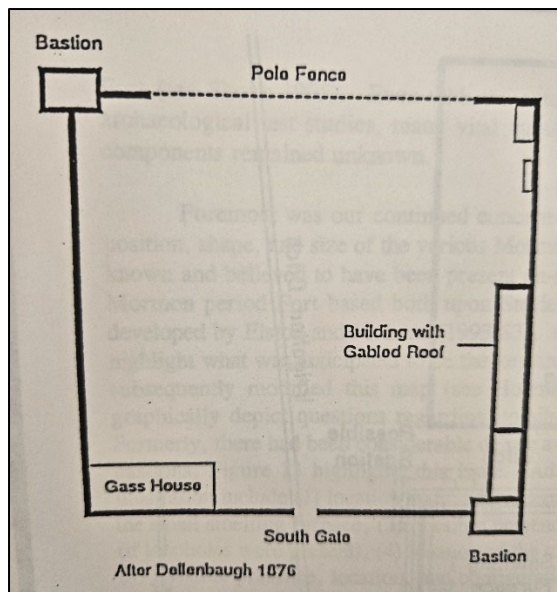


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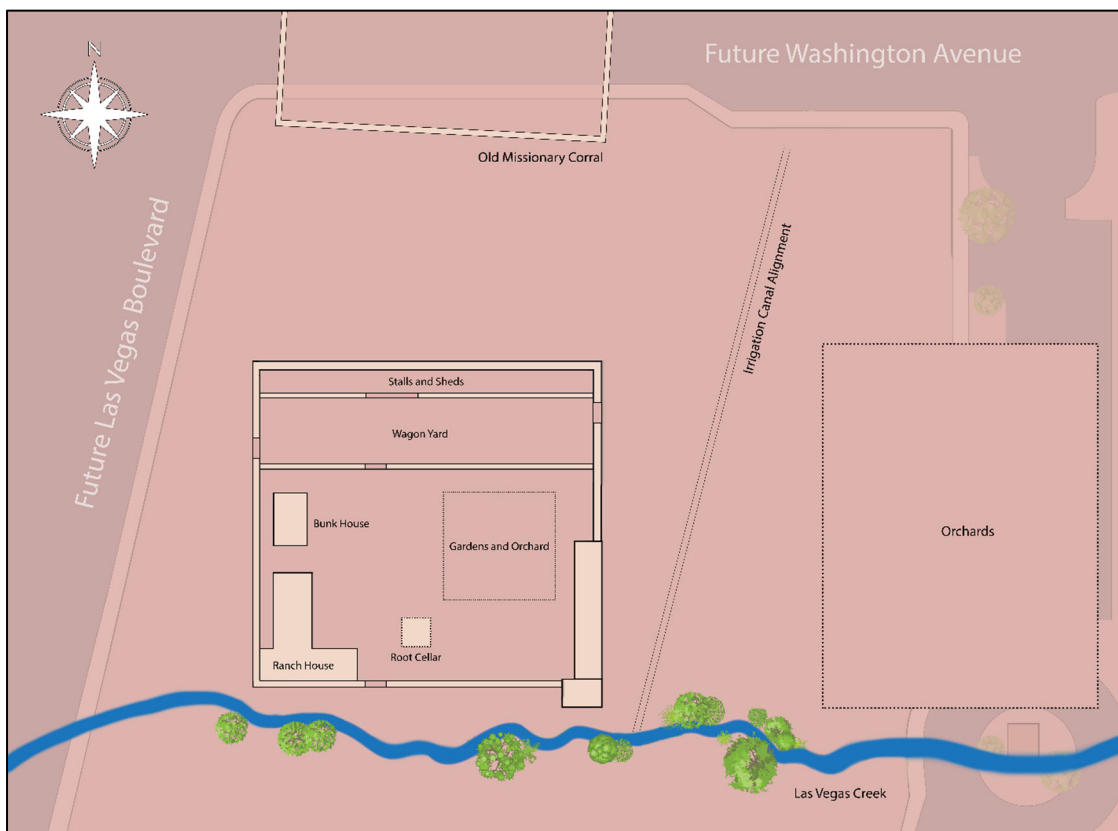
## Las Vegas Mormon Fort

### Historical Sketch Maps – Ranching Period (1860-1902)



Above: Schematic drawing of Gass property between 1876 and 1882 from Hohmann (1996).

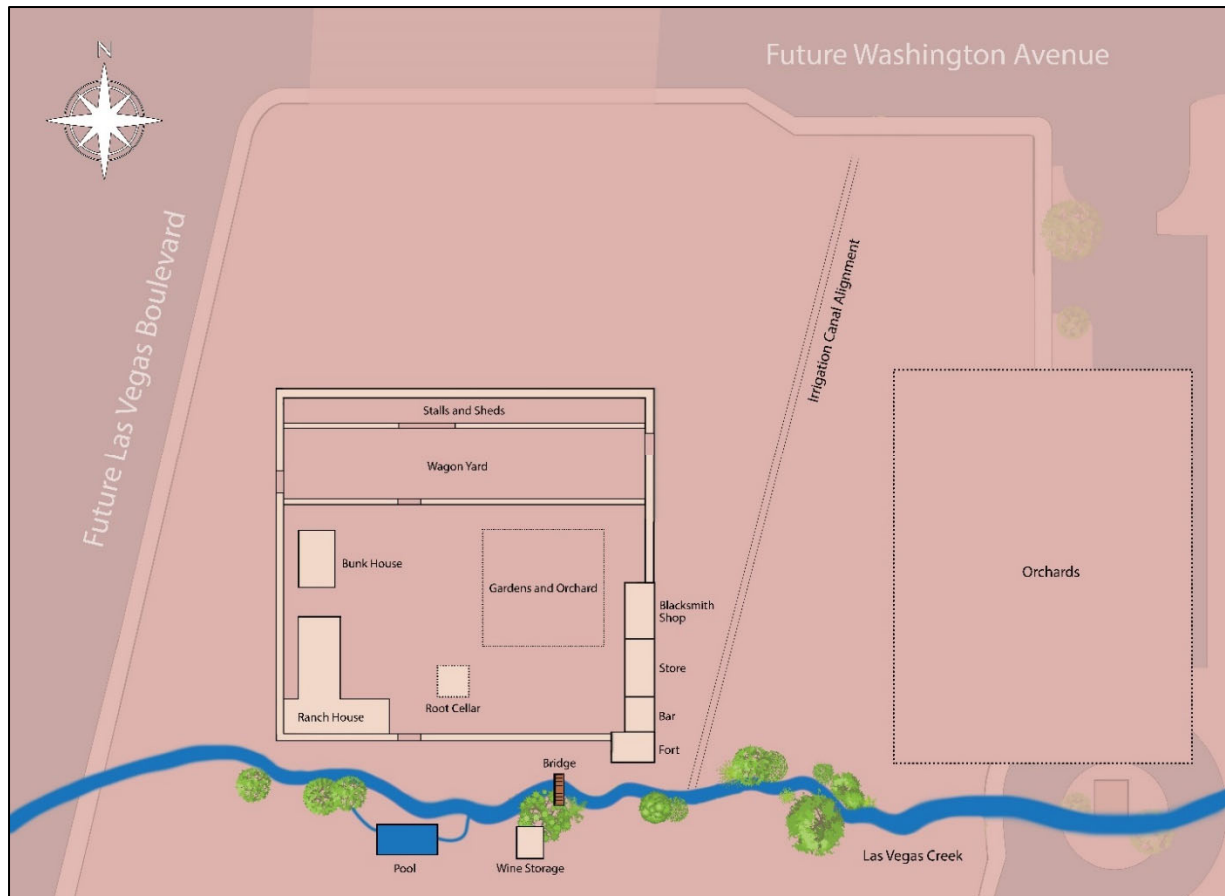
Below: Site plan during Stewart Ranch era after 1883.



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## Las Vegas Mormon Fort Site Sketch Maps – Railroad Period (1903-1955)



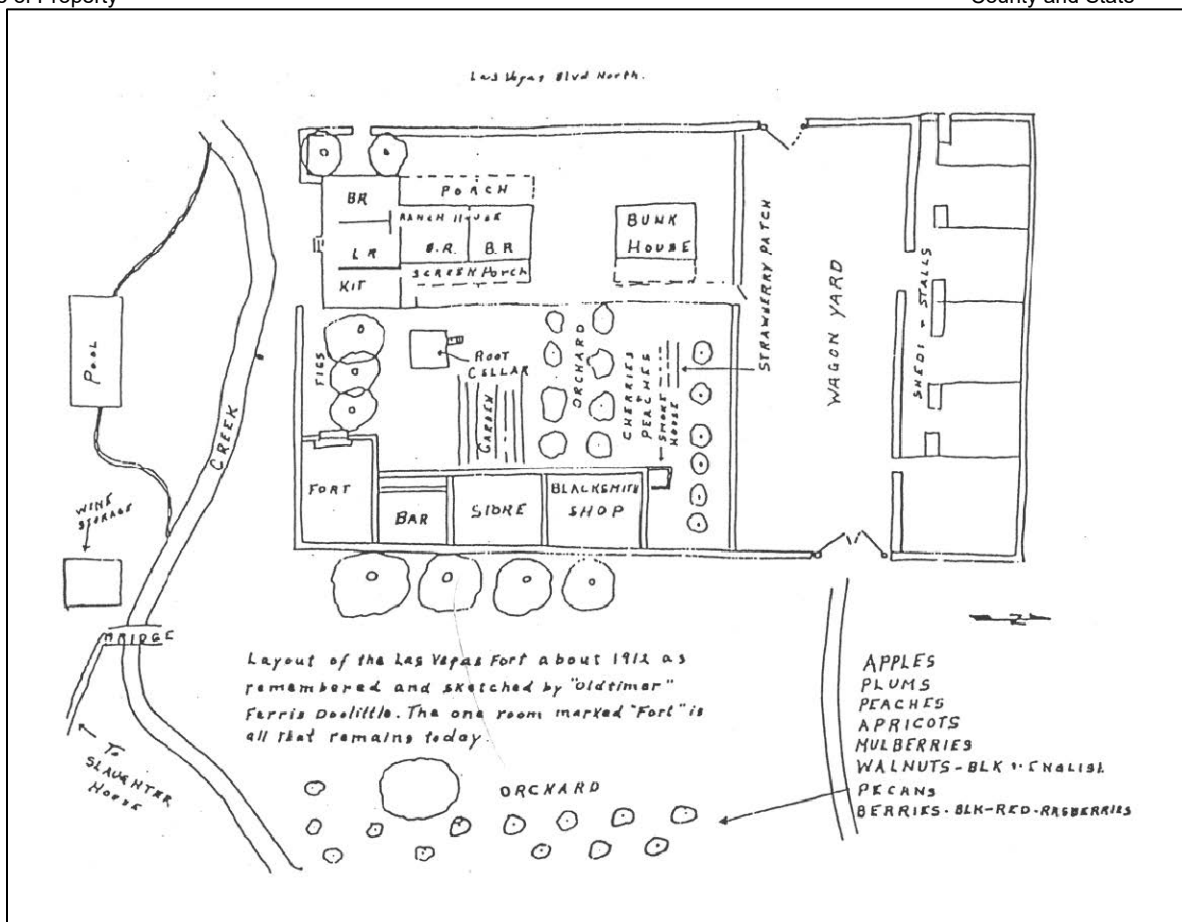
Conjectural site plan circa 1925 based on hand-drawn map by Ferris Doolittle.

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Ferris Doolittle's drawing created by memory in 1965 and published by Hohmann (1996). Doolittle resided at the ranch in the 1920s during the Railroad Period.

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**Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Photo Log**

Name of Property: **Las Vegas Mormon Fort**

City or Vicinity: **Las Vegas**

County: **Clark**

State: **Nevada**

Photographer: **ZoAnn Campana and Travis Hansen**

Date Photographed: **June 18, 2024**

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0001)

View of Visitor Center and Restroom Building 2 from parking lot, camera facing west.

2 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0002)

View of Visitor Center from the parking lot sidewalk, camera facing southwest.

3 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0003)

View of historic site from parking lot sidewalk with Visitor Center and the fort in view, camera facing southwest.

4 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0004)

View of parking lot from roundabout, camera facing northeast.

5 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0005)

View of Visitor Center from parking lot, camera facing west.

6 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0006)

View of Visitor Center from parking lot, camera facing northwest.

7 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0007)

View of maintenance building in parking lot roundabout, camera facing southeast.

8 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0008)

View of maintenance building and information site sign in parking lot roundabout, camera facing south.

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9 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0009)

View of Visitor Center from site vehicle access driveway, camera facing southeast.

10 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0010)

View of Restroom Building 1 from just outside the Visitor Center, camera facing southwest.

11 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0011)

View of Visitor Center from the historic park once up the stairs, camera facing northwest.

12 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0012)

View of Visitor Center from near the Maintenance Building, camera facing southwest.

13 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0013)

View of north and east facades of the Adobe Building, camera facing southwest.

14 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0014)

View of north and part of east facades of the Adobe Building, camera facing southwest.

15 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0015)

View of north facade of the Adobe Building, camera facing south.

16 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0016)

View of east facade of the Adobe Building, camera facing west.

17 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0017)

View of east facade of the Adobe Building from the southern end, camera facing northwest.

18 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0018)

View of south facade of the Adobe Building, camera facing north.

19 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0019)

View of the south and park of the west facade of the Adobe Building, camera facing northeast.

20 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0020)

View of the corner of the south and west facade of the Adobe Building, camera facing northeast.

21 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0021)

Partial view of the west facade of the Adobe Building and view of one of the caliche rock walls, camera facing northeast.

22 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0022)

View of the corner of the west and north facade of the Adobe Building, camera facing southeast.



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23 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0023)

Partial view of the north facade of the ell jog and the chimney of the Adobe Building, camera facing south.

24 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0024)

Closer view of the corner of the west and north facade of the Adobe Building, camera facing southeast.

25 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0025)

Close up view of the north facade looking into the Adobe Building interior, camera facing south.

26 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0026)

Close up view of the east facade roof line of the Adobe Building, camera facing southwest.

27 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0027)

Close up view of the northernmost east facade roof line, camera facing northwest.

28 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0028)

Close up view of the wooden double doors at the northern end of the east facade, camera facing west.

29 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0029)

Partial view of the west facade of the Adobe Building, camera facing east.

30 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0030)

Close up view of the northern end of the west facade of the Adobe Building, camera facing northeast.

31 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0031)

Close up view of the single wood door on the west facade, also seen in image 30, of the Adobe Building, camera facing east.

32 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0032)

Close up view of a single-hung window on the west facade of the Adobe Building, camera facing southeast.

33 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0033)

Close up view of the north facade door into the interior of the Adobe Building, camera facing south.

34 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0034)

Interior view from the north facade door of the Adobe Building, camera facing south.

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35 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0035)

Interior view from the southern end of the first room looking toward the north facade door of the Adobe Building, camera facing north.

36 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0036)

Interior view of the double wood doors in the first room of the Adobe Building, camera facing east.

37 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0037)

Interior view of the exposed adobe brick under the mud plaster finish of the Adobe Building.

38 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0038)

Interior view from the second room of the Adobe Building, camera facing north.

39 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0039)

Close up interior view of the underside of the roof and ceiling joists of the Adobe Building.

40 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0040)

Interior view of a wooden door of the Adobe Building.

41 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0041)

Interior view of the second room looking towards the southern portion of the Adobe Building, camera facing south.

42 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0042)

View of the Las Vegas Creek replica with the Adobe Building in the background, camera facing east.

43 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0043)

View of the Las Vegas Creek replica, camera facing west.

44 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0044)

View of the Las Vegas Creek Replica, the Adobe Building, and a caliche rock wall, camera facing northeast.

45 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0045)

View of the Las Vegas Creek Replica from further upstream, camera facing east.

46 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0046)

View of the Fort walls and northwest Bastion, camera facing northwest.

47 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0047)

View of the east Fort wall and a partial view of the Maintenance/Shop Building, camera facing northwest.

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48 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0048)

View of the east Fort wall and partial view of the north Fort wall, camera facing northeast.

49 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0049)

View of the north and west Fort wall and the northwest Bastion, camera facing northwest.

50 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0050)

Partial view of the north Fort wall, view of the west Fort wall and northwest Bastion, camera facing northwest.

51 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0051)

View of the corner of the east and north Fort walls, camera facing southwest.

52 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0052)

Close up view of the gate opening in the north Fort wall, camera facing south.

53 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0053)

Partial view of the north Fort wall with Visitor's Center in view, camera facing southeast.

54 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0054)

View of the north Fort wall and the northwest Bastion, camera facing southwest.

55 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0055)

Close up view of the northwest Bastion, camera facing southwest.

56 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0056)

View of the northwest Bastion, camera facing southeast.

57 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0057)

View of the northwest Bastion and north Fort wall, camera facing southeast.

58 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0058)

View of the west Fort wall and northwest Bastion, camera facing northeast.

59 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0059)

View west and north Fort walls and northwest Bastion, camera facing north.

60 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0060)

Close up view of the west Fort wall with the Adobe Building in view, camera facing east.

61 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0061)

View of east and north Fort walls, camera facing northeast.

62 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0062)

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Overall view including Adobe Building, east Fort wall, historic wagons and the Visitor's Center, camera facing east.

63 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0063)

Close up view of the stone foundation and adobe brick of the northwest Bastion.

64 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0064)

View of gate in north Fort wall, camera facing northeast.

65 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0065)

View of northwest Bastion, camera facing northwest.

66 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0066)

View of entry door into northwest Bastion, camera facing north.

67 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0067)

Interior view of northwest Bastion, camera facing north.

68 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0068)

Overall view including Ranch House remnants, picnic tables, Fort walls, and Adobe Building, camera facing northeast.

69 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0069)

View of Restroom Building 2, camera facing north.

70 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0070)

Angled view of Restroom Building 2, camera facing northwest.

71 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0071)

View of Maintenance/Shop Building, camera facing north.

72 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0072)

View from Maintenance/Shop Building to Visitor's Center and parking lot, camera facing east.

73 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0073)

View of Maintenance/Shop Building, camera facing northwest.

74 of 74 (NV\_Clark\_LasVegasMormonFort\_0074)

View of Maintenance/Shop Building from north Fort wall, camera facing east.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460

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et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours

Tier 2 – 120 hours

Tier 3 – 230 hours

Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.