



## **STAFF REPORT**

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MEETING DATE: 08/22/12**

**DEPARTMENT: PLANNING**

**ITEM DESCRIPTION: ABEYANCE ITEM - For possible action regarding revisions to the city of Las Vegas timeline posted on the city of Las Vegas official website, All Wards.**

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### **BACKGROUND**

- 04/25/12 Historic Preservation Commissioner Vice-Chair Stoldal requested that an item regarding the accuracy of the Las Vegas History timeline as posted on the city of Las Vegas website be placed on the May 23, 2012 HPC agenda.
- 05/23/12 Historic Preservation Commission Chair Dorothy Wright requested an item regarding suggested revisions to the Las Vegas History timeline as posted on the city of Las Vegas website be placed on the June 27, 2012 meeting agenda.
- 05/23/12 Historic Preservation Commission Chair Dorothy Wright requested an item regarding the creation of a committee to address the accuracy of the Las Vegas History timeline as posted on the city of Las Vegas website be placed on the June 27, 2012 meeting agenda.
- 06/27/12 Historic Preservation Commission approved the creation of the Special Purpose Las Vegas History Timeline Committee (HPC-45738) to conduct research and present findings to the Historic Preservation Commission regarding revisions to the city of Las Vegas History timeline as posted on the city of Las Vegas official website, All Wards.
- 07/25/12 The Historic Preservation Commission voted to hold item in abeyance (HPC-45937) until the August 22, 2012 meeting.

### **ANALYSIS**

On July 16, 2012 a meeting of the Special Purpose Las Vegas History Timeline Committee was held to discuss revisions to the city of Las Vegas History timeline as posted on the city of Las Vegas official website. The committee reviewed the timeline for accuracy of content and established content criteria.

The next meeting of the subcommittee is scheduled for August 29, 2012. Content and website format will be discussed at this meeting. Findings will be provided to the Historic Preservation Commission at the next available meeting.

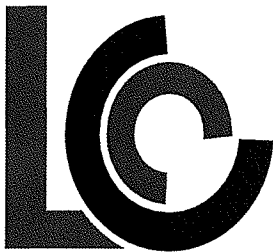
### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Take appropriate action.

|    |
|----|
| CM |
|----|

**BACKUP DOCUMENTS**

Letter from Thomas Rodriguez, Latin Chamber of Commerce, dated 7/20/12.  
Current Las Vegas History Timeline.



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July 20, 2012

Ms. Claytee White

Chairwoman

City of Las Vegas

Historical Preservation Committee

ATTN: City Clerk's Office, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

495 South Main Street

Las Vegas, Nevada 89101

Dear Claytee:

I am sending you this letter as follow up to my testimony at the meeting of the City of Las Vegas Historical Preservation Committee on July 16, 2012. At that meeting it was evident to me that Mr. David Millman, the former Director of the Nevada State Museum, and Mr. Bob Stodal, both wanted to revise the history of Las Vegas to give Antonio Armijo sole or dual credit for being the first non-Indian to set foot in Las Vegas. Personally, I am opposed to doing that. My logic in not revising the existing history is as follows:

First, the following respected historians have already credited Rafael Rivera with the discovery of Las Vegas. They are: LeRoy Hafen in his book, *Old Spanish Trail: Santa Fe to Los Angeles* (1954); Elbert Edwards in his book, *200 Years in Nevada: A Story of People Who Opened, Explored and Developed the Land* (1978); and Melvin L. Miranda in his book, *A History of Hispanics in Southern Nevada* (1997). In addition, local historian Frank Maggio, in his book, *Las Vegas Calling*; and M. L. Miranda and Thomas Rodriguez in their book, *Hispanic Profiles in Nevada History: 1829-1991* (1991) also credited Rafael Rivera with being the first non-Indian person to set foot in what is now Las Vegas, Nevada.

Second, in spite of the above documents, Mr. Millman insists that there is no proof that Rafael Rivera was the first to set foot in Las Vegas,

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and Mr. Stodal appears to support that position. At the hearing, I pointed out that in 1829 there were no photographers or newspapers to document that Rivera was the first non-Indian person to set in Las Vegas. Therefore, they are correct that there is no proof positive that Rafael Rivera was the first set foot in Las Vegas. By that same logic, however, there is no proof positive that he wasn't the first to set foot in Las Vegas.

Third, what is widely acknowledged by all historians and interested parties, including Mr. Millman and Mr. Stodal, is that the Armijo Trading Caravan did stop in what is now the Las Vegas Wash and traversed the area of southern Nevada on their way to Los Angeles, California. Their route is what became the "Old Spanish Trail" that was used from 1829 to about 1848.

What is also widely acknowledged by all historians and interested parties, including Mr. Millman and Mr. Stodal, is that Rafael Rivera was the scout for the Armijo Trading Caravan and that on December 29, 1829, Armijo noted in his diary that "Citizen Rivera is missing from the reconnaissance party of the day before." On January 4, Armijo sent out a search party and the men returned on January 5 without finding Citizen Rivera. On January 7, the caravan was camped at the *Yerba de Manso* (Las Vegas Wash) when Rafael Rivera returned to the caravan. He had been gone for 13 days and had explored the area all the way to what is now Barstow, California.

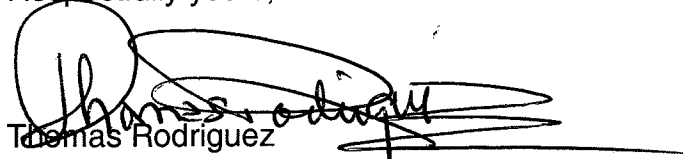
Given this non-contested history, it would seem extremely logical that the Armijo Caravan's chief scout, Rafael Rivera, would also have traversed the same area well ahead of the Armijo Caravan. That is what a scout does - to scout ahead and find the best routes, drinking water, camping grounds, etc. And that is obviously what Rafael Rivera did! Using that sound logic, Rivera should continue to be credited with being the first non-Indian person to set foot in what is now Las Vegas.

Claytee, from my perspective, to attempt at this late date to revise the history that has been written by several highly respected Nevada historians does not make any sense. If the existing history is revised, what are we going to do, confiscate and burn all of the existing books that credit Rafael Rivera? Are we also going to change the name of the I-215 Rafael Rivera Way, and the name of the Rafael Rivera Community Center? I sure hope not! My last word on this subject is

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that the wishes of the Hispanic community should be the deciding factor in this issue since it can't be proven one way or the other. Therefore, Rafael Rivera should continue to be credited with being the first non-Indian person to set foot in what is now Las Vegas, Nevada.

Respectfully yours,

  
Thomas Rodriguez  
Latin Chamber of Commerce

**P.S.**

**Please distribute copies of this letter to all of the members of the Las Vegas Historical Preservation Committee.**

Cc: Members, Las Vegas Historical Preservation Committee  
Javier Trujillo, Chairman, Latin Chamber Board of Directors  
Otto Merida, President, Latin Chamber of Commerce  
Members, Board of Directors of the Latin Chamber of Commerce



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History

Paleo-Indians first visited the Las Vegas valley hundreds of years ago. They lived as nomads, traveling and camping in different locations. These people left behind petroglyphs that help us tell our early history.

10,000 Years Ago

A young scout named Rafael Rivera is the first person of European ancestry to look upon the valley. His discovery of a valley with abundant wild grasses growing and a plentiful water supply reduces the journey by several days. The valley is named Las Vegas, Spanish for "The Meadows."

1829

Members of the Mormon Church choose Las Vegas as the site to build a fort halfway between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles, where they would travel to gather supplies. The remainder of the [Mormon Fort](#) can still be seen at the intersection of Las Vegas Boulevard and Washington Avenue. The fort was abandoned several years later.

1855

The discovery of minerals, including precious metals, leads to the beginning of the mining industry.

Late 1800's

Las Vegas is founded as a city on May 15, 1905, when 110 acres of land situated between Stewart Avenue on the north, Garces Avenue to the south, Main Street to the west, and 5th Street (Las Vegas Boulevard) to the east, are auctioned off.

Anasazi Indians move into southern Nevada and live along the Muddy and Virgin rivers. The "Lost City" are ruins of the Anasazi community that can be found in Overton, Nevada, northwest of Las Vegas. The Pauite people also explored the Las Vegas area.

2,000 Years Ago

John C. Fremont arrived in Las Vegas and kept a journal describing two springs he found. These writings were very popular and lured many individuals to the area.

1844

Nevada is admitted into the union as the 36th state. This day is recognized annually as a state holiday.

1864

The State Land Act of 1885 offers sections of land at \$1.25 per acre. Farmers move in and agriculture becomes the dominant industry for the next 20 years.

1885



The completion of the main railway, linking Southern California with Salt Lake City, establishes Las Vegas as a railroad town. The availability of water makes Las Vegas an ideal refueling point and rest stop.

Early 1900s

Related Links

- [Centennial Celebration](#)
- [Historic Preservation Commission](#)



Freight Wagon on Fremont Street

Las Vegas is incorporated on June 1, 1911. On that day, voters in the unincorporated township of Las Vegas went to the polls and voted on the issue of incorporation. The results? 168 in favor of incorporation and 57 opposed. The population stands at 800. Clark County has a population of 3,321. [Las Vegas Age front page - June 3, 1911](#)

Divorce laws are liberalized in the State of Nevada, making residency easier to attain. A "quickie" divorce can be attained after six weeks of residency. These short-term residents stay at "dude ranches" which are the forerunners of the sprawling Strip hotels.

Beginning in 1931, the construction of Hoover Dam brings an influx of construction workers which starts a population boom and gives the Valley's economy, which was in the grips of the Great Depression, a needed boost.

While gambling took place illegally for many years, it was officially legalized in March 1931 by the state legislature.



Las Vegas' population has grown to 8,422. The outbreak of World War II brings the defense industry to the valley. The isolated location, along with plentiful water and inexpensive energy, makes Las Vegas an ideal site for military and defense related industries. The site for Nellis Air Force Base is located in the northeast, and the Basic Management Complex, providers of raw materials, is located in the southeastern suburb of Henderson. The defense industry continues to employ a significant number of valley residents.

1905

1909

The Nevada Legislature creates Clark County on July 1, 1909. The new county was named after William Clark, who brought the railroad to southern Nevada. Las Vegas became the county seat. Prior to the formation of Clark County, southern Nevada was part of Lincoln County.

1911

1930

Las Vegas grows to a population of 5,165.

1931

[Hoover Dam](#) is complete. At 726 feet high and more than 1,200 feet long when built, it was the tallest dam in the world. President Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke at the dam's dedication.



1935

1940's

In 1944, the city of Las Vegas begins to operate council / manager form of government. Previous to this date, the city was operated as a "commission" form of government.

The first atomic bomb is detonated at the [Nevada Test Site](#)  north of Las Vegas. People flocked to watch the tests until the limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963 required that nuclear tests be moved underground. Moulin Rouge, Las Vegas' first racially integrated hotel, opens its doors

Topless Showgirls debut on the Strip with "Minsky's Follies."

Las Vegas encompasses 25 square miles and has a population of 64,405. Las Vegas has more than 22 percent of Nevada's total population on less than .02 percent of the State's land. At the same time, Clark County has a population of 127,016.

Elvis Presley opens at the International Hotel, now known as the Las Vegas Hilton.

Las Vegas economy remains strong and the population increases to 164,674. Clark County, meanwhile, grows to a population of 463,087.

Contributing to the population growth is a 4 percent annual increase in hotel rooms and a 9.18 percent annual increase in jobs

The US Census reports the population of Las Vegas is 478,434 over a land area of 113 square miles. There are over 500 churches and synagogues, 799 acres of parks, 7 television stations, and 12 radio stations (4 AM and 8FM). Las Vegas is the largest metropolitan city in the U.S. that was founded in 20th century.

The Las Vegas City Council grows from four wards to six. A vote of the people in 1999 approved an advisory ballot question allowing this change.

1945

Following World War II, lavishly decorated resort hotels and gambling casinos offering top-name entertainment come into existence. Tourism and entertainment took over as the largest employer in the valley.

1951

1955

1956

The city of Las Vegas annexes one square mile of land, its first such addition since incorporation 45 years earlier.

1957

1959

"Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas" sign is created by Betty Willis.

The Nevada State Legislature creates the Nevada Gaming Commission.

1960

1960's

During the 1960s, a phenomenon led by Howard Hughes, occurs in Las Vegas. Corporations are building and/or buying hotel/casino properties. They have the capital necessary and the profitability makes entrance into the casino industry extremely attractive. Gambling becomes "gaming" and starts the transition into legitimate business.

1969

1970-1980

Corporations continue to invest in the hotel/casino industry. Gaming becomes a legitimate business and some properties have stock traded on the market.

1980

1980's

Starting in the mid 1980s, a period of unprecedented growth begins. Annual population increases averaging nearly 7 percent causes the city's population to almost double between 1985 and 1995, increasing from 186,380 to 368,360, a 97.6 percent increase. That is equivalent to building a city larger than Reno in 10 years! At the same time, Clark County's population increases from 562,280 to 1,036,180, an increase of 84.3 percent.

1993

The Dunes Hotel is imploded.

1990's

1995

The [Fremont Street Experience](#)  opens. The \$70-million canopy above Fremont Street provides visitors with spectacular light and sound show.

2000



The [Las Vegas Springs Preserve](#) , a cultural and historical experience just miles from downtown Las Vegas opens to the public. The 180-acre national historic site is commonly referred to as the "birthplace of Las Vegas."

June 2007

The Smith Center for the Performing Arts , which is located on the 61-acre mixed-use urban community Symphony Park, celebrated its groundbreaking with a bell ringing.



May 26, 2009

Demolition begins to make way for a new [City Hall](#) and mixed-use office project in downtown Las Vegas, creating more than 13,000 jobs and providing more than \$4 billion in investment.

Feb. 2, 2010

The new City Hall, located at 495 S. Main

The city of Las Vegas celebrated its 100th birthday on May 15, 2005. The events celebrated the May 15, 1905 auction in which 110 acres of downtown Las Vegas laid the foundation for the city we know today. The celebration began on December 31, 2004, and lasted throughout 2005.

For more information, visit the [Centennial Web site](#) .

2005



The three-block area known as the [Fremont East Entertainment District](#) opens. As part of its downtown revitalization efforts, the city's Redevelopment Agency contributed funds to this renovation in an effort to attract additional non-gaming nightclubs, cocktail lounges and entertainment hotspots to the area.

August 2007



The city celebrates the designation of Las Vegas Boulevard, from Washington Avenue to Sahara Avenue, as a National Scenic Byway with a neon sign lighting ceremony.

November 2009

The [National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement](#)  opens inside in a former federal courthouse turned post office located at 300 Stewart Ave.

Feb. 14, 2012

Street, opens for business in downtown Las Vegas, leaving the previous City Hall available for development by Zappos.com



Feb. 27, 2012

**Sources:**

City of Las Vegas  
Clark County  
Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority  
State of Nevada  
U.S. Census Bureau  
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External Link