

City of Las Vegas

STAFF REPORT

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MEETING DATE: 01/27/16

DEPARTMENT: PLANNING

ITEM DESCRIPTION: Report by Department of Planning regarding historic and archaeological resources in local media

BACKGROUND

No relevant case history.

SUMMARY

Please enjoy the attached articles.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

NO ACTION REQUIRED

BACKUP DOCUMENTS

- “City restores historic Tule Springs adobe hut,” www.reviewjournal.com, 12/31/15
- “Mob Museum greets millionth visitor with confetti, champagne,” www.lasvegassun.com, 12/16/15
- “The Battle for Reed-Whipple Cultural Center,” www.dtlv.com, 12/23/15
- “Watergate break-in has connection to Las Vegas,” www.lasvegassun.com, 12/21/15
- “Northwest man shares 140-year-old locomotive he found languishing in museum,” www.reviewjournal.com, January 2016
- Submerged St. Thomas now historic lesson along scenic drive,” www.reviewjournal.com, January 2016

December 31, 2015 - 1:11pm | Updated December 31, 2015 - 4:14pm

City restores historic Tule Springs adobe hut



The recently restored adobe hut is seen at Floyd Lamb Park at Tule Springs Monday, Dec. 28, 2015, in Las Vegas. The project on the early 1900s building was funded by grants from the Nevada State Commission for Cultural Centers and Historic Preservation and the Commission for the Las Vegas Centennial. David Becker/Las Vegas Review-Journal

By Marian Green
Las Vegas Review-Journal

It was only a matter of time before the old adobe hut at Floyd Lamb Park at Tule Springs would have been erased from history, said Courtney Mooney, the city of Las Vegas' historic preservation officer, recalling the structure's state five years ago.

The historic building, believed one of the few of its kind left in Southern Nevada, was a shadow of its former self. Two exterior walls had partially collapsed. Wooden beams jutted from the roof at odd angles, while caliche blocks and stray scraps of wood and metal littered the ground around it.

"We had a really bad rainstorm in 2012, and parts of the adobe hut had already been



collapsing," Mooney said. "There were already issues, and we had been told that kids were climbing on it, and we had animals nesting in it. And all these things were causing further deterioration."

Add to that the risk of someone getting hurt at the site, and it was obvious something needed to be done. "We were in danger of losing the entire building altogether if we had one more big storm event," Mooney said. "So we prioritized."

The adobe hut became the second project undertaken as part of a city plan to restore 26 buildings at Tule Springs Ranch, she said. The first was the foreman's house, now a visitor's center.

Workers completed restoration in late December, and visitors now can see how the adobe hut, built in the early 1900s, looked in long-ago days.

"We really don't have very many buildings that are that kind of style in Las Vegas," Mooney said.

Beyond the adobe hut's age and rarity, she added, it is the only building left from the time when the Tule Springs area was a pit stop along a wagon road that led to mining camps north of Las Vegas. "There was kind of a little town site there. It had a restaurant, a hotel, probably a little tent city. No other resources exist from that time in that area."

The adobe served as storage, a blacksmith shop and temporary residence for Burt Nay, who purchased 40 acres in the Tule Springs area in 1917.

"He lived out there and started making improvements, and then it changed hands and developed and grew until it became what we know it as today," Mooney said. "If that building wasn't there to provide shelter, he might have moved on, and we might not have the Tule Springs Ranch."

The \$98,000 project, funded by grants from the Nevada State Commission for Cultural Centers and Historic Preservation and the Commission for the Las Vegas Centennial, was finished for a third of the estimated \$300,000 cost and in half the expected time.

"It's quite an accomplishment," Mooney said, crediting the city public works department's involvement as key.

The department was able to salvage some existing materials, including fallen caliche blocks, and reuse them, lowering material costs, said Patrick Batte, an architect for the department. New blocks were quarried from the park's "badlands" area, and other new materials were necessary to ensure the reconstruction met with current seismic and other city codes.

"With any one of these projects, there's always a dichotomy. You've got one foot in the past and one foot in the present," Batte said. "The challenges are to maintain the appearance and the historical integrity of the project but yet have it maintained and upgraded to code."

Batte and Mooney praised the restoration team, including city staff, contractor Accelerated Construction and structural engineer Mel Green of Mel Green and Associates.

"Any successful historical project always has to begin with good research," Batte said, "And we were fortunate that we have a team and a staff that provided the documentation that was necessary to make the project successful."

With any historic building restoration come surprises, and often the need to adjust to them, Mooney said.

"There are things you can sketch out as much as you want, but when you get out into the field and actually start putting it together, you have to make some changes to make it all fit," she said.

Mooney described how the team used concrete beams to strengthen the structure and devised a way to disguise them to meld with the adobe style.

Another surprise came from a close examination of the hut's construction that has led team members to believe the structure was built in two stages, Mooney said.

Perhaps the best revelation was the discovery of artifacts long buried under dirt. "We have photographic evidence that those things were from at least the '40s," Mooney said.

Among the finds were an original door, a shelf, hinges, nails, parts of the original tin roof and a piece of equipment that may be a bracket.

Archaeologist Colleen Beck, a member of the city Historic Preservation Commission, and a colleague collected and stored the items to be cataloged and later displayed inside the locked hut to be viewed through its windows.

Next up for restoration is a duplex where actress Terry Moore, a paramour of Howard Hughes, once stayed.

"Tule Springs Ranch was a guest ranch where hopeful divorcees would come and wait out their six-week residency so

they could get a divorce," Mooney explained. "This duplex is a good example of a place they would have lived, so that's our next priority."

Tule Springs Ranch, located at 9200 Tule Springs Road, is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The cost of entry is \$6 per car.

Contact Marian Green at mgreen@reviewjournal.com or 702-387-5205. Find her on Twitter: [@mgreen0708](https://twitter.com/mgreen0708)

Mob Museum greets millionth visitor with confetti, champagne



JERRY HENKEL / VOX SOLID COMMUNICATIONS

Former Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman drinks a toast with Billy Tveitnes at the celebration of the one millionth guest at the Mob Museum in Las Vegas, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2015.

Associated Press

Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2015 | 9:23 a.m.

The Mob Museum in Las Vegas has welcomed its millionth visitor.

The museum celebrated the milestone Tuesday by greeting visitor Billy Tveitnes with confetti and champagne as he walked in the door.

Director Jonathan Ullman and museum founder Oscar Goodman also presented Tveitnes with the key to the museum.

Tveitnes is a Las Vegas resident who says he has always wanted to see the museum.



The Battle for Reed-Whipple Cultural Center

NEWS

Wednesday, December 23 4:34pm

By [Lissa Townsend Rodgers](#)

The battle over the fate of the Huntridge Theater has preoccupied Downtown Las Vegas for a decade. However, another historic performance space is fighting for survival, as the **Reed-Whipple Cultural Center** finds itself standing directly in the path of progress—or a commute.

The [Regional Transportation Commission](#)'s master plan for Downtown includes a light-rail line that runs through the south wing of Reed-Whipple, which may mean the entire structure must go.

Those who support saving the building applaud its unique architecture and cultural history. Assemblywoman Heidi Swank, executive director of the [Nevada Preservation Foundation](#), says it is “one of our few remaining buildings in the international style. Its fat roofline, strong vertical and horizontal lines, and lack of ornamentation make it an excellent example of early modernism.”

The building, 821 Las Vegas Blvd. North, was constructed in 1963 as a recreation center for the LDS church and sold to the City in 1970. From 1972 to 2011, it was home to numerous arts nonprofits until budget cuts forced it to close. Reed-Whipple was supposed to receive a \$45 million renovation/expansion that would contain a theater, rehearsal spaces, bars and a restaurant. But that project has not come to fruition, and the building has remained unoccupied.

The Las Vegas Historic Preservation Commission met last week to consider the City’s and the RTC’s plans for the site. “I hope we can have a new occupant in Reed-Whipple who will use it well,” says Las Vegas City Manager Betsy Fretwell, adding that “a nonprofit would be ideal.” There were also suggestions of repurposing Reed-Whipple into a transit center. “We want everything on the table except for tearing down any part of that building,” commission member Jack LeVine says.

The Committee unanimously passed a resolution against allowing Reed-Whipple to be destroyed, as well as one to begin the process of fling for both national and local historic landmark status for the building. Given that the RTC is working on a 30-year plan, it appears the effort to save the building has plenty of time.

Watergate break-in has connection to Las Vegas

Who tried to break into Hank Greenspun's safe?



STAFF FILE

Hank Greenspun loads boxes marked "Hughes File" in his truck.

By Megan Messerly (contact), J.D. Morris (contact)
Monday, Dec. 21, 2015 | 2 a.m.

More than four decades ago, Las Vegas Sun publisher Hank Greenspun said he had information that could take down President Richard Nixon.

And in a way, he was right.

A large safe in Greenspun's office contained a stash of memos written by reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes and his former right-hand man Bob Maheu. Nixon feared the memos might contain proof of a secret \$100,000 contribution he received from Hughes. The president

didn't want the contribution becoming public because he believed that a loan his brother Donald received from Hughes had cost Nixon two elections in the past. Nixon may have used some of the funds for personal expenses.

Nixon's fear of getting caught may have prompted some of the same people who in 1972 infamously broke into the Watergate Hotel to devise another break-in plot: one to get inside Greenspun's safe.

They tried — or at least someone did — but the burglars failed to crack open the safe.

It was the other break-in, of course, that prompted Nixon's resignation. But the two events were not unrelated.

Larry O'Brien, chairman of the Democratic National Committee whose Watergate headquarters was targeted in the big scandal, also had ties to Hughes. Nixon's administration was deeply concerned about the fuzzy connection between O'Brien and Hughes, and longed to get to the bottom of it.

Also, because of a question Greenspun had asked Nixon's press secretary months earlier, the paranoid president had reason to fear his dealings with Hughes might eventually be unveiled — and tank his presidency in the process.

At the time, no one knew for sure what the memos in Greenspun's safe actually said, but the fear of what they might reveal proved motivating enough.

In the decades after the botched break-in, many of the memos in the safe — or at least the subjects they cover — were written about extensively. For example, the 1985 book "Citizen Hughes," based on a cache of memos from a Hughes building in Los Angeles, references many of the memos contained in the safe. Before that, renowned newspaper columnist Jack Anderson wrote in 1974 that he had obtained a 2-inch-thick stack of copies of the memos from the safe. Some of the memos also were made public in court proceedings.

That said, any remaining mystery about the memos is about to disappear. Forty-three years after the break-ins at the Watergate and the Sun offices, Greenspun's son Brian and Maheu's son Peter have agreed to donate them somewhere where the public can access them.

Before they do, they are offering readers of The Sunday a glimpse inside the safe.

The memos do not appear to be what Nixon dreaded. Those reviewed by The Sunday contain no smoking gun that proves the Hughes-Nixon payoff and few mentions of Nixon at all.

What the memos do show is the extent to which Hughes sought to peddle his influence. He wanted to control politicians, to overtake rival casino owners, to put an end to atomic tests in Nevada, to own the media and more.

The memos also provide valuable insight into a man who, despite his control of a six-casino empire on the Strip, remained insulated from the general public. Hughes showed signs of mental illness, including obsessive-compulsive disorder and an extreme fear of germs. By the time he arrived in Las Vegas in 1966, he was a total recluse. Maheu never laid eyes on him.



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY MIKAYLA WHITMORE

Key players

- Howard Hughes. Born the heir to a drill bit fortune, Hughes once was the wealthiest man in the world. In his early years, he ran his father's business, Hughes Tool Company, and used it to acquire other enterprises, including a movie studio, two airlines and vast real estate holdings. Later in life, Hughes became reclusive, holing up in his bedroom, writing memos to his aides and reportedly living in filth. On Thanksgiving Day 1966, he arrived by train in Las Vegas and moved into the Desert Inn, where he stayed for four years. While in Las Vegas, Hughes never left the hotel — he never even opened the drapes in his room — but nevertheless bought the Desert Inn and five other Strip properties.
- Richard Nixon. The 37th president of the United States, Nixon resigned in 1974 after the Watergate scandal. Before Watergate, Nixon was paranoid about what might become public about his financial relationship with Howard Hughes. A loan from Hughes to Nixon's brother, Donald, had damaged two of Nixon's previous campaigns, and the president worried about a second sum of money, \$100,000, given by Hughes to Nixon's best friend, Bebe Rebozo.
- Hank Greenspun. Greenspun was editor and publisher of the Las Vegas Sun from when he bought the paper in 1950 until his death in 1989. Greenspun also was involved in real estate, developing Green Valley in Henderson.
- Bob Maheu. Known as Hughes' alter-ego, Maheu was the face of

Because Hughes was so removed from the public, his connections to the outside world were his aides, the television, newspapers — and the memos.

How Hank Greenspun got the documents

Bob Maheu gave the memos to Hank Greenspun in late 1970. The former Hughes lieutenant had been storing the documents at his house but decided he needed a creative way to get rid of them — fast.

Two related developments made Maheu feel the documents must not remain in his possession. First, Hughes skipped town around Thanksgiving, an abrupt and dramatic departure after spending four years holed up in the penthouse of the Desert Inn hotel. Then, Maheu was ousted from his post overseeing Hughes' Nevada operations.

Maheu knew a private security firm that had been working for the remaining "Hughes people" would want access to his personal files. So he boxed a number of documents from his office at the Hughes-owned Frontier hotel and sent them to California, beyond the reach of Nevada courts.

But he wanted to keep the memos closer to home — out of his control but not destroyed.

The memos detailed many issues Maheu felt were best kept from the public eye: hints at stock manipulation in Hughes' purchase of an airline company, Hughes' overt racism and frank discussion of Hughes' attempts to influence numerous politicians, to name few. Should the memos be subpoenaed, Maheu wanted to say, without perjuring himself, that he did not have them in his possession.

So Maheu and his son Peter assembled a stack of memos from Maheu's house and stuffed them into a briefcase. Peter Maheu then hand-delivered the briefcase to Greenspun, a good family friend. Maheu watched Greenspun lock the memos inside a safe in his office. If the documents ever were subpoenaed, Greenspun could shield them from the courts by insisting they were obtained in the course of reporting.

"(He) said they'd be there safely and would remain in his possession until they were returned to us or destroyed," Peter Maheu said. "They've been in there since."

The move worked. Bob Maheu never had to turn over the memos unwillingly, and they remained secure inside Greenspun's safe for two years.

Then, in August 1972, Greenspun's secretary noticed something strange when she was straightening up her boss's office. The secretary, Ruthe Deskin, saw that the window had been jimmied open and the front of Greenspun's safe was partially torn off.

It was not a successful break-in; the intruders were unable to get inside the safe. Still, Deskin immediately called police.

Greenspun, who was wrapping up a vacation in California, had no idea who would try to crack the safe open or why. Neither did police when they came to investigate.

It remained a mystery until the following year, when a possible connection emerged to one of the biggest political scandals in U.S. history.

Congressional hearings revealed that the White House-affiliated group who broke into the Democratic National Committee offices at the Watergate was involved in other covert activities. Watergate conspirator James McCord told a Senate committee that the group also plotted to break into Greenspun's safe.

Greenspun's son Brian, current publisher of the Sun and The Sunday, heard the testimony.

Hughes' years in Las Vegas. Politicians, businesspeople and other government officials met with Maheu and considered him a direct representative of Hughes. Maheu never actually met Hughes; instead, the men communicated via written memos and talked on the telephone. Before working for Hughes, Maheu did counterintelligence work for the FBI during World War II and also for the CIA, including working on a plot to assassinate Cuban leader Fidel Castro.



Howard Hughes



LAS VEGAS SUN FILE

Robert Maheu was a former government spy when he became acquainted by telephone with Howard Hughes in 1955. Though the two would never meet in person, they would be the driving force behind evicting the mob from Las Vegas.

“We’re listening to this and we’re saying, ‘Oh my God, that’s what happened in August the year before. They tried to get in,’ ” Brian Greenspun said. “All the puzzle pieces fit.”

Greenspun said he later was told by Sam Dash, chief counsel to the Senate Watergate Committee, that the Watergate scandal would not have happened were it not for the memos in the safe.

Evidence of the secret \$100,000 contribution was what Nixon really feared. Hughes, via Maheu, had made the donation to Nixon’s longtime friend Bebe Rebozo. Nixon may have used at least some of the money to fix up his house in Key Biscayne, Fla.

Nixon’s administration had good reason to believe Hank Greenspun’s safe contained information about the president’s dealings with Hughes. The newspaper publisher had raised its fears earlier with one simple question.

“What happened to the \$100,000 in cash that went from Howard Hughes to Bebe Rebozo?” Greenspun asked Nixon’s press secretary at an Oregon news conference in 1971, less than a year before the Watergate break-in.

Greenspun reflected on that chance encounter with Terry Lenzner, an investigative lawyer who interviewed Greenspun as part of the Watergate proceedings. Lenzner included the interview in his 2013 book, “The Investigator.”

“I told Klein that the breakup of the Hughes empire in Nevada was going to sink Nixon,” Greenspun said, referring to Hughes’ abrupt departure from Las Vegas. Asked to clarify, Greenspun said he had given Klein the message that he knew about the \$100,000 payment, which Greenspun characterized as a bribe.

Greenspun’s questioning brought to mind painful memories for the Hughes camp. Revelations of a previous loan from Hughes to Nixon’s brother had damaged Nixon’s 1960 presidential campaign and 1962 bid for California governor.

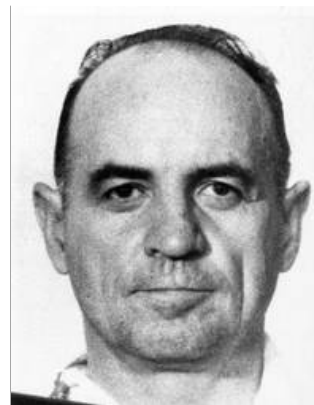
And if the Nixon administration had any doubts about how Greenspun knew about the Hughes cash in 1971, their questions were laid to rest the following year.

On Feb. 3, 1972, The New York Times wrote a story with the headline, “Hundreds of copies of Hughes memos are readily available in Las Vegas.” The story reported that Hughes documents had turned up in local Las Vegas publications and that Greenspun possessed the largest collection of them. The Times said Greenspun had “about 200 individual items” in his “Hughes communications collection.”

The day after the Times article was published, Attorney General John Mitchell, White House Counsel John Dean and Watergate conspirator G. Gordon Liddy discussed a possible break-in of Greenspun’s safe, according to Lenzner.

Also, Nixon spoke of the break-in with two of his aides, Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, on at least one occasion, according to White House transcripts:

Ehrlichman: “McCord volunteered this Hank Greenspun thing,



James McCord

Timeline of events

- Nov. 24, 1966: Thanksgiving day Howard Hughes arrives in Las Vegas on a train from Boston and moves into the ninth floor of the Desert Inn hotel.
- March 31, 1967: Hughes buys the Desert Inn for \$13.3 million after refusing to leave its ninth-floor penthouse.
- Later in 1967: Hughes buys the Sands Hotel for \$14.6 million, Castaways for \$3.3 million and the Frontier for \$23 million.
- September 1967: Hughes buys Channel 8 from Las Vegas Sun publisher Hank Greenspun.
- Dec. 27, 1968: Air West stockholders approve selling the airline to Hughes.
- 1968-1969: Hughes buys the Silver Slipper for \$5.4 million and the Landmark for \$17.3 million.
- April 3, 1970: Hughes acquires Air West.
- Thanksgiving, 1970: Hughes leaves Las Vegas and flies to Paradise Island in the Bahamas, where he moves into the Britannia Beach Hotel.
- December 1970: Bob Maheu is fired as head of Hughes’ Nevada operations. Maheu turns over his correspondence with Hughes to Greenspun.
- August 1972: Greenspun’s office is broken into, but the burglars are unable to open his safe, where the Hughes memos are stored.
- December 1973: Hughes is indicted by a federal grand jury in his acquisition of Air West. The indictment was later dismissed. Hughes was re-indicted again in 1974 and it was dismissed again but finally reinstated month after Hughes’ death.
- Aug. 9, 1974: President Richard Nixon resigns.
- Jan. 30, 1974: Hughes is indicted by a federal grand jury in connection with his purchase of Air West. Hughes is accused of conspiring to pressure airline

gratuitously apparently not ...”

Nixon: “Can you tell me is that a serious thing? Did they really try to get into Hank Greenspun?”

Ehrlichman: “I guess they actually got in ...”

Nixon: “What in the name of (expletive deleted) though has Hank Greenspun got with anything to do with Mitchell or anybody else?”

Ehrlichman: “Nothing. Well, now, Mitchell. Here’s — Hughes. ...”

Halderman: “They busted his safe to get something out of it. Wasn’t that it? ...”

Still, the identity of who tried to open Greenspun’s safe has not been proven. Brian Greenspun speculates the break-in was carried out by the Hughes organization; Peter Maheu says it seems more like the job of the Watergate burglars. No one really knows for sure.

What we do know is that the memos became intricately wrapped up in Watergate, and perhaps even caused the scandal.

lawsuits and depressing the value of Air West’s stock.

- June 5, 1974: Personal documents from Hughes’ Romaine Street headquarters in Los Angeles are stolen. The documents later are used to write Michael Drosnin’s 1985 book, “Citizen Hughes.”
- April 5, 1976: Hughes dies on an airplane from Acapulco to Houston.



[MIKAYLA WHITMORE](#)

This briefcase, filled with correspondence between Bob Maheu and Howard Hughes, was given to Hank Greenspun for safe keeping.

Northwest man shares 140-year-old locomotive he found languishing in museum



Dan Markoff, 67, stands next to his steam engine of a 140-year-old Eureka & Palisade Railroad Locomotive No. 4 outside the Nevada State Railroad Museum Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2015, in Boulder City. Markoff, who owns the train and restores it at his northwest Las Vegas home, exhibits and runs it at the museum every December. Ronda Churchill/Las Vegas Review-Journal

By Sandy Lopez
View staff writer

When Las Vegas trial attorney **Dan Markoff** first set his eyes on the Eureka Locomotive, he didn't think he'd commit to a lifelong relationship with a part of Nevada's past.

As a history buff, he already knew about the locomotive's past and of the role it played in building the Silver State, so when he saw the now-140-year-old train burned up after a fire broke out in a museum where it was stored, he decided to rescue it and give it the love and attention it deserved.

"I like sharing this piece of history with Nevadans," Markoff said. "This is our heritage. People see locomotives like this one all of the time in old photos, but very rarely do you see one running."

For roughly six years, Markoff has dedicated his time to restoring the Eureka, which is one of only three in the nation — one sits inside the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and the other is in the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento.

While the other two locomotives are carefully stored and inoperable, Markoff occasionally allows the Eureka out for a breath of fresh air and short rides.

Every December for the last eight years, he has transported the Eureka to Boulder City, doing demonstration runs as part of the Nevada Southern Railway and Nevada State Railroad Museum's Santa Train.

The highly decorated locomotive can be seen sporting a deep maroon color with gold trim and brass handrails. As it does its demonstration runs, Markoff will blow the train whistle to signal to his crew as children watch from the sidelines.

"This is my public service for Nevada," Markoff said. "People get to see something they don't get to see every day, and I just love seeing the children's reactions. Some get spooked, while others enjoy it."

"Dan brings an important piece of Nevada history for people to see and enjoy every year," said **Kate Hemingway**, acting museum director at the Nevada Railroad Museum. "Dan loves educating people about the Eureka. Having it here is something special."

The Eureka is listed on the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places as a 3-foot gauge, 4-4-0 American-type steam locomotive (the register includes buildings, sites, structures, districts and objects).

The designation 4-4-0 refers to the wheel arrangement of the locomotive, which includes a four-wheel lead truck under the front part to help guide it around curves. Behind the lead truck are four drive wheels, which power it.

Its history can be traced to when it was built in 1875 for the Eureka & Palisade Railroad to transport passengers and goods in Nevada from the mines at Eureka to the Central Pacific Railroad in Palisade. The engine served on this railroad until 1896.

From 1896-1938, it operated for the Sierra Nevada Wood and Lumber Co. until the company went out of business.

A San Francisco scrap dealer bought the locomotive and was about to cut it up for scrap before it was sold to a movie rights company. Warner Bros. bought the engine in 1939, and it was featured in many Western films, including "Torrid Zone," "Cheyenne Autumn" and "The Great Train Robbery."

The Eureka's last film appearance was in the 1976 film "The Shootist," which featured John Wayne in his final film role. The train was then sent into retirement to Old Vegas — an amusement park in Henderson that operated from 1978 to 1986 — where it was placed on display.

In 1985, a fire tore through the Old Vegas park, and one of the burning buildings collapsed on the Eureka, badly damaging its engine.

A year later, Markoff purchased it and began restoration efforts.

"I saw that no one wanted to care for it, so I decided to take it home," Markoff said. "I thought maybe I could have an adventure of a lifetime."

In 1997, the Eureka was transported to Chama, N.M., for a series of operational excursions over the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad. It continues to make occasional appearances during special events at the Nevada State Railroad Museum in Boulder City, 601 Yucca St., among others.

Once the Eureka is done for the holiday season, Markoff spends roughly three hours loading it up for the ride to his northwest Las Vegas home, where he stores it inside a specially constructed shed.

The wood-burning engine weighs 22 tons, and the boiler is designed to operate at 120 pounds of pressure.

He said he plans to take the locomotive through Colorado or New Mexico next summer.

"Having it at the house means that I'm constantly restoring it. I'm always doing maintenance on it and inspections," he said. "That's just part of the game for any locomotive. I don't know how much money I've spent on it. It's a big, dark secret. If I knew, I'd probably shoot myself. I do this for the love of history."

— To reach North View reporter Sandy Lopez, email slopez@viewnews.com or call 702-383-4686. Find her on Twitter:

Submerged St. Thomas now historic lesson along scenic drive



Ruins from the town of St. Thomas in Lake Mead National Recreation Area can be found along the trail. Deborah Wall/Special to View

By Deborah Wall
Special to View

For more than 60 years, the town of St. Thomas was a legend — Nevada's Atlantis, lying deep under the surface of Lake Mead. But after drought lowered the waters in 2002 and uncovered the old settlement, it has become an interesting and educational destination, with the bonus of a scenic drive to get there and back.

The town is accessible all year, but these cooler months are a better time to visit, for the trailhead to the town itself lies at 1,227 feet and descends from there, so it can get plenty hot in summer. That said, in cooler weather, the trail is an easy one, a loop of 2½ miles.

Now lying in Lake Mead National Recreation Area, it can be approached either through the recreation area's Northshore Road or the drive through Valley of Fire State Park. Both are famously scenic routes, and it's logical to enjoy one on the way there and the other coming back.

This town was occupied from 1865 until 1938, when Lake Mead — gradually forming behind the newly built Boulder Dam (now called Hoover Dam) — rose high enough to flood the town. It was no surprise; construction on the dam had been planned for years and began in earnest in 1931, so townspeople were given evacuation notices before the water started rising. Most of the residents relocated in a timely fashion. But one man, Hugh Lord, held out so long he had to depart St. Thomas by boat. The community cemetery was moved to nearby Overton, where it can be seen near the famous Lost City Museum. Many of the residents also settled in Overton and continued to visit St. Thomas whenever circumstances allowed.

St. Thomas has emerged five times since 1938, during periods of low water, but most of those reappearances were brief. All those years underwater took their toll, so the main remnants of buildings, still visible today, are the parts made of concrete. Besides building foundations, you will also find many round or square, hollowed cement structures. These were cisterns, the common means of storing water for household use back in the day. The Park Service asks that you not climb or sit on any of the remaining walls; they're more fragile than one might imagine. You'll also notice, perhaps, artifacts such as broken bottles or iron implements. Federal law, however, requires that you leave them where you see them to enhance the experience for those who visit later. Ubiquitous shellfish shells are not exactly artifacts, but a reminder of how long the town remained underwater.

Near the confluence of the Muddy and Virgin rivers, St. Thomas was founded by Mormon pioneers, who named it for one of the group's leaders, Thomas Sassen Smith. The settlers planned to raise cotton and mine. But cotton didn't grow as well there as the pioneers had hoped. Furthermore, the settlers had believed they were in Utah until an 1870 survey showed St. Thomas was really in Nevada. Nevada officials demanded not only current Nevada taxes, but three years' arrears. Residents refused to pay, abandoned St. Thomas, and returned to Utah. The town was briefly inhabited mostly by squatters and outlaws looking for a remote hiding place, an inherently transient bunch.

But St. Thomas' location made it too valuable to remain abandoned, so it was resettled in the 1880s. The former Old Spanish Trail, by this time commonly called The Mormon Road, was Southern Utah's main link to the West Coast, and St. Thomas stood on that wagon road, at one of the few points in the Mojave Desert providing adequate water and forage for oxen and mules. When the age of the horseless carriage dawned, much of that route became part of the Arrowhead Trail, the first all-weather road between Los Angeles and Salt Lake City. St. Thomas had a hotel and several service stations and garages, and motorist guidebooks pointed out that the mechanics in those garages seemed to know what they were doing.

It also had a post office, a school, stores and a church. The village population was probably never more than 500 people, but there were more at surrounding farms and mines.

The trailhead is on a bluff overlooking the Overton Arm of Lake Mead. From here, you won't be able to see the remains, but you will be able to see a faint ribbon of green vegetation on the banks of the Muddy River. The Muddy here is making its final journey from Moapa Valley, lying to the north, down to Lake Mead. If you look a bit more to your right, or southeast, you can also see a larger tributary, the Virgin River, which flows down from Utah.

St. Thomas is a day-use area only. Don't hike the trail if it has rained recently or rain threatens, as it becomes extremely muddy. The gravel access road is suitable for most vehicles except those that are low-slung.

— *Deborah Wall is the author of "Great Hikes, A Cerca Country Guide" and "Base Camp Las Vegas: Hiking the Southwestern States," published by Stephens Press. She can be reached at deborabus@aol.com.*