

City of Las Vegas

STAFF REPORT

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MEETING DATE: 03/23/16

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

- “A-Bombs, Showgirls and African Masks: A Museum Rhapsody in Las Vegas,” www.lasvegasweekly.com, 03/03/16
- “Hope flickers anew at old Moulin Rouge site in downtown Las Vegas” www.reviewjournal.com, February 2016
- “Stone tools from the end of the ice age discovered in Lincoln County,” www.reviewjournal.com, 03/06/16
- “The Huntridge Center Gets a Facelift,” www.dtlv.com, 02/24/16
- “The Mothers Who Marched,” www.vegasseven.com, 03/03/16
- “An architectural gem from Nevada’s past is returning from ruin,” www.reviewjournal.com, 03/06/16
- “Clark County grants first historical designation to Liberace Mansion,” www.reviewjournal.com, 03/02/16
- Entertainment Diet: UNLV history professor Michael Green,” www.reviewjournal.com, 03/03/16
- Why the Liberace Mansion is back in the spotlight,” www.reviewjournal.com, 03/04/16

A-BOMBS, SHOWGIRLS AND AFRICAN MASKS: A MUSEUM RHAPSODY IN LAS VEGAS



Kristen Peterson

Thu, Mar 3, 2016 (midnight)

Boom towns, bust towns, ghost towns and billion-dollar faux landmarks. Nothing is like Southern Nevada. Pioneers, showgirls, casino moguls, mobsters, architects and circus acts landing here in the wake of Mormon settlers and railroads have altered the landscape decade by decade, building out a community famously transient and filled with colorful stories. The artifacts left behind—from ginormous marquees to geiger counters—live in museums across the Valley.



Photo: [Mikayla Whitmore](#)
The Natural History Museum.

But only in the past dozen years has a seismic cultural

shift shaken the area, launching forth the Mob Museum, Neon Museum, Springs Preserve and National Atomic Testing Museum. The Erotic Heritage Museum arrived, as did the Burlesque Hall of Fame. The high-profile and mostly well-funded projects elevated the scene to a new level, creating a sudden critical mass.

Quirky or serious, in state-of-the art facilities or low-budget operations bordering on kitsch, museums tell the incomparable story of this place. But it's hard to sell small-time dioramas when mega-casinos build themed cities and spend millions marketing them. And as museum expert Mark Hall-Patton points out, for every new resident, that's another person who doesn't know these resources exist. "What people don't remember about Las Vegas is that we're a new town," says the Pawn Stars celebrity and museum administrator for Clark County. "We're still a puppy with big feet. We're still growing into our size."

As are the museums. The Mob Museum shows what \$40 million and a push from city leaders can do, while volunteers have maintained and slowly built smaller venues. Either way, "No other institution in society teaches using the real thing," Hall-Patton says, "and that's the one thing that will keep us relevant in the future."

To that we say, here's a sliver of a guide to go crazy over—with more than 20 museums and collections out there educating and inspiring, we had to pare it down.

LAS VEGAS NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

Nothing says "natural history museum" like boarding an elevator in a dinosaur enclave and exiting into a life-size diorama of early man.

Opened in 1991 to house a wildlife collection and prehistoric display, this Smithsonian affiliate in the Cultural Corridor has been triumphant despite its limited space. Founding director Marilyn Gillespie's familiar description of growth challenges as "dinosaurs with an 11-foot ceiling" hasn't stopped the accredited museum from being field-trip central for more than two decades.

Bighorn sheep climb mountainous crags in the Nevada Wildlife Gallery, where snakes burrow in the ground under native brush. Taxidermied predators roam the Serengeti against wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling murals in the African Savanna exhibit. And the prehistoric gallery is soundtracked by the roars of 35-foot-long, animatronic Tyrannosaurus rex—the kid-magnet of natural history.

The Strip's habit of fabricating historical icons sneaks in. Treasures of Egypt, donated by the Luxor when the casino toned down its theme, has King Tut's golden sarcophagus transporting you inside the ancient teen ruler's burial chamber. 900 Las Vegas Blvd. N., 702-384-3466.

HOWARD W. CANNON AVIATION MUSEUM

The 1958 Cessna 172 with the old Hacienda logo painted on it and the cherry-red '56 Ford Thunderbird convertible mark the Aviation Museum inside McCarran International Airport. Dedicated to the history of Southern Nevada Aviation, this second-floor installation overlooking baggage claim is the highest-trafficked museum in the Valley (even if travelers don't realize they're patrons). Why the Thunderbird? It's an exact duplicate of the one used as a "crash wagon" at Alamo Airport, which later became McCarran. McCarran International Airport.

NEON MUSEUM

It's hard to believe that the Neon Museum, home to the atomic Stardust letters and script of the white Moulin Rouge signs, only officially opened to the public in 2012 with guided daily tours. It's been part of Las Vegas for decades, growing from a Yesco storage lot to a large boneyard appearing in movies like Mars Attacks!, TV shows and magazine fashion spreads, always



Photo: Mikayla Whitmore
The Neon Museum.

racing to keep up with the
implosions and raising
funds for costly rescues.

A favorite among locals and tourists, the outdoor
collection of more than 100 signs representing the stylish
history of Las Vegas continues to awe. Large and
sculptural, worn and restored, they once famously fronted
elegant casinos or small businesses within the
community and tower above the corridors they create.

Tours head out from the entrance—the relocated La
Concha Motel lobby, designed by architect Paul Revere
Williams and built on Las Vegas Boulevard in 1961—
embarking on a well-scripted journey of Las Vegas past
and present. 770 Las Vegas Blvd. N., 702-387-6366.

LEFT OF CENTER ART GALLERY'S **MUSEUM COLLECTION OF AFRICAN ART**

An a-Mantsho-na-Tshol
mask from the Baga in
Guinea and a Kakungu mask
from the Suku in Congo are
displayed here, among
others used in ceremonies
by various tribes. Carved
wood adorned with cowrie
shells, paint, raffia, hair and
fabric, they demonstrate
their influence in modern
art. And a wooden wedding bowl from Tanzania's
Makonde, a cloth from the Ashanti in Ghana and
Swaziland baskets tell the stories behind the handcrafted
works.

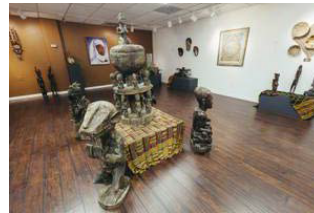


Photo: Mikayla Whitmore
Museum collection of African
art at Left of Center.

“With African art you really start to see the humanity of the
cultures,” says Left of Center Art Gallery administrator
Mary Lou Evans, after explaining the role of a large
wooden bowl set outside a family's home and filled with
community offerings in times of need. As local collector
Joseph Walker says in a video documentary playing inside
LOC, “the art is only coincidental.”

It was a big moment when a representative from the American Alliance of Museums paid a visit to the North Las Vegas nonprofit last summer to look at its African art and artifacts and advise it on seeking museum status.

The rich display of African masks, sculptures, figures, objects, instruments and cloths began decades ago when LOC founder Vicki Richardson began collecting while living on a teacher's salary. It expanded when she met her husband, who'd lived in Sierra Leone. After putting their private collection on public display, LOC received others from local collectors Walker and Calvin B. Jones. 2207 W. Gowan Road, 702-647-7378.

DISCOVERY CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

After 23 years in the Cultural Corridor, the Discovery Children's Museum moved to a new \$50 million facility at Downtown's Symphony Park in 2013, offering visitors 58,000 square feet of educational family fun. The high-tech interactive exhibits and themed activities based on science and social skills include a medieval castle; a three-story exploration tower about machinery, light and sound; a hurricane simulator and a very splashy physics exhibit about water. Eco City introduces kids to how cities function, and Young at Art teaches the foundations of visual art. 360 Promenade Place, 702-382-3445.

MOB MUSEUM

Spending less than three hours on your first trip to the Mob Museum is way too breezy for this collection so fascinating and vast it fills three floors of the former Downtown courthouse and post office built in 1933.

It opened on Valentine's Day 2012, completing a longtime dream of former Mayor Oscar Goodman, and preceded by controversy over funding and concerns that it would glamorize violent criminals. But it has proven a rich and dynamic educational institution. The second-floor courtroom used for the Kefauver Committee hearings aimed at exposing organized crime sits in situ, anchoring the collection of once-classified documents, photographs and artifacts illustrating the rift between law enforcement

and crime.

The museum houses the actual wall from the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, still bloodstained and bullet-ridden. A police lineup, an electric chair and a gun-wielding simulation are among the interactive exhibits. Officially titled the National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement, the Mob Museum's assets are storied, creatively brought together by Dennis Barrie, known for his work on the International Spy Museum and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. 300 E. Stewart Ave., 702-229-2734.

BARRICK MUSEUM

What started as UNLV's original gymnasium (its old Beaugard mascot still sealed to the wooden floor) became the home of the Barrick Museum in the late 1970s, when Barrick was a natural history museum with a focus on pre-Columbian and Native American art and artifacts.

In 2012, it became an art museum when it reopened as part of the College of Fine Arts with an exhibit of works from the closed Las Vegas Art Museum's private collection.

Since then exhibits have shown everything from the commanding 3D presence of John Millei's abstract paintings to the vibrant and intense recombinations of Break Ups and Tear Downs by Las Vegas artists Wendy Kveck and JK Russ and former Las Vegas resident Erin Stellmon.

The museum houses a healthy permanent collection, along with the LVAM works and the Herbert and Dorothy Vogel Collection. Its Inner Gallery is currently showing Ellsworth Kelly, with print editions by the artist who died last year at 92—an up-close look at the contemporary master's understanding of color and angles. UNLV



Photo: Mikayla Whitmore

The exterior of the Marjorie Barrick Museum on Feb. 18, 2016.

campus, 702-895-3381.

OLD LAS VEGAS MORMON FORT STATE HISTORIC PARK

Standing in the tidy historic site with Las Vegas Boulevard traffic on the other side of the fence, visitors are simultaneously in the past and present. In 1855 Mormon missionaries settled here, building a 150-square-foot adobe fort along Las Vegas Creek before abandoning it to farm. Some of the original walls still stand.



Photo: [Mikayla Whitmore](#)
The Old Mormon Fort State
Park.

The site later became a ranch owned by Helen J. Stewart, a famed pioneer who raised five children alone and became the largest landowner in the county. Her reconstructed house seals you in another era. 500 E. Washington Ave., 702-486-3511.

BURLESQUE HALL OF FAME MUSEUM

From pasties, panties and delicately beaded and sequined costumes to a timeline of the art form's femme fatales, the goods on display are juicy indeed. Founded by former dancer Jennie Lee (who also founded the Exotic Dancers League) in the '60s and moved to Las Vegas from Helendale, California, in 2006, the museum has burlesque star Dixie Evans at the helm of its annual weekend celebration, which brings thousands from around the world for performances and workshops.

In 2010 the burlesque trove moved into Emergency Arts, a pocket space just off the Beat Coffeehouse. More than \$32,000 raised on a recent Indiegogo brought in 65 percent of its fundraising goal for a new home opening this fall. 520 Fremont St.

NEVADA STATE MUSEUM

From showgirl artifacts in a shimmering wall to bones, miners and native life, this museum has it covered.

Long operating out of a Lorenzi Park building, the accredited museum reopened at the Springs Preserve in 2011, a move into a \$51.5 million facility that effected a transformation. It tells the story of Nevada through interactive exhibits and a wealth of artifacts, from ancient fossils to the trappings of atomic testing and gaming. You can even learn about wildlife indigenous to the Strip.



Photo: [Mikayla Whitmore](#)
The Folies Bergere Collection newly acquired by the Nevada State Museum on Feb. 6, 2015.

A gallery has featured rotating exhibits including the history of modern-day communication, Mexican embroidery and Nevada-inspired contemporary art. And the museum's recent acquisitions include the entire wardrobe collection from the now-closed showgirl spectacular Folies Bergere. 309 S. Valley View Blvd., 702-486-5205.

EROTIC HERITAGE MUSEUM

Most people will live their entire lives not expecting to see a pair of panties once belonging to Hitler's companion Eva Braun, but the large lingerie is front and center in Sex in the Third Reich, an exhibit providing a tiny glimpse into the sexual climate and politics between World Wars I and II, explaining at the outset its use of offensive symbolism to display how iconography is



Photo: [Mikayla Whitmore](#)
On display at the Erotic Heritage Museum is a undergarment from Eva Braun, Hitler's mistress.

used to control and brainwash societies. Located near a Chicken Ranch brothel exhibit, it links in a hyper-niche of human sexuality and leads into two floors on sex's role in politics, religion, law and popular culture (complete with a sexualized Star Wars display with a naughty Stormtrooper standing near a Landspeeder).

Opened in 2008 by San Francisco-based Exodus Trust, the museum temporarily closed in 2014. Property owner Harry Mohny has since reopened the museum as a for-profit, and it's now home to the show Puppetry of the Penis, as well as mammalian penis bones, the prop-heavy history of peep shows, video porn through the decades and artifacts ranging from a metal chastity belt to re-created porn-star vaginas. 3275 S. Industrial Road, 702-794-4000.

ATOMIC TESTING MUSEUM

Dioramas of Cold War America take us inside a family fallout shelter and a government office in a classified world, showing midcentury realities of nuclear fear. Starting out as a small collection in a room off the library at the Department of Energy on Losee Road, this national archive of Nevada's relationship with nuclear testing is a Smithsonian-affiliated institution.

Its 8,000 square feet show the havoc atomic warfare wreaked on Japan while becoming a pop-culture focus in America—particularly in Nevada, where bars celebrated the theme and people watched test-blasts in the desert. Told through more than 12,000 artifacts, the story includes videos, documents and displays, from geiger counters to a simulated atomic blast that will tell you “duck and cover” would never have worked. 755 E. Flamingo Road, 702-794-5151.

CLARK COUNTY MUSEUM

Homes of early Las Vegas
have taken over Heritage
Street at the Clark County
Museum, where relocated
historic buildings make up

the quaint neighborhood. The giant open-air diorama on a gravel road leads to a '60s-era Gothic-revival wedding chapel that once sat next to the Riviera.

Sidewalks under the canopies of mature trees take visitors into a 1935 Tudor revival built originally on Downtown's Seventh Street, and a restored 1912 California bungalow featuring a vast front porch with rocking chairs. A three-bedroom Townsite Home, one of many famous temporary homes built to accommodate workers of the Basic Magnesium Plant, includes an exhibit about Southern Nevada's role in the Second World War.

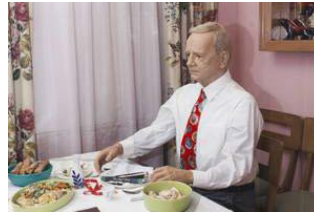


Photo: [Mikayla Whitmore](#)

A display in the Goumond House at the Clark County Museum.

The experience is Memory Lane-esque, even for those whose knowledge of early 20th-century America was handed down by popular culture. Among the painstakingly decorated interiors is a 1930s Las Vegas motor-court cabin paired with a 1948 silver Spartanette trailer, the Candlelight Wedding Chapel, a railroad depot and a print shop, some inhabited by mannequins.

The small ghost town and walking trail take visitors back another century with structures and artifacts. And inside the museum's exhibit hall sits a diorama-to-diorama narrative of the area, starting with the Ice Age and dipping into gaming, mining, wildlife and native cultures. 1830 S. Boulder Highway, 702-455-7955.

HISPANIC MUSEUM

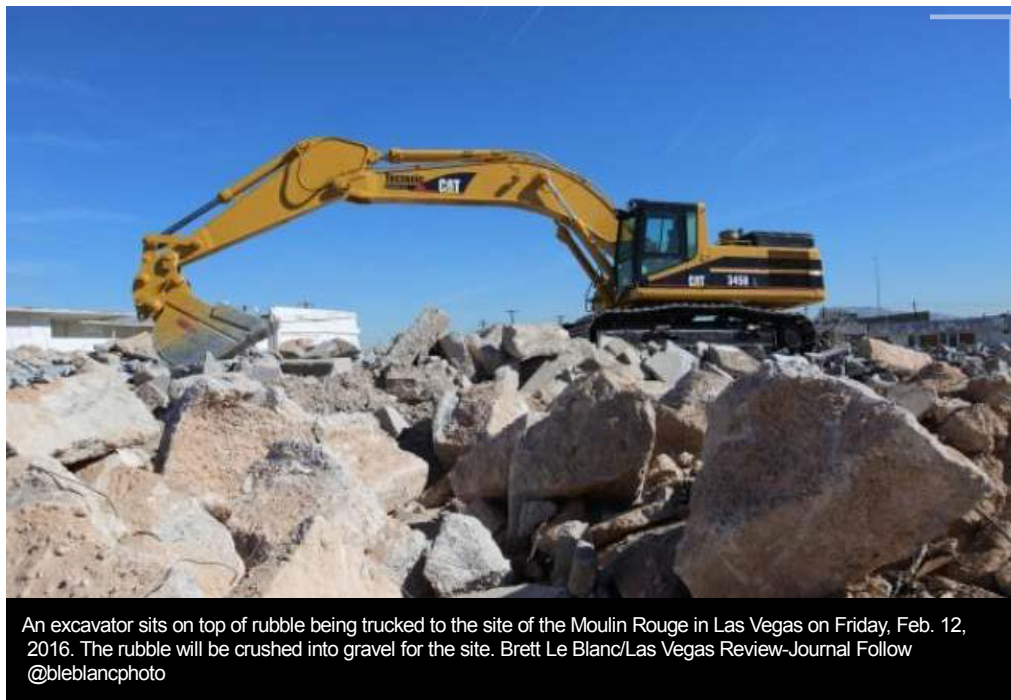
Founded in 1991, the long-nomadic Hispanic Museum of Nevada settled into its home at the Boulevard Mall in 2012, mounting exhibits of religious iconography, artworks, textiles and artifacts representing Latin American and Caribbean cultures in what was once a store. It also sells work by Las Vegas artists. 3680 S. Maryland Parkway, 702-773-2203.

BOULDER CITY/HOOVER DAM MUSEUM

Located in the Boulder Dam Hotel in Boulder City's historic district, this detailed narration of the Boulder Dam Project—a monumental feat in the 1930s that became the Hoover Dam—shows how laborers worked and lived in the government town that grew into quaint Boulder City.

The Hoover Dam, a museum in itself with outdoor displays of its construction, remains a main attraction at the edge of town, and the Nevada State Railroad Museum at 602 Yucca Street offers train rides on rails built by the Union Pacific Railroad in the 1930s, with locomotives on display. 1305 Arizona St., 702-294-1988.

Hope flickers anew at old Moulin Rouge site in downtown Las Vegas



An excavator sits on top of rubble being trucked to the site of the Moulin Rouge in Las Vegas on Friday, Feb. 12, 2016. The rubble will be crushed into gravel for the site. Brett Le Blanc/Las Vegas Review-Journal Follow @bleblancphoto

By Alan Snel
Las Vegas Review-Journal

There's a flicker of life at the old Moulin Rouge casino site on the industrial northwest edge of downtown Las Vegas.

And a property transaction could be in the cards by the end of March.

Not much is left of the fire-ravaged, 5-acre historic casino site that hosted the country's first racially integrated hotel-casino for six months in 1955.

But these days, there is activity on the property. Trucks are delivering Project Neon road debris, and construction vehicles are recycling concrete at 840 W. Bonanza Road as Las Vegas-based Rebel Sand & Gravel has an air quality permit for a project called Moulin Rouge Restoration.

City code enforcement staffers are keeping tabs on the sand and gravel operators, who are working to remove a building foundation from a different location to take it to the landfill, city spokesman Jace Radke said. Republic Services requires they grind the concrete into manageable pieces, Radke said.

The county dust control application lists Moulin Rouge Group/Ward 5 Chamber of Commerce as the owner. But Olympic Coast Investment Inc. of Seattle is the loan servicing company for a group of about 315 investors who actually own the property. The group has no formal name; the majority of the investors are in the Seattle area.

Ward 5 Chamber of Commerce, a small nonprofit organization, is trying to work with two potential investors who are interested in acquiring the site by the end of March, said Kevin Hanchett, managing member of Resource Transition Consultants LLC in Edmonds, Washington.

Hanchett is an Edmonds, Washington, attorney who owns Resource Transition Consultants LLC, which was appointed by District Court for Clark County to take control of the property and guide the process of disposing of it to a seller. Moulin Rouge Properties LLC had borrowed approximately \$18 million to buy the land, but it defaulted on the loan in 2012 and the property was foreclosed on.

Hanchett said the two investors, Max Energy International LLC from the Los Angeles area, and Asraf Rajpoot, also of Los Angeles, are looking to reinstate a purchase agreement.

Ward 5 Chamber of Commerce will act in an advisory capacity to the two investors, Hanchett said.

"Ward 5 has a vision for the property and would like to have that vision implemented," Hanchett said.

Breathing new life

Hanchett has been in touch with Katherine Duncan, founding president of Ward 5 Chamber of Commerce. Duncan hopes her work will serve as a catalyst to help breathe new life into the former integrated casino site where the likes of Sammy Davis Jr., Ella Fitzgerald, Nat "King" Cole and Louis Armstrong performed more than six decades ago.

"There's hope. We're looking for investors. There's room for volunteers," said Duncan, who drives a car with "M Rouge" plates.

The plan is to use a redeveloped Moulin Rouge site as a driver to bolster the city's historic west side, Duncan said.

Duncan said a meeting will be held at the Elks Lodge at 4100 W. Charleston Blvd. at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday. "We're looking for investors and volunteers to sign up for committees. And we want people to come to the Moulin Rouge by bicycle."

Duncan said her nonprofit raised \$100,000 last year toward buying the Moulin Rouge site and wants to sell \$250 ownership units to interested parties who don't have deep pockets. The money would buy a total of 15 acres, which includes the former Moulin Rouge site and also land that hosted condos and government-subsidized housing. Those vacant buildings would also need to be demolished.

Scott Johnson, president of Moulin Rouge Holdings LLC, said, "The biggest challenge is the reputation of the area."

Duncan and her nonprofit originally wanted to buy the site but failed to come up with the \$1 million down payment on Feb. 3 toward the purchase, Hanchett said.

Rebel Sand & Gravel is recycling the concrete because Duncan first thought she would be able to close on the deal, Hanchett said. So, she gave permission to Rebel Sand & Gravel to work on the site.

Hanchett said there was confusion by Duncan over which one of the economic partners was going to fund her down payment to buy the land. Rebel Sand & Gravel began its concrete recycling operation before the sale had closed because of the confusion over the closing date, Hanchett said.

Hanchett is working with Rebel Sand & Gravel on a short-term lease to allow the operators to continue recycling the concrete until a closing is finalized. Hanchett also figured Rebel Sand & Gravel can stick around after any potential property closing to help recycle the concrete blocks from the buildings on the site.

The loan servicer, Olympic Coast, previously had worked out a settlement agreement with the city that allows for round-the-clock security instead of the \$2 million to \$2.5 million it would have taken to demolish the remaining buildings on site, Hanchett said. The city had wanted the property owners to raze the old buildings.

"Like every project there are complications and issues to deal with. We have eliminated virtually all hurdles to enable us to convey clear title to a buyer," Hanchett said.

Historically significant

A New York City-based company, GCA Capital Group, floated an idea two years ago for a \$230 million to \$250 million casino and entertainment development that would include a hotel, retail and restaurants for the site. The Moulin Rouge is the only entertainment site recognized on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places for its significance to the civil rights movement.

The developer had the property under contract and even appeared before the state Gaming Commission, but the project was never realized because of GCA was unable to fund the closing, Hanchett said. A GCA representative could not be reached for comment.

Duncan is determined to move forward. "We'll integrate it socially and economically," Duncan said. "No private developer has been successful with this project since it opened in 1955."

Councilman Ricki Barlow, whose district includes the site, said the new Tenaya Creek Brewing site is "a planting of the seed" along Bonanza Road, and he hopes the former Moulin Rouge site can attract a gaming developer to build a neighborhood casino.

A trailer is brought in periodically to preserve the gaming entitlements on the Moulin Rouge site.

Rebel Sand & Gravel owner Rico Laureano said he hopes the Moulin Rouge redevelopment moves ahead.

"It's an effort to improve the site," Laureano said. "The buildings are unsafe and attract the wrong type of people."

March 6, 2016 - 2:15pm

Stone tools from the end of the ice age discovered in Lincoln County



By HENRY BREAN
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Thousands of years before Dry Lake Valley earned its name, the vast basin in Eastern Nevada cradled water and marshland that beckoned some of the Great Basin's earliest known human inhabitants.

Their stone tools are still out there, if you know where to look.

A team of archaeologists from a Utah-based firm has found artifacts at six sites in the Lincoln County valley, 130 miles northeast of Las Vegas on U.S. Highway 93. They also found ancient tools at seven sites in Delamar Valley and six sites near Kane Springs, also in Lincoln County.

The projectile points and crescent-shaped scrapers were fashioned out of chert and obsidian by people who lived in the

area as many as 12,000 years ago, near the end of the last ice age.

"These are the first folks to make a living in the Great Basin," said archaeologist Jesse Adams, who led the team from the environmental consulting firm Logan Simpson.

Finds like this are "very rare," Adams said. "There are definitely archaeologists who go their whole careers without finding any, and we found several."

And almost as impressive as what they found was how they found it.

The team used computer-based predictive modeling to determine where to go looking for artifacts based on the locations of previous finds elsewhere in the Great Basin from the same time period.

The method helped them pick out relic sites 100 feet square in valleys 60 miles long and 15 miles wide.

In Delamar Valley, their predictive mapping tool led them to the rocky rubble of a long-vanished stream bed where scattered tools marked where early inhabitants may have fished, hunted water fowl and gathered plants.

"These are very subtle land forms," Adams said of the old stream channels, which have been inverted by erosion along the dusty playa.

The fieldwork was conducted from 2010 to 2013, using grant money from something called the Lincoln County Archaeological Initiative, a federal program launched in 2006 to inventory, manage and protect cultural resources on public land in the rural county.

The initiative was seeded with money from the sale of federal land for development near Mesquite. So far, the program has distributed more than \$8.1 million to 49 different research and resource management projects in Lincoln County.

The initiative is now accepting proposals for its ninth round of projects, with \$1 million up for grabs.

Nick Pay, an archaeologist with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, said Adams and company found something rare, "especially in the Great Basin," where little evidence has been found of human activity from the end of the Pleistocene.

"We don't find (sites like this) very often. In this case, we found them and we were looking for them," said Pay, who is also project manager for the Lincoln County Archaeological Initiative. "It's kind of a big deal that their (predictive) model worked."

Adams said the artifacts they discovered were cataloged, photographed and left where they were found.

As a general rule, Pay said, his agency doesn't collect relics from the field unless they are under immediate threat. He said they simply don't have the money or the space to store and care for every arrowhead or scraper tool.

For members of the general public, removing artifacts from federal land is against the law.

Pay declined to identify the specific location of the relic sites, though he did say that some of them "skirt along" the route picked out by another group of people who have come to Dry Lake and Delamar valleys in search of water.

The Southern Nevada Water Authority plans to sink wells and run pipes across a wide swath of Eastern Nevada some day, supplying groundwater to the Las Vegas Valley that some researchers argue is left over from the last ice age.

Pay said the discovery of artifacts in the area is unlikely to impact the pipeline project. The water authority is already required to conduct a cultural resource inventory along "every inch" of the pipeline and mitigate for any sites that may be found in its path.

Pay said little is known about the culture and customs of the people who left the stone tools in what is now Lincoln County. He said the Paleo-Indian people were hunter-gatherers and "more than likely semi-nomadic," trailing water and game across the landscape and through the seasons.

"In the Great Basin, where you have water you have people," he said.

Adams can vouch for that. During one of their field trips to Delamar Valley in January 2013, they arrived after a winter storm to find the playa covered by shallow lake.

Standing at its edge, it was hard not to think about the people who may have stood there thousands of years before.

"It gave you an idea of what the valley might have looked like to them," Adams said.

Contact Henry Brean at hbrean@reviewjournal.com or 702-383-0350. Find him on Twitter: [@RefriedBrean](https://twitter.com/RefriedBrean)



The Huntridge Center Gets a Facelift

DOWNTOWN NEWS

Wednesday, February 24 11:45am

By [Jessie O'Brien](#)

Anyone who has flied up at Circle K or popped in at Huntridge Tavern for a nightcap knows the Huntridge Shopping Center has a reputation for being sketchy. But J Dapper is starting to change that.

Dapper, the head of [Dapper Companies](#), purchased the 62,000-square-foot center at 1116 E. Charleston Blvd. from Paul Kellogg, who also owns Huntridge Tavern, for \$5.2 million. He also purchased the former Mahoney's Drum Shop and Gamblers Book Shore on the north side of Charleston.

While the city and most neighboring business are supporting Dapper, revitalizing these properties has had its challenges. So far, the old Gamblers Book Shop was gutted and new windows were put in. The parking lot was re-asphalted and they are currently working on the façade. An undisclosed design firm is moving in at the end of 2016. The old Mahoney's Drum Shop on Bonneville Avenue and Maryland Parkway is getting a façade remodel as well with new glass storefronts. The adjacent fourplex was torn down because it was full of asbestos, which added more parking.

“It's going to look like a well-maintained old building,” Dapper says.

Plans for Huntridge Center include a mid-century façade remodel coming in the fall, downsizing the Huntridge Pharmacy and expanding the [Hi-Rollers Barber Shop](#) space, and updating the entire Circle K corner property with 1950s-style architecture (if they renew their lease). New signage for the center should appear in the next two-to-five months.

The current tenants of the almost-full center include Savers thrift store, Save-A-Lot grocery store, Circle K, The Huntridge Pharmacy and Soda Fountain, Huntridge Tavern, and Hi-Rollers Barbershop. The only new tenant with a lease so far is a chain restaurant offering chicken wings, [Wingstop](#).

“You can't just go in and put east Fremont Street dining types of establishments there, because it won't work,” Dapper says. “You need to have a combination of some mom-and-pop and some corporate tenants, too.”

Getting the right tenants to believe that the Huntridge shopping center is a good,

“You can't just go in and put east Fremont Street dining types of establishments there, because it won't work.” -J Dapper

viable area to put their business and to reassure them that issues like homelessness are going to get better is what Dapper says are his biggest challenges.



Facade remodel proposal

So far, Dapper has stepped up security and tore down the old Farm Basket building, which had become “a squatters paradise.” According to multiple Huntridge Center business managers, removing the building and adding security has made a difference, but there is still an issue with panhandlers in the area.

“We don’t want to just push [the homeless] into the next neighborhood. We are looking to try to make a change,” Dapper says, which is why he is working with Caridad charity to help with outreach in the area.

Dapper realizes it is going to take more than just his properties to make the area succeed and he is reaching out to neighboring businesses to get them to clean up their properties. Some, like Burger King, have been responsive to his requests and willing to help while others, like 99 Cents Only, have not. Representatives for 99 Cents Only Stores declined to comment.

Overall, however, the neighborhood is supportive.

“Nowhere else in town—nowhere—do I buy a property and have my fellow landowners [in the area] email me and [say], ‘Thanks for coming here. Thanks for doing this,’” Dapper says.



The Mothers Who Marched

How an organization of black mothers from the South provoked welfare reform by shutting down the Strip

FEATURES

Thursday, March 3 7:00am

By **Emmily Bristol**

On a Saturday 45 years ago, 37-year-old Emma Daugherty, a mother of eight, took part in one of the largest protests in Las Vegas history.

She was a member of the welfare reform organization known as Operation Life. On March 6, 1971, marching 1,500 strong, arm-in-arm with celebrity activists including actress Jane Fonda and labor rights leader Cesar Chavez, this group of poor women from the South walked to the heart of the Strip, Caesars Palace gleaming on one side

and the blushing marquees of the Flamingo on the other.

After years of fighting a broken welfare system, staging sit-ins, getting arrested and begging state legislators for reform, the women of Operation Life were not going to be quiet.

“It makes me appreciate the hidden history of Las Vegas so much more,” says Carmella Gadsen, Daugherty’s great-granddaughter. “I always said that Las Vegas is a place without culture and without history, but I just hadn’t really been exposed to it.”

It’s a powerful history. And, as the women of Operation Life pass on, it’s a history that, until recently, was in danger of dying with them.

From the cotton fields **to the desert**

“We were sharecroppers [in Louisiana],” says Ruby Duncan, one of the leaders of the march and a founder of Operation Life. “It was a bit better [in Las Vegas], because in the South, when I was a young person picking cotton ... we didn’t have roads. But it wasn’t much different.”

Segregation on the Strip during the 1940s and ’50s, Jim Crow laws and the practice of redlining funneled most of the city’s black community and businesses into the Westside, an area near Downtown so called because it was on the west side of the Union Pacific railroad tracks. The neighborhood offered little succor to those migrating from the



Protesters at the Sands, 1971. | Photo courtesy of Las Vegas News Bureau

South, and Las Vegas became known as the Mississippi of the West.

“We didn’t have any running water. It was really bad,” says Duncan, who moved to Southern Nevada

from her native Tallulah, Louisiana, in 1952. She found kitchen work in casinos on the Strip until an accident left her with a permanent disability. By the 1960s, she had married and had seven children.

Many more of the women who would later form Operation Life were making their way to Las Vegas. Among them were Daugherty, Mary Wesley, Alversa Beals and Rosie Seals. While many of them were born and raised near each other, it was their shared struggles in the Westside that would cause them to meet and, eventually, unite.

Like Duncan, Seals worked in the cotton fields as well as wood mills before moving to Las Vegas in 1951. When she was 37, the widowed Seals had a stroke. Her doctor wrote a note saying she could die if she went back to work, and instructed Seals, a

mother of seven, to take it to the welfare office. But when Seals visited the welfare clerk, her application was promptly denied.

Seals' experience was neither rare nor the worst of its kind. In 1961, the national welfare system did not force states to participate. Nevada refused to sign on for years. States had full discretion over how funds were disbursed, including rules on who qualified and how recipients were compensated.

Because of the states' power, single black mothers and single white mothers could end up getting paid different amounts. While working at a laundry service, Seals learned that her white coworker got a higher welfare benefit, despite having fewer kids.

Across the country, welfare office administrators saw single black mothers as part of a growing cultural problem. Annelise Orleck writes in *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Beacon Press, 2006):

“By the mid-1960s, when Duncan, Beals, Wesley and Seals walked into the Las Vegas welfare office to apply for aid, it had become difficult for most caseworkers to see poor black mothers as individuals. They had merged, instead, into a nameless, featureless social problem: the unmarried black mother. The nation’s newest bogeywoman was stigmatized no matter what she said or did: She was a bad mother if she worked outside the home and neglected her children, a

parasite if she applied for aid so that she could stay at home.”

After the curt dismissal, Seals began talking to welfare rights activists and bringing their call to arms back into the living rooms and churches of the Westside.

At the time, it was legal to work while receiving benefits, and Nevada had the highest rate of working welfare mothers in the country (47 percent), according to Orleck. But dollars earned on the job counted against welfare benefits. In Nevada, the welfare benefit was only \$25 per child per month.

This wasn't the worst problem facing welfare mothers. Nevada law allowed welfare offices to routinely conduct substitute-father raids, in which they could forcibly enter the homes of recipients, unannounced, to search for any clue that a man had been there. If any evidence, such as whiskers in the sink, was discovered, the women could be labeled a welfare cheat and kicked out of the system.

Women also faced the threat of losing their children. In 1967, Congress gave the Welfare Department the right to take a single mother's children because of multiple instances of illegitimacy. Illegitimacy could mean anything from too many children fathered outside of marriage, too many children fathered by too many different men or simply, children being raised in a home without a father.

Compounding the problem, family-planning options for poor black women at the time were limited. Until 1973 unmarried women, regardless of race, couldn't access birth control. Many of the women on the Westside begged their doctors for birth control. Gadsen's great-grandmother Emma Daugherty was one of them.

“I would have preferred to have fewer children,” Daugherty, who declined an

interview with *Vegas Seven* due to health issues, says in *Storming Caesars Palace*. “But there wasn’t any birth control available on the market for black peoples like they had for whites. There was no place to go.”

Daugherty’s plight echoes in Gadsen’s work. The recent UNLV graduate is the coordinator of the Green Dot Violence Prevention Program at the school’s Jean Nidetch Women’s Center.

“There were so many other women [besides my great-grandmother] who had a lot of children, not because they wanted to,” Gadsen says. “Someone like me now, who is participating in reproductive justice and caring about those things ... and knowing it’s been going on so long, [to see] that my great-grandmother was really a victim of not being able to have her own choices and options, that really touched home for me.”



March 13, 1971. | Photo courtesy Las Vegas News Bureau

The growing storm

Rosie Seals soon found her living room meetings getting bigger, and her phone ringing off the hook. She was visiting homes of people in abject poverty, some in shacks barely more than tents made of rags. The poorest would send their children door-to-door begging for bread.

With the help of Alversa Beals, Seals mobilized the Westside mothers into the Clark County Welfare Rights Organization (CCWRO). Affiliated with the coalescing National Welfare Rights Organization, CCWRO joined a movement that was spreading throughout the country. In 1966, welfare marches took place in 16 major cities. The following year, protests spread to 40 cities. By 1968, the movement captured the gaze of national leaders, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who acknowledged the group as an important part of his Poor People's Campaign.

But in 1970, things got worse. By this time, George Miller had taken over as director of the Nevada Welfare Department. Miller was already known for using substitute-father raids to investigate alleged welfare cheats, despite the Supreme Court ruling two years earlier that aid could not be withheld because of the presence of a "man in the house." He launched a ruthless audit of Las Vegas and Reno welfare rolls. Without warning, recipients stopped getting checks or found them slashed without explanation.

Duncan, now a major player in CCWRO and a media-friendly face for the organization, was not going away without a fight. With the help of Clark County Legal Services Director B. Mahlon Brown, they filed *Woods v. Miller*, which argued that terminating the benefits of so many welfare mothers at the same time without hearings was a violation of their due process rights and federal law.

Although a judge's order temporarily reinstated benefits, Miller refused to release his iron grip. Instead, he escalated his efforts, sending out a new wave of cuts on New

Year's Day 1971.

Duncan knew what they had to do: "We had to go to war with them."

Taking it to the streets

on february 8, 1971, ccwro leaders marched to the welfare office, weaving through the Westside with 300 members of the community. Duncan read a list of demands, including restoring benefsts and reviewing the official caseworker rulebook.

They would return to the welfare office a week later, but officials would only meet one demand: A select few CCWRO leaders could read the manual at the office. As they walked outside in defeat, help appeared in a surprise supporter: Sammy Davis Jr.

The entertainer experienced segregation frsthand in Las Vegas. Once, the Sands drained the pool after the headliner jumped in with his Rat Pack buddies. Duncan found him talking to a crowd of media outside the welfare office, rallying behind their cause. She seized her moment.

Duncan announced plans to shut down the lifeblood of Las Vegas. She delivered the news that CCWRO would march down the Strip every Saturday until things changed.



Security guards block protesters from entering the Sands Hotel and Casino. Photo courtesy Las Vegas News Bureau

With Duncan taking lead, protesters linked arms and marched down Las Vegas Boulevard on March 6, 1971. In addition to Fonda and Chavez, they were joined by peace activists Rev. Ralph Abernathy, Dave Dellinger, Donald Sutherland and Dr. Benjamin Spock. The 1,500-person procession spanned a quarter mile down the Strip, and was filled with welfare rights activists who had come from “every corner of the United States,” according to Duncan.

Their destination: Caesars Palace.

Organizers marched past the sparkling fountains into the heart of the casino, where gaming stopped for half an hour. Caesars’ then-president William Weinberger surreptitiously met Duncan in the lobby and told her that everyone was invited to stay as long as they liked. The mothers sat on the steps out front. Their children played in the fountains as security guards stood idle.

Across the street, the Flamingo locked its doors. “They were afraid of us!” Duncan says.

But for all the national headlines, they had little to show for it. The following week, the Westside mothers took to the boulevard again, this time targeting Howard Hughes’ Sands. While their numbers had dwindled to about 250 protesters, their spirits were not diminished. When CCWRO leaders found the Sands’ doors locked and barricaded by furniture, “we took to the streets,” Duncan says.

From sidewalk to sidewalk, protesters sat in the street in peaceful protest. Traffic backed up all the way to the California border, says Duncan, who was among the 86 arrested.

In the following days, things



Security guards and guests watch protesters outside the Sands Hotel and Casino. | Photo courtesy Las Vegas News Bureau

escalated between the protesters and the police. The women were arrested multiple times on suspicion of assault and battery after welfare officials repeatedly refused to sign a form that would help an evicted woman from their community. In one incident, fistfights with the police broke out after Duncan and Seals carried a welfare official, who was hiding in his office, outside to the public.

“I was not aware it would explode the way it did,” Duncan says. “We were aggravating everybody.”

Then, 13 days after protesters first shut down the Las Vegas Strip, the *Woods v. Miller* ruling came in and changed everything. Miller’s massive cuts were found to be an unconstitutional violation of the rights of all welfare recipients. The judge reinstated everyone who had been cut and ordered retroactive payments.

It was a big win, but far from the mothers’ last fight.

The aftermath

Following the *Woods v. Miller* ruling, the organizers staged eat-ins when state legislators passed new cuts to the welfare program and stiff new penalties for cheats, including prison time. They lobbied for Nevada to join the food stamps program.

“Nothing was ever too big. We just felt like everything should be done and our children should get better,” Duncan says.

A year after the marches on the Strip, CCWRO opened a community organization at the corner of Jackson Avenue and D Street, christening it Operation Life. In just a few years’ time, its headquarters would offer the Westside’s first library, first healthcare clinic and first economic development office. At its height, the organization was managing millions of dollars in federal aid money and grants, which were used to feed children, start businesses, provide job training and shelter the homeless in their community. The organization shifted focus after Reagan-era policies required administrators of federal funds to have a college degree.

Now 83 years old, Duncan is one of the few Westside mothers still alive and is as sharp as ever. She retired from Operation Life in 1990, and is the only one who has a public legacy, which includes the low-income housing project Ruby Duncan Manor (built by Operation Life in 1987) and Ruby Duncan Elementary School in North Las Vegas (opened in 2010).

When Seals died in April, her one-paragraph obituary in the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* simply said she was a homemaker. The other women are almost forgotten.

“I realized I had learned more about my [great-]grandmother from the book, *Storming Caesars Palace*, than I had really learned all my life growing up with her,” Gadsen says.
“She never really mentioned Ruby

Duncan or any of the other women, for that matter. For all I know they could be really great friends in the church, but it was just something she never really brought up. And I don't know why that is."

Gadsen hopes to record Daugherty's account of Operation Life for an oral history at the Lied Library, so her great-grandmother's stories will not be lost.

Duncan also has stories included in archives. "I tell my children, 'You guys better ask me everything you want to know now,' [while] my mind is still working," she says.

But while Duncan wants the history of Operation Life preserved, she doesn't want people to only look backward. And she's ready with advice for the next generation of activists: "I think they should push their legislators. Go to them and say, 'This is what we want or we will organize against you!'"



Ruby Duncan, February 26, 2016. | Photo by Krystal Ramirez

Coming from Duncan, that's no idle threat.

March 6, 2016 - 10:15am

An architectural gem from Nevada's past is returning from ruin



The Belmont Courthouse in Belmont, Nev., is shown on Wednesday, March 2, 2016. The courthouse was built in 1876. Randi Lynn Beach/Las Vegas Review-Journal

By JOHN M. GLIONNA
SPECIAL TO THE REVIEW-JOURNAL

BELMONT – Each time Donna Motis gazed out her kitchen window, through the leafless branches of her backyard cottonwood trees, she spied a rare slice of Nevada history: a three-story timepiece whose fabled architectural elegance was now tarnished by a sense of wretchedness and despair.

In its heyday, Belmont's old brick courthouse, with its square wooden cupola, was the moral compass of this once-thriving mining town, where for decades a no-nonsense brand of Old West justice was dispensed and lawbreakers met their fates with both bravery and tears.

The imposing edifice was completed on July 4, 1876, when this silver boomtown was the Nye County seat. It saw its last case in 1905, long after the silver was gone and the town had begun its cultural decline.

Like a crusty old lawyer whose career had fallen on hard times, the once-proud courthouse tumbled into a state of near-ruin. When it rained or snowed, Motis could see water pouring through the roof, staining the walls of a once-cherished building added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.

Weekend hikers on self-guided tours covered the walls with graffiti. Vandals carted off the building's priceless period furnishings. In the 1960s, the infamous Manson Family even tried to make camp in the courthouse. Legend has it that feisty Belmont resident Rose Walters, rife in hand, told the group to scram.

Then a few years back, this isolated high-desert burg with less than a dozen year-round residents decided to save its treasure. When the subject of the old courthouse came up at Dirty Dick's Belmont Saloon, locals cupped their beers and shot each other knowing looks.

"We got to the point where we knew we either had to let it go to hell or put together a group of people to fix it," said Rick Motis, a sturdy 63-year-old former truck driver with sledgehammer hands:

Well, this old courthouse was not going to hell; not by a long shot.

In 2011, residents formed Friends of the Belmont Courthouse, a nonprofit group whose mission was to rally the money, energy and expertise to stem the building's decline. They wanted to install a new roof and windows and, just maybe, bring the old courtroom back to life as a living snapshot of the past.

The group includes Belmont residents Rick and Donna Motis as well as lawyers and judges from across the state who want to preserve an important piece of Nevada history.

"There was a time when the courthouse was the pulse of that town," said Nevada Supreme Court Justice Kristina Pickering, who sits on the group's board of directors. "It has endured so much neglect. For me, it symbolizes the pioneer spirit of the people who first settled here."

But there was a catch to this renovation job: The courthouse never had electricity or running water, and not much has changed. Belmont is off the grid; a collection of scattered buildings without electricity, running water or phone service. Generators and solar cells help heat and cool homes. Flashlights are kept on hand.

"There's nothing out here," Donna Motis said. "When it gets dark, it gets dark. If you stand on a hill in the right spot, you might get a cell signal, but even that's iffy."

Rebuilding the courthouse without modern technology required contractors who ran their tools with generators and batteries; workers who didn't mind taking a few extra steps to get a job done.

Rick Motis told of the day five men installed a 1,200-pound safe without a crane or winches. How did they do it?

"Brute force and ignorance," Motis said with a laugh.

BORN IN A BOOM

The Belmont courthouse came to be for a couple of reasons: One was that the community was booming in the frenzied search for the second Comstock mother lode.

The other was less savory: In the early 1870s, suspected horse thieves Jack Walker and Charles McIntyre were lynched at the jail and buried in unmarked graves beneath a pinion pine on the lower edge of town. The episode convinced officials that more formal justice was needed on the Nevada frontier.

In the treeless high-desert, the \$20,000 courthouse immediately became a modern wonder of its day — testimony to the true grit of the settlers.

Rock for the foundation was quarried locally. Each brick was fired in the nearby Belmont kilns. Wood for the doors, joists and roof timbers came from trees felled in the Sierra and brought in by train and horse-pulled wagons.

With a population that ranged as high as 2,000, Belmont had been the Nye County seat since 1867. It once featured an oyster house, bakery, two physicians, a drugstore, fruit store and watch repair shop. A newspaper wrote feisty editorials, including one in 1867 that read, "Here's to our governor. He came in with very little opposition; he goes out with none at all."

The Cosmopolitan Music Hall would host traveling vaudeville acts. There was a Chinatown and a mercantile store that stocked everything from Paris perfume to hob-nailed boots.

From the beginning, the thriving community's new courthouse was more than a place for the sitting judge. It also housed the sheriff, district attorney and town treasurer, some of whom both worked and slept there. And even from those early days, the place was not without scandal.

Once, locals say, a district attorney lost his re-election race but refused to leave. And in 1894, County Treasurer Adam McLean was found dead in his bed on the first floor of the courthouse. He chose poison over being charged with embezzling more than \$15,000.

The courthouse also saw its share of notable cases. One involved a Nye County sheep rancher named George Ernst, who was tried for tax evasion after trying to pay his grazing fees in nearby Elko County, where they were considerably cheaper.

In a summation that went down in courthouse annals for its brevity, prosecutor Peter Breen stood before the jury and simply stated: "George Ernst has a flock of sheep/their fleece as white as snow./He feeds them in Nye County/and taxes

them in Elko."

He won the case.

Then the roof fell in on the mining economy. In the election of 1900, fewer than 100 votes were cast in Belmont. After the county seat was moved 46 miles south to Tonopah in 1905, the courthouse was closed and the building fell on hard times. Over the years it was used to store hay and surveyor's equipment, and even accoutrements for a field hospital.

Tourists often left behind their signatures, which remain even today. "Barbara Swanson, June 9, 1940" decorates one wall.

In another place, a soldier bound for France during World War II left a poem to his girl:

"When you and I our love must part/may it cause pain in both our hearts/I to some foreign land will go/sleep cold in death as others do/All this and more I have to say but/night calls and I mush away/With these lines/you will a hidden question find."

Resident Terry Terras pondered over the lines before finally solving the riddle. Put together as a sentence, the first word of each sentence reads: "When may I sleep all night with you?"

In 1953, author Nell Murbarger wrote of the old mining town's decline for *Desert* magazine, observing that the courthouse still stood "as square and unadorned as a three-story bank vault, still as indomitable as the Bank of England."

Fifteen years later, the Manson family tried to take up residence there. The group left behind a piece of graffiti, written on the frame of a downstairs door that reads: "Charlie Manson + family 1969" with a peace symbol forming the O in Manson.

Ghost hunters try to contact spirits that supposedly remain here. But most people, Terras said, come in search of the Manson Family.

"Every time Manson comes up for parole, people flock to the courthouse to take pictures of that graffiti," he said. "That's got to be the most photographed door jamb in the entire country."

LOCAL MONEY

The Friends of the Belmont Courthouse initially decided to do things the grass-roots way: They wanted all the money for the refurbishment to come from donations.

The annual July 4th parade and art show raised \$2,500 one year. On Labor Day there's a barbecue fundraiser. For details, visit www.belmontcourthouse.org.

They've had to get creative: Each of the 30 new windows was financed by different donors. Nye County paid for a new roof. The cupola was also fixed and painted. So far, the group has raised about \$130,000 and has spent \$100,000, mostly on the windows.

The group's board holds regular meetings to plan strategy, and members take them seriously: Kim Wanker, the 5th District judge in Pahrump, will drive 650 miles roundtrip to attend a planning session without staying the night.

When the work will be done —and even how much more they can do — remains up in the air.

"That building is weather-tight," said Donna Motis. "Even if we didn't do another thing, it would stand for another 200 years. There's no way the elements are going to break down that building."

But many in the group want to do more, including renovating the courtroom. There's talk of asking the state Supreme Court to hold a hearing there once the work is done.

"We've never held a session in a ghost town or in a building without electricity or fire protection, but I'm open to anything," Justice Pickering said. "Personally, I think it would be cool."

But there is a stumbling block: Most of the historical photos were exterior shots, so workers have no idea what the old courtroom looked like when in use. Faint lines on the floor suggest where the judge and jury sat, but what they really need — from some museum or home attic — is a historic photo of the old courthouse in action.

Until then, they are collecting period furniture for the project.

Both Terras and Rick Motis offer tours of the courthouse, gladly accepting donations.

"Any building that can stand that long deserves some loving care," Terras said.

Now, when Donna Motis looks out her kitchen window, she doesn't see a neglected relic of the past, but a symbol of Belmont's stubborn endurance.

March 2, 2016 - 12:24pm | Updated March 2, 2016 - 1:42pm

Clark County grants first historical designation to Liberace Mansion



A second-story cantilever housing an Old World-looking grand piano is directly above the kitchen and overlooks the living room. (Tonya Harvey/Real Estate Millions)

By BETHANY BARNES
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Liberace has long been part of Las Vegas' history. Now the iconic sequin-clad piano player's Las Vegas legacy is a little more official.

The Clark County Commission gave its first historic designation [to the Liberace Mansion](#) on Wednesday.

The mansion at 4982 Shirley St. is tucked away in an otherwise understated neighborhood located between the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and McCarran International Airport. It's owned by United Kingdom businessman Martyn Ravenhill, who has made a project out of restoring the place to preserve the opulent icon's legacy.

[Wladziu Valentino Liberace](#) bought the property in 1974 and it has contributed to Las Vegas' history even after Liberace's

death in 1987. Ownership changes saw it as an event space, making it the backdrop of weddings and some proms.

A 2006 purchase for \$3.7 million led to a starring role in one Las Vegas' sadder stories: The housing crisis.

The 2010 foreclosure left the villa in disrepair, but also attracted attention. Ravenhill learned the 14,939-square-foot home was for sale and ended up snagging it for \$500,000. The Liberace fan has since made it a mission to bring Liberace's luster back to the space.

"The historical designation will help safeguard the vision and initial design of the residence as envisioned and executed by Liberace and to preserve the integrity and maintenance of the mansion," according to the application, which also boasts that the new status, "will allow Liberace's legacy to continue to bring joy to many star-enthralled visitors."

The application says the mansion will be opened for public viewing, events and educational programming, which it expects will help strengthen Clark County tourism.

"The Liberace Foundation for the Performing and Creative Arts was thrilled to consult with Mr. Ravenhill on his restoration of the former home of Liberace in Las Vegas," said Jonathan Warren, chairman of the foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the showman that has control of his costumes, automobiles, antiques, art and jewelry and manages his brand.

"We congratulate him on the new designation, and are thrilled to be able to point to another shining example of the cultural value of Liberace's iconic and enduring legacy."

Commissioner Mary Beth Scow, whose district includes the mansion, said the designation includes restrictions on noise and parking to make sure neighbors are protected from the increased interest.

The county historic designation is fairly new and the Liberace Mansion was the first place to try for it, Scow said.

"I think it will be a nice addition to the community to have it as a historical designation," Scow said. "It's one more thing in Las Vegas that entices people here."

Contact Bethany Barnes at bbarnes@reviewjournal.com or 702-477-3861. Find her on Twitter: [@betsbarnes](https://twitter.com/betsbarnes)

March 3, 2016 - 11:30am | Updated March 5, 2016 - 8:38am

Entertainment Diet: UNLV history professor Michael Green



UNLV history professor Michael Green poses for a photograph inside his home near Tropicana Avenue and Pecos Road in Las Vegas on Friday, Feb. 26, 2016. Daniel Clark/Las Vegas Review-Journal Follow @DanJClarkPhoto

By JOHN PRZYBYS
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Over the past several weeks, Michael Green has added another entry to his usual roster of entertainment-related activities: politics-watching.

Green, an associate professor of history at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, followed the lead-up to the Nevada presidential caucuses and even served as a political analyst and commentator for area media during the process.

Green moved from Los Angeles to Las Vegas at the age of 2 and has been immersed in the state's history and culture ever since. Last year, "Nevada: A History of the Silver State," Green's comprehensive and highly readable history of Nevada, was published.

"If you find politics interesting — and there's something to be said for that — then yes, my entertainment (lately) certainly has changed," Green says with a laugh. "Adlai Stevenson once said that he liked politics because politicians are so funny. I don't know how funny this (presidential) crowd is, but if 'funny' means 'interesting' or 'unusual,' there's your entertainment."

We talked to Green about what he and his wife, Deborah, do when he's not keeping up with politicians or trying to figure out how today's events fit into the tapestry of Nevada's colorful history.

TV

"When I do land in front of the TV, I try to get news. I try to sample a little of everything, and some of the time it's there for background noise. I still love "M*A*S*H" reruns. I still love "Barney Miller" reruns, and I vaguely recall yelling at the cable people enough to get the cartoon channel. I am a Warner Bros. fanatic, and "Tom & Jerry" was all I had until they changed the schedule. ... I'm a sports fan, especially baseball, so it's a time of year for anticipating things, and it would be nice if I got the (Los Angeles) Dodgers on TV, especially for Vin's (announcer Vin Scully's) last season. But, in that case, I will get what I can when I get it. And we are loyal PBS viewers, and let's just say Carson the butler (from "Downton Abbey") is my hero.

Movies

This is a big joke in our household. Deborah and I have been together for 16 years and I think we have seen 10 movies together. ... We like comedies, musicals, good dramas and period pieces, and I do not incline toward foreign and arts films, which is a moral defect on my part. But it does mean I have been abandoned a couple of times (laughs).

Theater

We love New York City, we love Broadway, and we have gone to several productions at The Smith Center, including "Mary Poppins" and "Wicked." We have gone to The Smith Center for several things, most recently for Pink Martini with the Las Vegas Philharmonic. ... We like theater, and we've gone to several things at UNLV. Later this spring, I believe UNLV is going to have "Kiss Me, Kate," which was one of the first musicals we saw together, so we're going back for, like, a sing-along.

Books

I have to read (nonfiction) in the fields I study, and if I really dedicate myself to that, then I don't have enough time for goof-off reading. But for Christmas and birthdays, my wife will get very cheapie, easy reading books, and never mind where I read them (laughs). ... I read about one of my loves, baseball broadcasting, and I especially love the old Nero Wolfe mysteries. He's my kind of guy. He just likes to eat and read and sends other people to dig up information for him (laughs). That would be a nice life.

Music

I listen to KNPR, which is not music, and then I will go over to see what's on the classical station and the UNLV station, and I will end up checking the big band station. I actually like older music and, sometimes, the country station. ... I find I like just about most music. I'm not into hip-hop or rap, but I can't wait to see "Hamilton," and not just on historical grounds, just on the basis that it looks fascinating.

Dining

I wish I was a foodie; I just like what I like. ... Downtown has a lot to offer, and it's a big change from my youth, and I think it's a great change in that there are not just a lot of places to choose from, but so much variety, so many ethnicities.

Read more from John Przybys at reviewjournal.com. Contact him at jprzybys@reviewjournal.com, and follow [@JJPrzybys](https://twitter.com/JJPrzybys) on Twitter.

March 4, 2016 - 2:45pm | Updated March 7, 2016 - 1:00pm

Why the Liberace Mansion is back in the spotlight



Liberace commissioned a ceiling mural in the master bedroom and bath. The bedroom's mural depicts the Sistine Chapel. It reportedly took two years for Stefano Angelo Falk, a descendant of Michelangelo, to complete. (Tonya Harvey/Real Estate Millions)

By **HOLLY IVY DEVORE**
REAL ESTATE MILLIONS

A lot can change in a few years. Need evidence? Look at the Liberace Mansion at 4982 Shirley St.

In summer 2013, the 14,393-square-foot former part-time residence of iconic piano virtuoso Wladziu Valentino Liberace (1919-1987) – known for his showmanship while performing on the Las Vegas Strip, sequined costumes and opulent lifestyle – was in foreclosure after several changes of ownership following his 1987 death. Signs of neglect were evident both inside and out, and its cracking walls were a sign of a sink hole hidden under its master suite wing. Its glory days of glitz and glamour were no more.

That was then and this is now.

Now the Liberace Mansion is back in the spotlight, [receiving the first Clark County Historical Designation](#) with an unanimous vote of the Clark County Commissioners last week. This is a big step from when United Kingdom businessman and long-time Liberace fan Martyn Ravenhill purchased the foreclosed home for a mere \$500,000 or \$34.74 per square foot in August 2013 and embarked on extensive preservation and restoration efforts after fixing the sink hole. He said he has spent more than \$1 million in restoring this slice of Las Vegas history. These efforts are still ongoing.

"We pursued this designation because we were very concerned about the future of the mansion, and I wanted to make certain that it remains intact. It was neglected when I purchased it, and I want to protect it the best I can," Ravenhill said. "Las Vegas is internationally renowned for destroying its history and buildings, but where I come from, in England, we are focused on preserving. I want to share the mansion and its history with others, and I think receiving the historical designation will help do that."

Historical designation

Describing "why" the Liberace Mansion qualified for the county's historical designation during last Wednesday's Zoning Commission meeting was Heidi Swank, executive director of the Nevada Preservation Foundation, who worked with the county in expanding the Clark County Historic Designation beyond neighborhoods to individual homes and structures in 2014.

Criteria for historical designation can vary. Swank explained that, in the Liberace Mansion's case, the residence met the criteria that it:

- Is at least 40 years old (Liberace actually combined two existing houses in 1974);

- Is associated with a well-known person in the community's history; and

- Contributes to or is reflective of the county's social, cultural, economic or political history.

"This is the first time that the county ordinance has been used at all. We should have another project applying for county Historic Neighborhood Designation in the coming months – the original part of the Paradise Palms neighborhood," Swank said after the meeting, explaining that the foundation assists property owners as well as neighborhoods in establishing historical designation, although owners can pursue it solo.

"I really am so happy that Martyn and Ivan (Ravenhill's partner) have taken on the Liberace Mansion and in all of the work they have done ... We first visited the mansion in 2013 right after Martyn bought it, and we have helped out here and there along the way. It has come a long way."

Along with the plaque that will be displayed near the mansion's decorative front entrance, the historical designation will bring accessory uses to the single-family residence for activities like charity fundraisers, private events and private appointment-only tours.

The historical designation was approved with several conditions such as the use of valet parking during events, times when special events can be held, no outside amplified noise, and so on to protect the neighborhood, which is located between the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, campus and McCarran International Airport.

The Mansion's Future

"What's intended in the future is for the mansion to become a special area. I want to open the doors through private events and share it with others so they can get a taste of what Liberace was all about," Ravenhill said. "It has never been my intention to just open up my home to the public. After all, I live there, too."

Looking forward to getting a first-hand glimpse of the mansion are members of a Liberace fan club, who will be gathering in Las Vegas this fall.

"About 100 people from our fan club will be attending our first Liberace festival this fall in Las Vegas and the mansion is the number one thing that we would like to see," said Las Vegas Valley resident David LaBrake, administrator of a Liberace fan club on Facebook who also spoke in favor of the historic designation during the commission meeting. "I'm pleased that they are preserving the home and Liberace's memory."

They will likely be enthralled by what many have only seen in photographs and TV clips — the mansion's ornate chandeliers, an intricate ceiling mural depicting the Sistine Chapel and painted by a descendant of Michelangelo in its master bedroom, a marble tub with 14-carat gold swan fixtures in the master bath, eight marble pillars imported from Greece, mirrored walls and bars featuring etchings similar to that English illustrator Aubrey Beardsley, a curved staircase that was imported from a can-can-bar in Paris, and an atrium-style "Moroccan Room" featuring copper tiles from Africa. Memorabilia placed throughout and pictures of Liberace adorning the walls will remind them of its former owner.

For additional information, visit nevadapreservation.org or the Liberace Mansion Facebook page.