

#### Section 1 (16 U.S.C. 470)

(a) This Act may be cited as the "National Historic Preservation Act."

(b) The Congress finds and declares that-

- (1) the spirit and direction of the Nation are founded upon and reflected in its historic heritage;
- (2) the historical and cultural foundations of the Nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people;
- (3) historic properties significant to the Nation's heritage are being lost or substantially altered, often inadvertently, with increasing frequency;
- (4) the preservation of this irreplaceable heritage is in the public interest so that its vital legacy of cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, economic, and **energy** benefits will be maintained and enriched for future generations of Americans;
- (5) in the face of ever-increasing extensions of urban centers, highways, and residential, commercial, and industrial developments, the present governmental and nongovernmental historic preservation programs and activities are inadequate to insure future generations a genuine opportunity to appreciate and enjoy the rich heritage of our Nation;
- (6) the increased knowledge of our historic resources, the establishment of better means of identifying and administering them, and the encouragement of their preservation will improve the planning and execution of federal and federally assisted projects and will assist economic growth and development; and
- (7) although the major burdens of historic preservation have been borne and major efforts initiated by private agencies and individuals, and both should continue to play a vital role, it is nevertheless necessary and appropriate for the Federal Government to accelerate its historic preservation programs and activities, to give maximum encouragement to agencies and individuals undertaking preservation by private means, and to assist State and local governments and the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States to expand and accelerate their historic preservation programs and activities.

# Las Vegas Sense of Place: The view of a Western & Environmental Historian

What if you think about Las Vegas as a western town with a familiar history? How can you locate this history on maps, in images and documents and then venture out to see what evidence of this history remains? What does this simple change in viewpoint do for internal and external perceptions of Vegas style historic preservation? Western & Environmental historians study place this way and have some tricks for preservationists working to better establish a Vegas sense of place.

# “Las Vegas shouldn’t exist”

- ▶ Almost a million hits and hundreds even for the exact phrase. Even people who love to visit most likely believe this.
- ▶ One of the most powerful myths about Las Vegas is that it was and is a randomly chosen spot in a trackless wasteland a place that does not make sense and shouldn't exist. Wastelands are empty and have no history.
- ▶ The myth of Vegas as a historyless place that shouldn't exist emphasizes the exception aspects of modern LV history and obscures the deeper history.
- ▶ People love to think of Las Vegas as the other and this tendency made historic preservation difficult for a long time. Deeper context helps explain the long history of the city, patterns of urban development and growth, the many architectural connections to the broader region and surrounding states and development/thereof vernacular forms of building and design.
- ▶ Restoring the richer, deeper history of this place and its region is critical for building a wider community sense of place and for the preservation of the range of historic resources and landscapes that remain from all phases of this more nuanced history.
- ▶ Historic buildings, sites and objects are important here for all the same reasons the 1966 Historic Preservation Act explained that historic resources were important everywhere:

**(4) the preservation of this irreplaceable heritage is in the public interest so that its vital legacy of cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, economic, and energy benefits will be maintained and enriched for future generations of Americans;**

- ▶ Because of its extraordinary history of migration and growth Vegas needs history and its artifacts more than many American places to make sure its citizens don't fall prey to the exceptional thinking and mythology that characterizes much of the thinking about this place. Exceptionalism explains only in Vegas terms like, “Used Houses” and the disdain for the old that this term implies.
- ▶ There have been big losses of historic fabric here in part because there weren't enough advocates to point to examples of environmentally sensitive design, indigenous traditions of desert living or to make the link with neighboring desert communities that had long celebrated these things.

# Not Exceptional—Just a very Interesting Western Place that should exist

## **A longer & more boring but important history:**

- ▶ Thousands of years of indigenous place making—they were here because of good natural resources.
- ▶ Critical transportation corridor for Spanish and then a succession of explorers—They stopped because of the above “The Meadows”
- ▶ Mormon consolidation of southern resources network—St. Thomas and points between
- ▶ Union Pacific acquisition of critical strategic resources—it made complete sense
- ▶ UP consolidation of LV resources town construction dictated by resource network
- ▶ Slow & steady, small-scale urban and regional development in sync with typical western patterns between teens and 1940s. It’s all very familiar for students of the West.

## **The Federal Period c. 1935-1955**

- ▶ Hoover Dam, Basic Magnesium, The Las Vegas Proving Ground, Nevada Test Site, AEC Administrative complexes, housing and services for military and federal employees. Also typical of the West during this period

## **The Human-Scaled Recreation Era c. 1940s-1970s**

- ▶ Hotels and resorts with mid-century and western style, access for cars, human-scaled structures, connection to and embrace of desert environment—another development pattern widely shared throughout the region. Toward the end of this period is when natural resources are clearly inadequate—also the period when Las Vegas becomes widely known as a strange and historyless wasteland outpost. Cue the myth.



**The Mirage Period**—If you are looking, this is the moment where familiar western forms of architecture and design and a clear and obvious relationship with desert environment and natural resources of region goes away not to start to return on a limited basis until the early 2000s enthusiasm for sustainable design.

- What's the next era? **The Taco Bell Era** when about 400,000 Taco Bell replica houses are chucked across the landscape with little regard for environment or regional traditions of design—a tough challenge for future preservationists but this phenomenon did not obliterate the past.
- This is also not a Las Vegas invention or another example of only-in-Vegas craziness. The same corporate builders did the same thing in AZ & CA—think Temecula, CA or Phoenix in the 1980s.
- Obvious but important take-away—Las Vegas is a century plus old western town with a human history going back many centuries that can only be understood within the broader context of the history of the American West.
- Less obvious, but also important take-away—the sensibilities of western and environmental history grounded in place can be very useful for historic preservationists working in the West or any other extreme environment (really any environment).
- Newcomers, outsiders, students have a very hard time dealing with places that don't obviously have a history in the way that they are used to.
- The overwhelming scope of the development of the past 25 years is hard to overcome.
- How can you teach students and the community about the value of historic preservation given these issues?
- Dig a little deeper and ground everything in historic and environmental context.

How can you take the landscape of the recent past and give it depth & context?

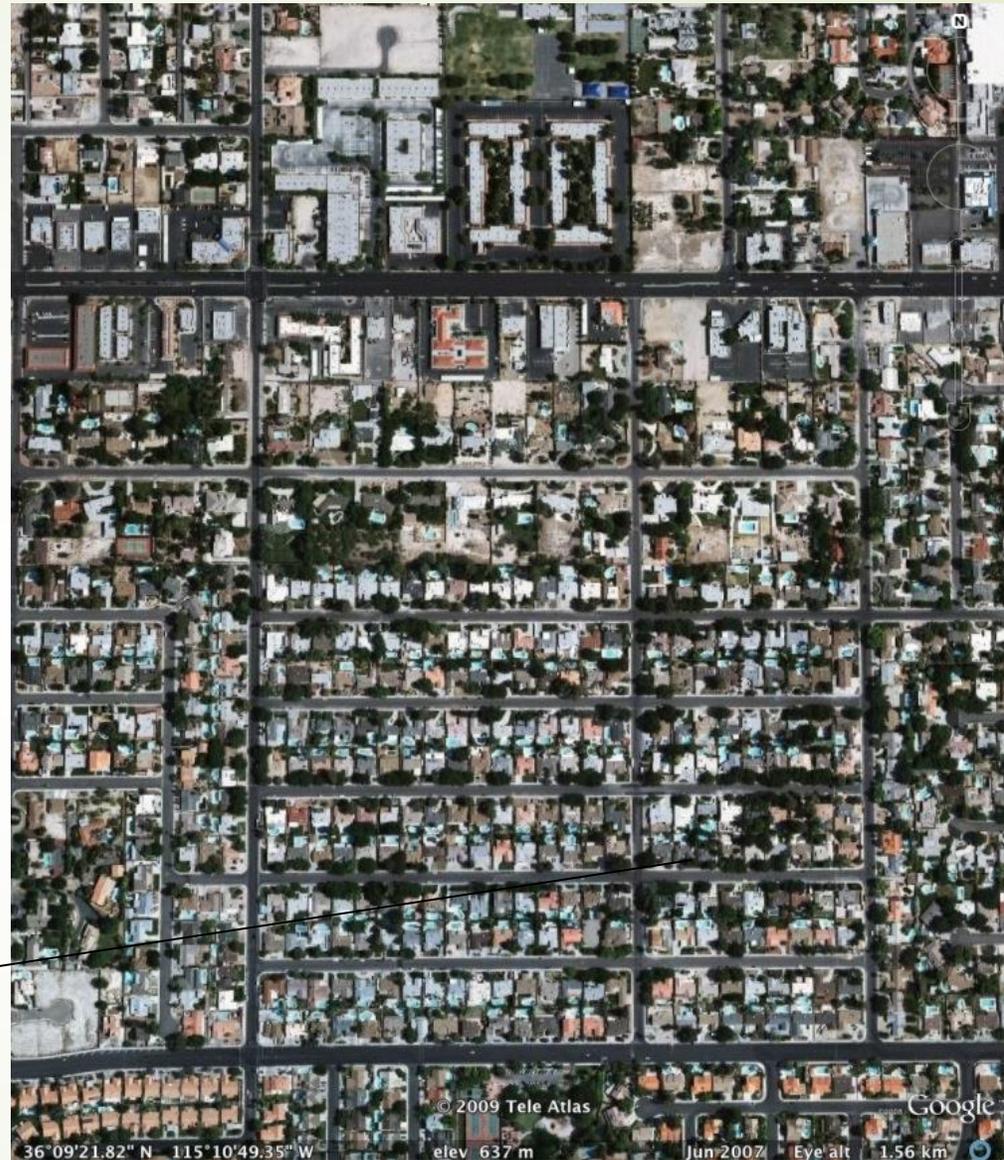
**A Sample Research Project:** Pick a house from the 1950s/60s (could even be 80s/90s) era and trace its history back through time. Pay special attention to the place it sits and its environmental context. How is the place connected to deep patterns of the history of the region? Could you make a compelling case for historic significance under the guidelines of the National Register of Historic Places on the basis of this relationship to cultural landscapes and broader patterns of history if you needed to?



Here's an example of a tricky house to try and contextualize.

## Our target house and neighborhood now.

A classic example of mid-century first-circle suburban development of contemporary historic importance because of its historically significant neighborhood, Cinderella style, and associations with historical figures but not obviously linked to deeper history of city and region for the causal observer.



Our research goal. Trace the history of the land under our house.  
How is it linked to history of city and region? Is there historical  
significance to be uncovered?

Important features for our  
study

1. Las Vegas Springs Preserve
2. Historic core of city with rings and grids of development over time.
3. Places where neighborhoods leapfrog in time and place
4. Remains of key historic features on the landscape and built environment



For Las Vegas, water is where you always start.

Lots of evidence and research about Indigenous and early Anglo settlement around abundant water sources. Very familiar pattern in the American West. Understanding extent of historic water sources helps explain history of city and growth of neighborhoods. The map of water in southern Nevada is also the map of human settlement and history. Seems obvious, but often overlooked.



### Locating the Site

**Map 3: Las Vegas, Nevada.**

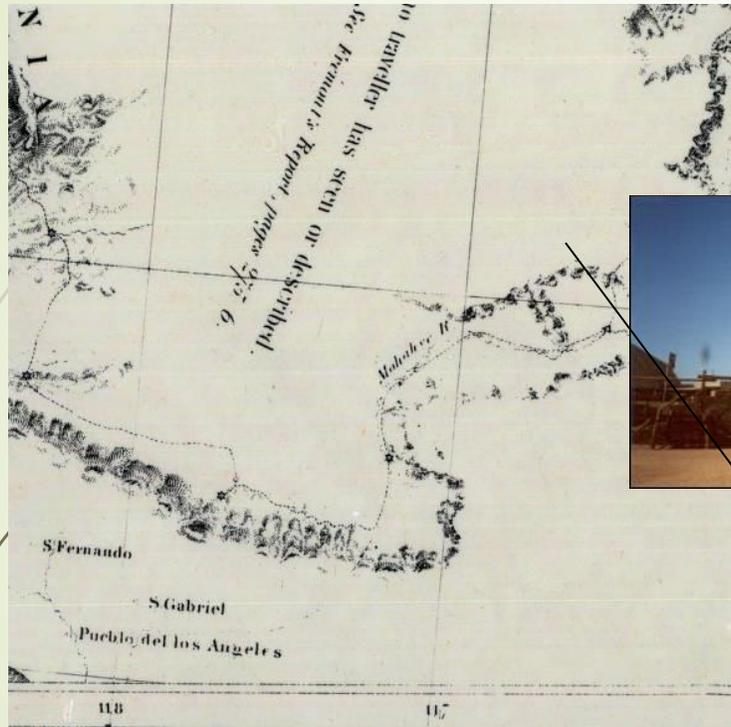


*(Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park Brochure. Used with permission from Nevada State Parks.)*

### Questions for Map 3

1. Locate the Mormon fort today. What is the proximity of the fort to downtown and the highways?
2. Comparing Maps 1, 2, and 3, as well as using what you know, or have heard about Las Vegas, NV, how would you say this area has changed over time?

Map your place through time with a focus on the water sources in the immediate region of your neighborhood.

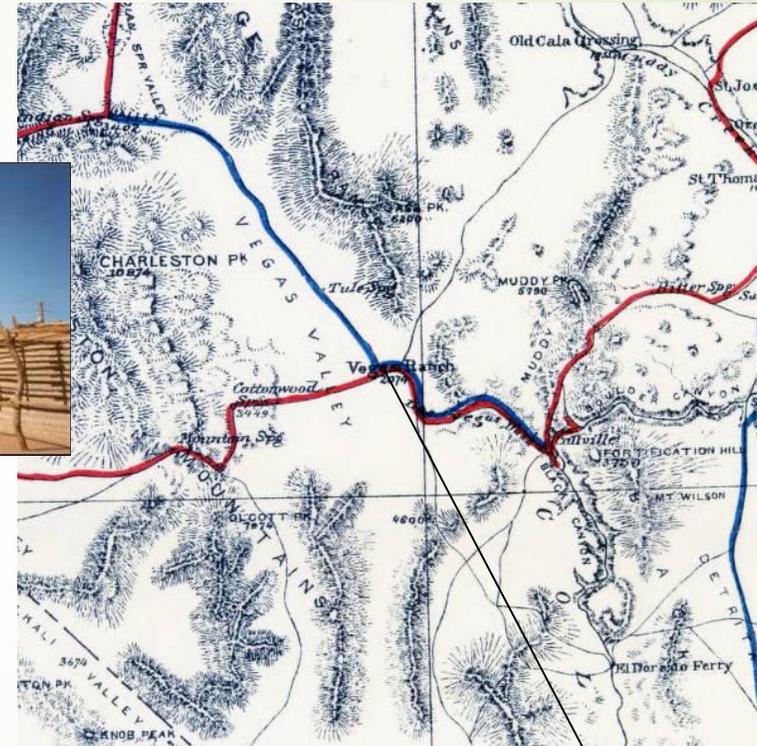


Early maps by  
John C. Fremont (1842)

Identified Las Vegas as rich source of springs and a very strategic desert oasis



Mormon Settlement established at spring head in 1855. Half way between SLC & California missions.



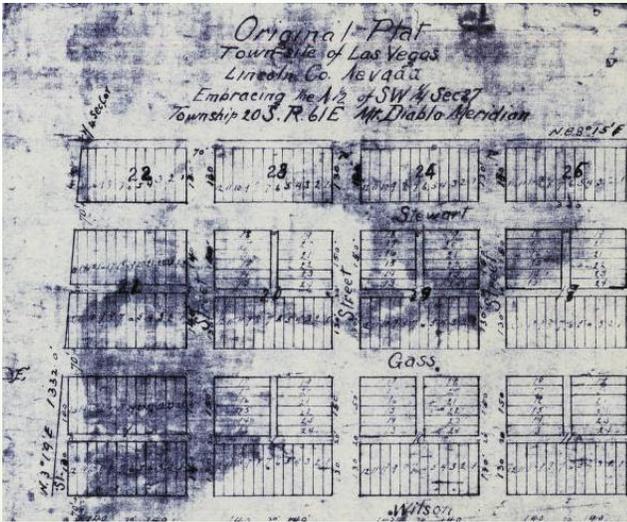
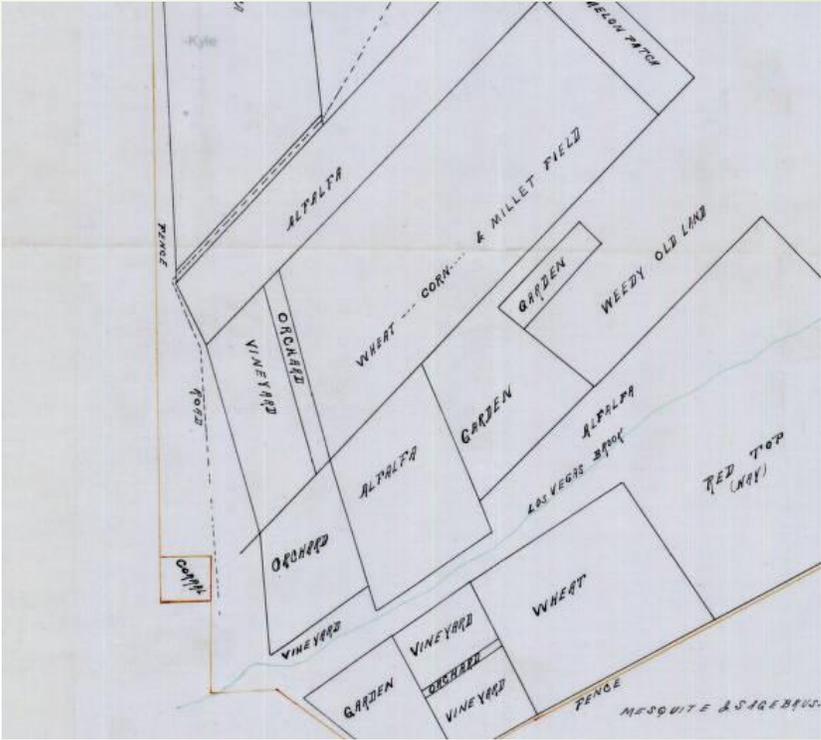
C. Hart Merriam (1891)

Our midcentury house is

By 1902 significant land under cultivation around springs area. 1906 blueprint identifies most significant springs and plan for building pipe network. Original LV Plat from 1906 sets town at terminus of ground water.

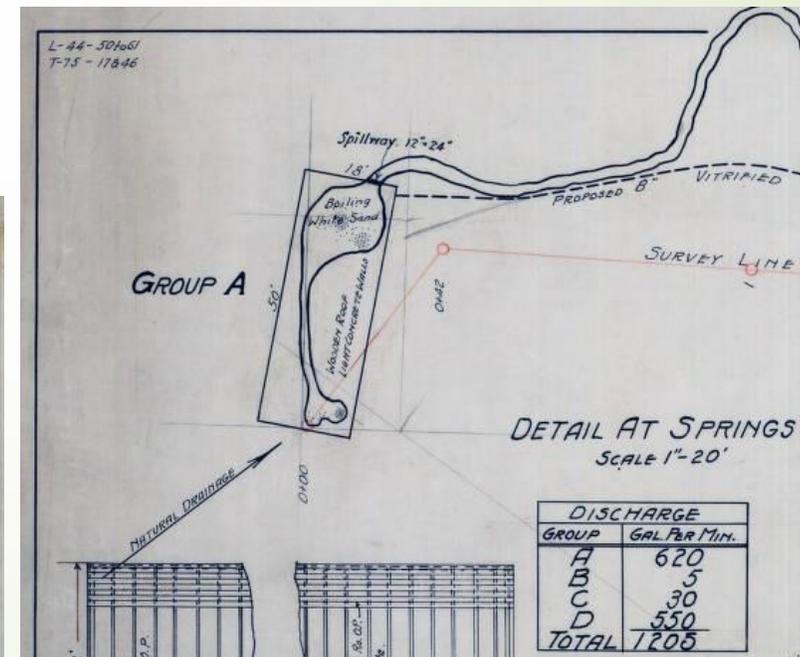
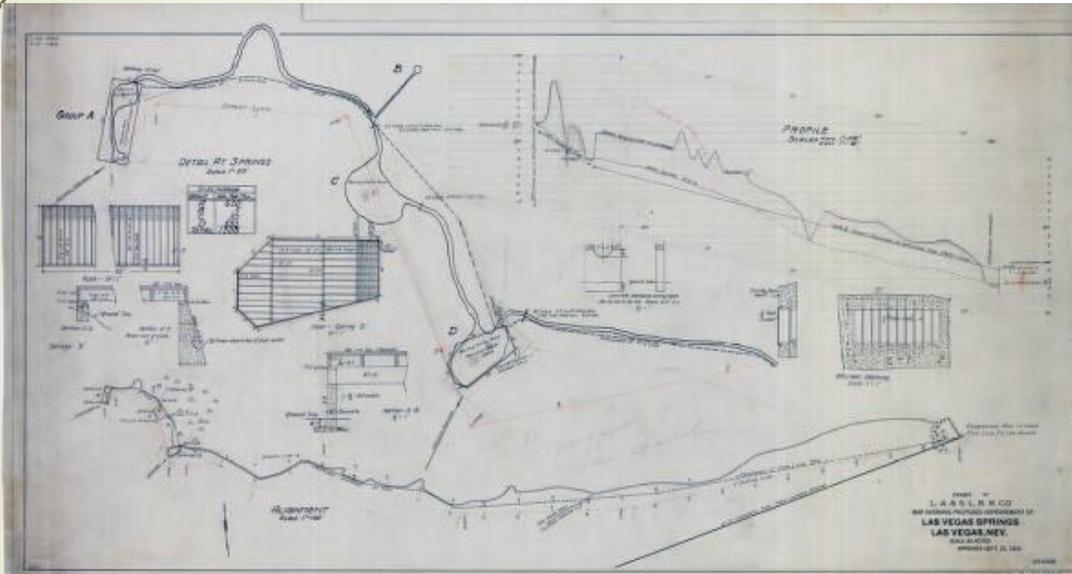


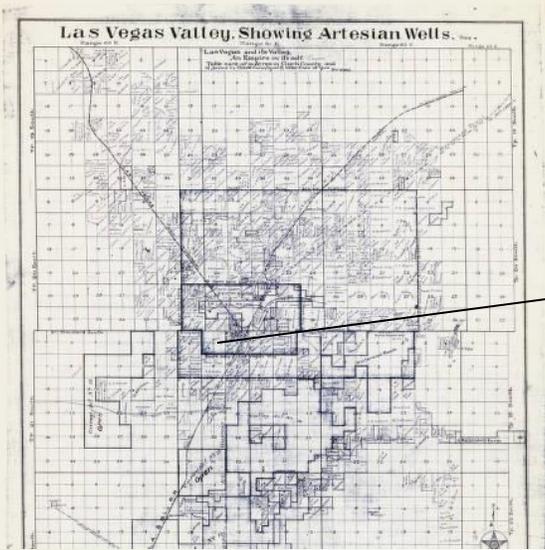
By 1910 patterns of residential and commercial development directly linked to water are set.



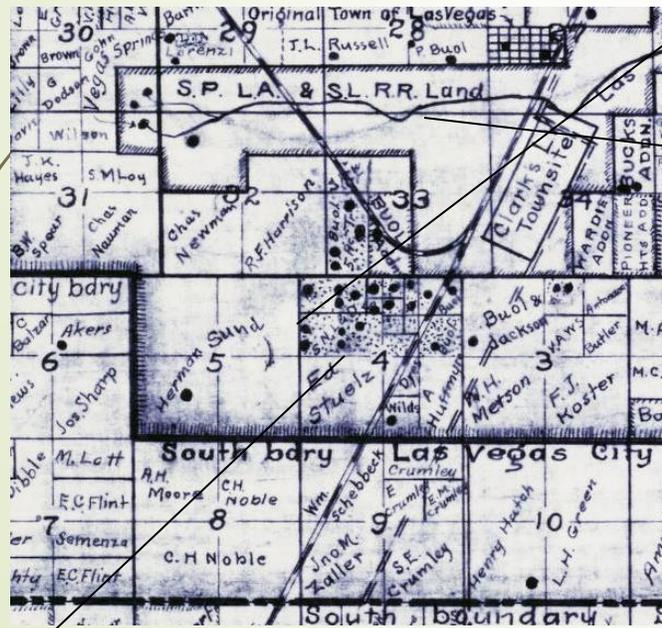


In 1920 springs redesigned again to serve growing city with population of c.15,000. Agriculture still the norm around springs but town creeping closer to water source as gravity system struggles to keep pace. City has grown but landscape shaped by springs and network of natural features still very clear to residents and planners.

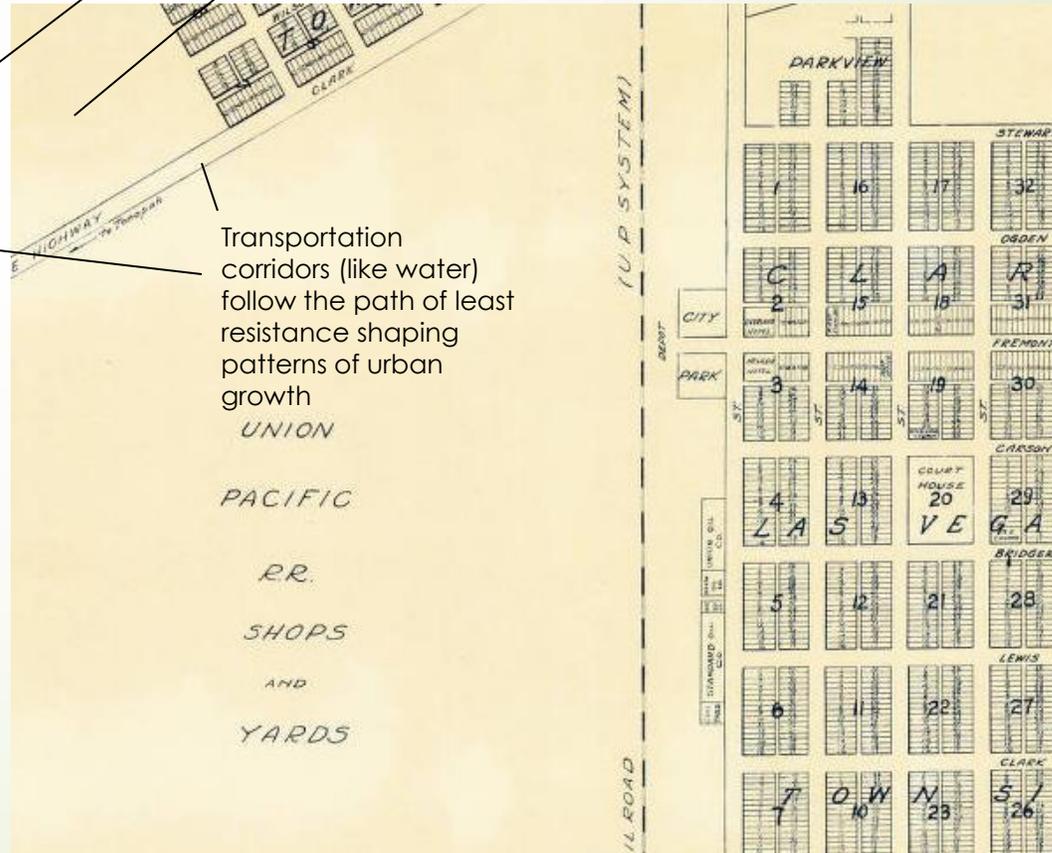




Our house site is on the 1920 map of wells and springs

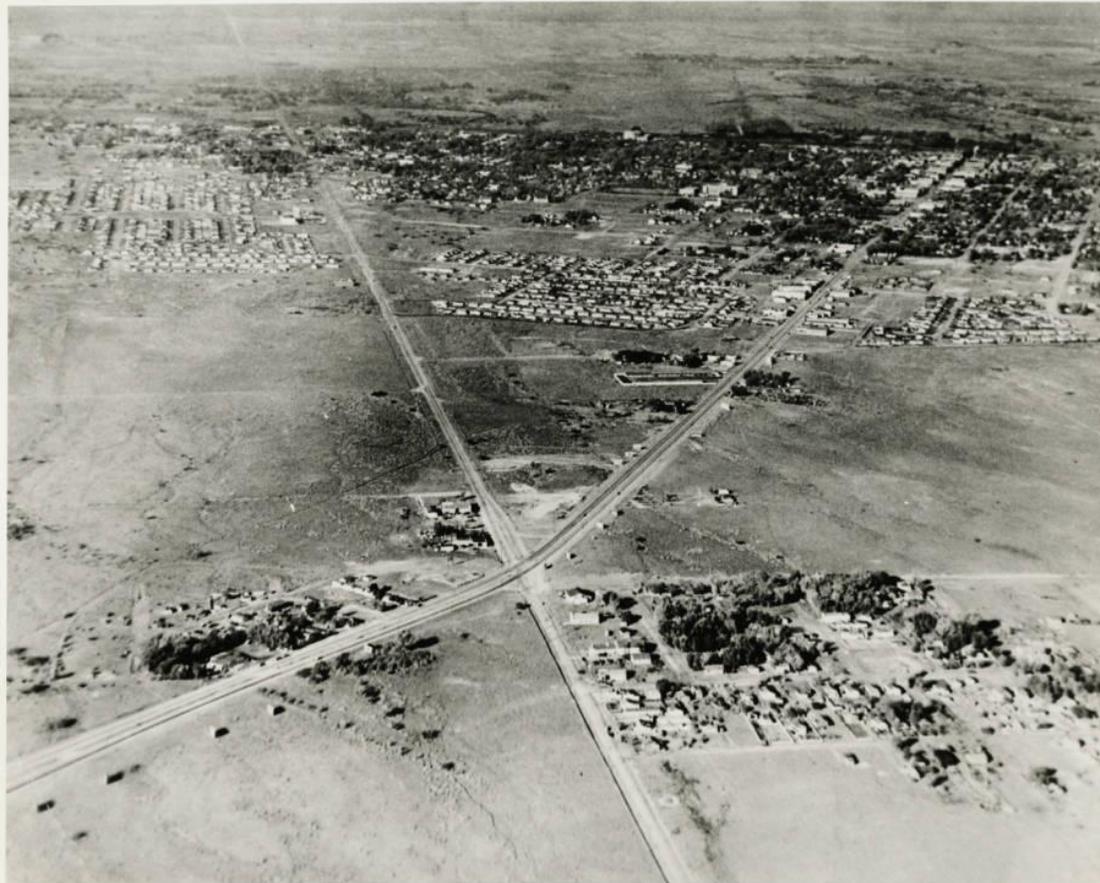


Clusters of development around springs & spring mounds (sources of organic enriched soil)



Transportation corridors (like water) follow the path of least resistance shaping patterns of urban growth

Looking West over neighbor and city moving out 1945. Letter from A.M. Folger discussing new need for expanded water for our target neighbor and other expansions moving into the 1950s.



Las Vegas - April 19, 1950  
W 23-3-3

Mr. Wm. Reinhardt:

I know you are cognizant of our need for additional water to take care of the ever increasing number of consumers in Las Vegas, and believe you will be interested in the following recent developments:

In addition to the usual run of new services, the following three major developments appear to be maturing, as we have been asked to design the water main extensions to serve them:

1. Ridge View, southeast and adjacent to Huntridge, extending from Oakay to Franklin - - - - - 80 houses
2. Federal Development Tract, west of McNeil Tract on Charleston at west city limit - - - - - 252 houses
3. Economy Homes, to be constructed by the Flumleigh Nevada Corporation in the SW $\frac{1}{4}$  SW $\frac{1}{4}$  and NW $\frac{1}{4}$  SW $\frac{1}{4}$  Sec 2 T 21 N, R 31 E, between Greenwood Homes and Charleston Square, quarter mile south of Charleston Boulevard - - - - - 360 houses

These have not yet reached the stage where we could request work order authority as the developers have not obtained F.H.A. approval, but it appears they will eventually. In addition to these prospective increases, we had an increase of 461 new services last year and 124 more so far this year or a total of 605, besides the Paradise Tract with 47 proposed new homes in the first unit and Alta Vista with 36, the water mains being just completed for the last two named.

On the basis of 3 people to each home and a per capita consumption of 650 g.p.d. during peak months, the 1380 potential and actual increased consumers will require about 2,750,000 gallons per day in addition to present production.

A. M. Folger



# We could keep going....

- ▶ What emerges from this type of research is liberating...Vegas has as much history as most western places even before you take on the truly exceptional aspects of our town.
- ▶ The artifacts and places associated with this history are as interestingly entwined as in other places and there is a lot left.
- ▶ Even new areas and seemingly historyless zones have a rich past that when revealed helps provide a geography of history and culture that can be toured, and preserved.
- ▶ We are in the midst of a very significant wave of appreciation for the history of the region and the historic fabric that is much more intact than might have been assumed even ten years ago.
- ▶ A new generation of natives and newcomers are less encumbered by the mythic history and more willing to embrace the kinds of buildings, structures and objects that are the natural result of life in this specific desert landscape.
- ▶ It may be less interesting to embrace the idea that Las Vegas is not an exceptional place but it has enabled the growth of a critical mass of people recognizing the way old buildings help make a sense of place, are an critical part of mature urban economic growth, can help generate value for individuals and businesses.