

# How the 'West Side' Came Into Existence

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

Last week the Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice reprinted an Sept. 25, 1980 article written by Prof. Roosevelt Fitzgerald on "How the 'West Side' Came Into Existence." He continued the series in our Oct. 2, 1980 issue. We are reprinting this continued series, particularly during this month of Black History observance.

The McWilliams Townsite, as it was originally surveyed, was not an extremely large area. It extended from what is now called "A" Street on the east to "H" Street on the west. Bonanza Road was the southern boundary and present day Washington St. was the northern. These were not, initially, the names of those streets.

In 1905, Bonanza Road was known as Clark Street, McWilliams was called Gass and Morgan was Stewart Street on the south was the northernmost edge of the townsite. "A" Street was called First Street, "B" was Second Street, "C", "D", "E", "F", and "G" Streets were Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh. Where "H" Street is today, could be found the westernmost boundary. Clark, or Bonanza Road, was the southernmost boundary. There was nothing beyond those boundaries other than the Helen J. Stewart ranch to the northeast and the Mormon Fort directly to the east — both less than a mile away. When the McWilliams Townsite started, there were no Adams, Madison, Jackson and other streets. What eventually became the westside, consisted of a mere twenty-eight blocks of territory. Quite small.

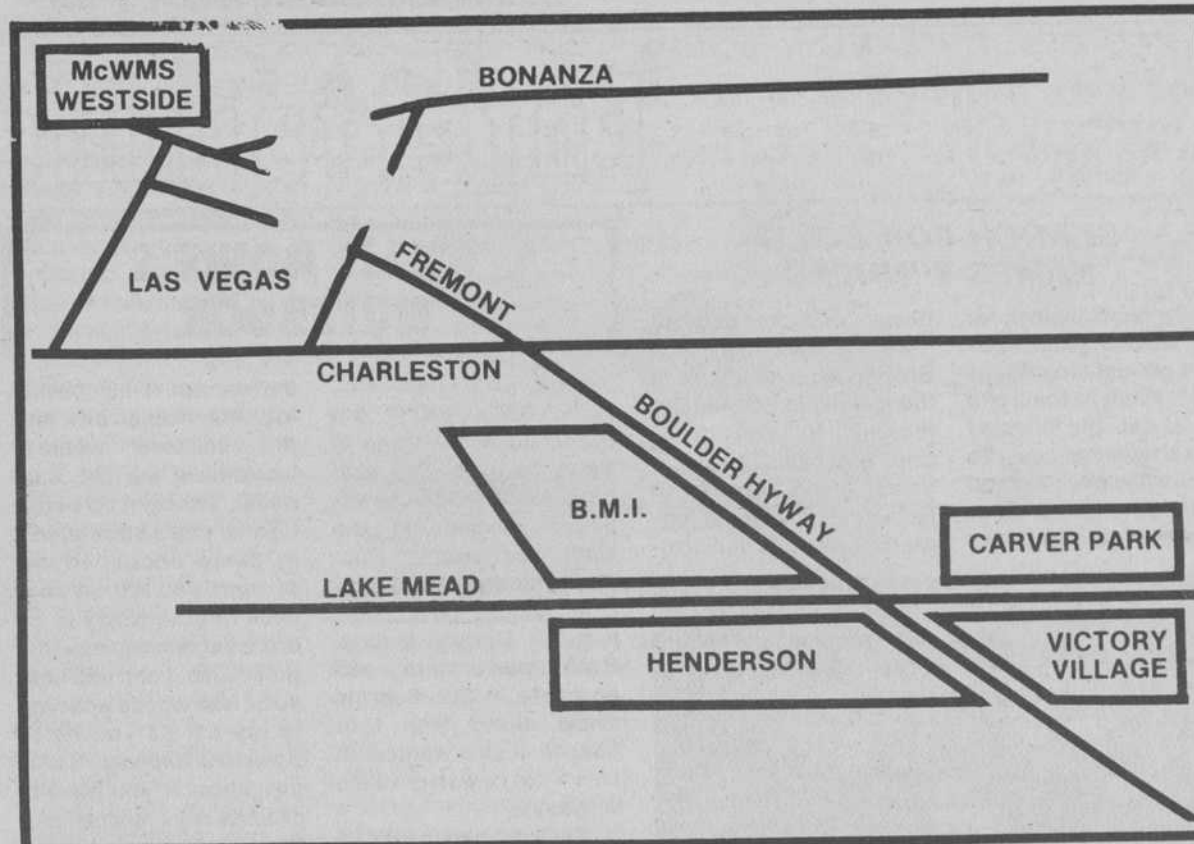
In 1940, when Black Las Vegans were exiled to the westside, it had not been involved in any real development. The few structures there had not been well constructed or maintained. As whites moved out, blacks moved in. They found an already deteriorating condition waiting to greet them. The less than 200 who went there, hardly found enough available

housing. When B opened for operations, it was accompanied by an influx of newcomers. Their arrival only heightened the already deplorable conditions blacks were being forced to live in.

Blacks from Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and other places, found themselves in dire straits. The recollections of some of those who arrived here then gives us some appreciation of the manner in which Blacks were treated in Las Vegas during the early 1940s.

Ms. Sarah Ann Knight Freddy, who arrived here in 1942, recalls that there were very few houses on the westside — a dozen or so. For most of the people, there were only tents or whatever other kind of ramshackle shelters they could construct. Some slept on the outside or in their cars. Others remember the large number of people who built platforms in order to elevate themselves off the ground and they would place tarps across them. Sometimes, during the hotter months, they would wet the tarps in order to gain a bit of respite from the heat. Few of these efforts really helped the situation.

The living conditions were so terrible that a large number of people simply sought to stay away from their living quarters. Not only was the heat unbearable, but they also had to deal with the lack of sanitary facilities. No one had an inside toilet or running water. There were common faucets from which water was gotten and brought and stored in galvanized buckets. Large number three tubs were in great demand for



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bathing and clothes washing. Clothes lines were strung from one place to another. While there was hardly a worry that someone would take what did not belong to them, there were still risks, of a different sort, involved.

After a hard day on the job at BMI, an enterprising person might return home and begin to take care of those basic necessities like cooking and cleaning. A fire would be built, outside of the tent, both for safety and comfort sake. After preparing a meal and having dinner, water would be heated up and dirty clothing would be put in for an overnight soak. Early the next morning they would be washed and rinsed and strung up before

going to work. Often, as we all know, after such effort, nature might take a turn for the worse. It was not unusual for a "wind" to come up all of a sudden. The dripping clothing would be like a magnet in trapping particles of dust and dirt. Within a matter of minutes, what had been sparkling, clean clothes, would have become merely hanging mud pies with different shapes. The person, upon their return, would simply take them down, shake them out and rinse them out again.

Their problems were not restricted simply to the westside. Some housing was provided at the job site in Henderson for the workers. The Mc-

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