Form 10-300 (Rev. 6-72)

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

STATE:
New Mexico
COUNTY:
San Miguel
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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Las Vegas Plaza was officially laid out on April 6, 1835. On March 30 of that year four residents of the Jurisdiction of San Miguel del Bado, Juan de Dios Maese, Manuel Duran, Miguel Archuleta, and José Antonio Casados, on behalf of themselves and twenty-five other landless heads of families had petitioned the authorities of New Mexico, then a Territory of the Mexican Republic, for a land grant on the Gallinas River in the region known as the Vegas Grandes, "the Great Meadows." The grant was approved by Governor Francisco Sarracino and the Territorial Deputation, and Alcalde José de Jesus Ulibarri, the chief local official of San Miguel del Bado, in whose jurisdiction the new settlement was to be located was instructed to place the settlers in possession. On April 6, he designated the outside boundaries of the grant, allotted farming lands to family heads and selected the site for the plaza, the traditional center of any new settlement.

In common with most outlying New Mexico communities, Ulibarri specified that the plaza was to be surrounded by a defensive "And the Plaza marked out, the wall in the form of a square on the outside of it should be built by all." This wall was apparently of short duration as it was not mentioned by early visitors. A well was dug in the center of the plaza, later supplemented by an acequia which brought water to the southwest area of the plaza from the hills to the west. ditch became the acequia madre or main irrigation ditch which flowed west around the plaza then ran south for the use of farming land before emptying into the Gallinas River. Abert of the U.S. Corps of Army Engineers in his report of New Mexico made after U.S. Occupation, noted on September 24, 1846: "Through the midst of the town there was a large 'acequia' or canal for the purpose of supplying the town with water and of irrigating the fields."

An account of the peaceful entry of Brigadier General Stephen Watts Kearny into Las Vegas on August 15, 1846 by Lt. W.H. Emory gives the first specific description of the plaza area surrounded by its typical one-story adobe structures:

At eight, precisely, the general was in the public square where he was met by the alcalde and the people, many of whom were mounted; . .The General pointed to the top of one of their houses, which are built of one story and suggested to the alcalde that if he would go to that place, he and his staff would follow, and, from that point, where all could hear and see, he would speak to them. (Emory Report, p.49)

Kearny proclaimed New Mexica a Territory of the United States, guaranteed protection to the new citizens and their property, and took the oath of allegiance from the town officials, after

(See Continuation Sheet 扣)

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet #1)

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7. DESCRIPTION Continued:

which, as Emory continues: "We descended by the same rickety ladder by which we climbed to the tops of the houses,..."

Documentation is strong that the alcalde's house, where Kearny and the others stood is still standing, and is the present Dice Apartments.

The Las Vegas settlement and the plaza were not very impressive to early visitors, such as Private Jacob S. Robinson, who wrote on August 14, 1846: "At night we encamped at the town of La Vegas (sic), where the houses are built of adobes, or sun-dried bricks. Each house has a little porthole at the backside... a window." On the same date, Private Abraham S. Robinson described the settlement as little more than "an assemblage of mud houses covering a square of fifteen acres." Lt. Abert recorded a similar description:

There was a large open space in the middle of the town; the streets run north and south, east and west; the houses are built of "adobes." The...roofs, have enough inclination to turn the rain, the walls...continued up one foot above the roof are pierced for this purpose.

Trader William Kronig wrote in 1849: "Las Vegas was an adobe-built town composed of about 100 small shacks as huts placed at random. A few were built along the main traveled road and around a square." James A. Bennett, serving with the U.S. Dragoons in New Mexico from 1850-1856 described his first view of Las Vegas thus: "There appeared a great pile of unbaked brick which was the village of Las Vegas, a town with a central plaza or square." In 1854, W.W.H. Davis, attorney for the Territory wrote the following less flattering account:

Las Vegas is a dirty mud town of some seven hundred inhabitants; many of the houses were in ruins, and most of the others wore an exceedingly uncomfortable appearance. We halted our teams in the Plaza, but which more resembled a muddy field than a public square, and all sorts of four-footed domestic animals were roaming at large over it.

By 1857, however, the settlement had become a thriving community, as described by William B. Napton, a traveler along the Santa Fe Trail:

As we drew near Las Vegas we noted that the "bottoms" of the little creek running near the town were cultivated in corn, with occasional patches of vegetables, the land enclosed by fences, but flanked by irrigation ditches supplying the necessary water and the crops were looking (See Continuation Sheet #2)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet #2)

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7. DESCRIPTION Continued:

remarkably well, although the weather had been dry for some weeks...Las Vegas was a compactly-built town of probably two or three hundred inhabitants, the houses are for the most part built of adobe bricks or tufts of sod, with a corral in the rear. The herds...were driven in about sunset.

A later photograph taken about 1879 shows housing extending south of the plaza along the acequia madre.

The original church of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores de Las Vegas, built by the settlers was located near the southwest corner of the plaza and faces east. There is no record extant of the ecclesiastical license authorizing this structure but it was in use by October 15, 1850, when Private Bennett stopped at Las Vegas and noted: "The...streets all look alike since only the Church is higher than one story." W.W.H. Davis during his visit in 1854 gives the best single description of the church:

I paid a visit to the antiquated mud church, which looked as though it had stood the wear and tear of more years than was likely to be meted out in the future. It stands upon the Plaza, and over it hangs an old cracked bell, the tones of which will be doleful sounds upon the ear. The form is that of a cross, with a damp earthen floor, and void of seats, or other accomodations for worshippers.

A sketch of this church of the early 1850's shows it to be of adobe with stone buttresses and a curious, square-shaped, false front made of boards. It was razed about 1870 and replaced by the present stone church located one block west of the original structure.

During the 1850's, the well in the center of the plaza was surrounded by a low wooden wall. Later, a high platform was added to support a wooden superstructure topped by a circular blade and fan assembly. By 1879, the blade assembly had been removed and the windmill was no longer in use, but served as a hanging gallows by the Vigilantes. Citizen complaints that the hanging bodies could be seen by the incoming railroad passengers led to the removal of the "Hanging Windmill" in 1881.

The coming of the railroad on July 4, 1879, changed the face of the plaza area and resulted in the introduction of the architectural styles and building materials prevalent in the eastern part of the United States. The Dice Apartments and the adjoining adobe structures on the north side of plaza are probably the only remaining original buildings. Although the documentation seems clear that the Dice Apartments was the house on top of which Kearny addressed the citizens of Las Vegas, its appearance has (See Continuation Sheet #3)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

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(Continuation Sheet #3)

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7. DESCRIPTION Continued:

been altered several times. The single story adobe buildings contrast sharply with the stone-cut facing, wrought iron and sculptured trim and the ornate Victoryan false fronts of the later structures.

These include the red brick and cut-stone three story Plaza Hotel, built in 1880 at the west end of the north block, and the three-story "Great Emporium" of Charles Ilfeld built in 1882 of squared rock, enlarged and refaced in multi-colored marble in 1890. Both are of the Italian Renaissance Revival style of the Each remains in use, one as a hotel and the other a hardware store. The John D. Veeder Building, across the street from the Plaza Hotel on the west block and built around the same time, is of ornate red brick decoration, and cut stone with an impressive carved-stone false front. The remaining one-story adobe west wing of the famous Exchange Hotel built in 1850 is located on National Street just off the southwest corner of the plaza, and is now used for storage. The now vacant Romero Mercantile Company Building on South Pacific Street, on the southside of the plaza occupies the site of the original 1881 adobe structure which had been next door to the since-demolished east wing of the Exchange Hotel. The site of the Imperial Saloon of the infamous Vicente Silva is situated near the center of the south block, an area once crowded with such establishments. two-story First National Bank Building on the southeast corner of the plaza was constructed of cut-stone in 1880 and is now used for community purposes.

The busy plaza was cleared of all livestock after the smallpox epidemic of 1877, and soon after all wagons and teams were not permitted to remain on the plaza after discharging their cargoes. Stagecoaches gradually disappeared after the coming of the railroad. The Las Vegas Street Railway Company offered round trip, horse-drawn trolley service around the plaza first and then to the train depot.

By 1881 the citizens of West Las Vegas had decided to renovate the center of the plaza into a park and F. O. Kihlberg was appointed Park Commissioner. After the removal of the "Hanging Windmill" the well was filled in and the oval-shaped park was enclosed by a white picket fence with four gates. In 1882 one-hundred cottonwood trees secured in Puerto de Luna were planted, together with low-cut shrubbery which lined the wide, graveled main path laid from east to west over the site of the old well. Smaller paths led to four, large circular flower beds. White street lamps were placed atop each of the four gates. Later, a utility pole with arc lights was placed in the center of the plaza, and still later, this in turn gave way to a covered, eight-sided bandstand.

(See Continuation Sheet #4)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet #4)

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7. DESCRIPTION Continued:

Iron park lights were later installed and wooden-planked sidewalks built in front of the stores encircled the plaza. The tracks of the street railway were later torn out, and brick paving laid in the streets around the plaza. Asphalt now covers that paving, the picket fence and flower beds removed. The sidewalks have been cemented and only the trees and inoperative iron park lights near the bandstand remain. A Santa Fe Trail Marker placed in the plaza in 1910 by the Daughters of the American Revolution and a bronze plaque encased in a piece of petrified wood commemorating Kearny's peaceful entrance into the plaza erected by the Las Vegas Historical Society in 1934 stand in the plaza area with a 20mm anti-aircraft field piece dedicated to the local heroes of the Bataan Death March during the Second World War.

The plaza area retains a distinct character which is daily enriched by the activities of its citizens. It will continue to serve these people, remaining a tribute to their lives and accomplishments.



PERIOD (Check One or More as A	(appropriate)		
Pre-Columbian	☐ 16th Century	☐ 18th Century	🙀 20th Century
☐ 15th Century	17th Century	19th Century	
SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicabl	e and Known) March	30, 1835, Apri	1 6, 1835
REAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Che	ck One or More as Appropri	ate)	
Abor iginal	☐ Education	▼ Political	Urban Planning
Prehistoric	Engineering	Religion/Phi-	Other (Specify)
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Agriculture	☐ Invention	Science	
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Conservation	Music	▼ Transportation	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Las Vegas plaza and the West Las Vegas settlement played an important part in New Mexico history from the later years of the Mexican Republic until after the coming of the railroad to East Las Vegas in 1879.

The site of the settlement was well-known before 1835. The trader, Josiah Gregg, leading an advance party from a caravan on his first trip down the Santa Fe Trail in the Spring of 1831, mentioned meeting a sheep herder who lived in a hut and grazed sheep for others in the Vegas Grandes. This was probably José Antonio Casados, an original grantee, who testified in 1887 before the Surveyor-General that he had herded sheep on the "vegas grandes" in 1829; that Mexican soldiers had encamped directly opposite the site of the then future plaza from 1829 to 1831; and that the vegas had been used for grazing by others from San Miguel and even as far as Santa Fe.

The plaza is the same as laid out in the Act of Possession of April 6, 1835 by which José de Jesus Ulibarri, Alcalde of the Jurisdiction of San Miguel del Vado selected the side of the plaza and parceled out lands for residences and farming. On March 3, 1835, Juan de Dios Maese, Manuel Duran, Miguel Archuleta and José Antonio Casados, on behalf of themselves and twenty-five other landless, heads of families petitioned Governor Francisco Sarracino and the Territorial Deputation for a land grant to the vegas grandes, which was approved on March 30, 1835 by José de Jesus Ulibarri.

This new settlement lay in the path of the Santa Fe Trail, opened in 1821 by Charles Becknell, some 20 miles south of the watering place at La Junta (now Watrous) where the Mountain and Cimarron branches of the trail met. The plaza became a market place, with the citizens anxious to barter for the manufactured goods and supplies of the traders.

During the War with Mexico, 1846-1848, Brigadier General Stephen Watts Kearny with a contingent of the "Army of the West," rode into the plaza, without contest, on the morning of August 15, 1846, and from the roof of the alcalde's house Proclaimed New Mexico to be a part of the Union; guaranteed protection for the citizens; and took the oath of allegiance to the United States from the local officials. Troops were stationed at Las Vegas to quell the revolts in 1847 against the American Occupation in the surrounding region, at Mora, January (See Continuation Sheet #5)

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A. Bennett A Dragoon in New Mexico 1850-1856, 1948.	<u>James</u>					
(See Continuation Sheet #6)						
10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES	DINATES					
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12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFIC	ATION .					
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As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law	luded in the					
89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion National Register.						
in the National Register and certify that it has been	11 17 71 17 1/4.					
forth by the National Park Service. The recommended						
level of significance of this nomination is: Director, Office of Archeology and Historic I	Preservation					
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Date 10/16/14						
Name DAVID W. MING. ATTEST:						
DAVID W. KING						
Title State Historic Preservation W The	u e and					
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet #5)

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NATIONAL REGISTER

8. SIGNIFICANCE Continued:

20; Santa Clara, (Wagon Mound), in May; at Los Valles, in June; and at La Cienega in July. Las Vegas became an important supply depot for Fort Union, established August 2, 1851 and played a similarly important role in the Civil War.

After the defeat of the Union forces in the Battle of Valverde, February 21, 1862, Confederate forces marched through Albuquerque and occupied Santa Fe. Governor Henry L. Connelly had already removed the capital to Las Vegas and established his office in the Exchange Hotel on the plaza. He returned to Santa Fe after the Battle of Glorieta March 26-28, 1862 which destroyed Confederate hopes of capturing Fort Union.

Operating from impressive establishments around the plaza in the 1860's and 1870's mercantile houses such as those built by Charles Ilfeld and by Hilario Romgro carried on a trade extending throughout the Territory, southern Colorado, west Texas, and even as far as eastern Arizona. Transportation firms such as those of the Romero Brothers, and the Blanchard Brothers, thrived before the coming of the railroads, crowding the plaza with their muletrains --eight or twelve teams pulling a string of five or eight freight wagons. In the spring of 1874, Messrs Jerems and Mitchell of Fort Smith, Arkansas established a tri-weekly stagecoach, freight service mail route between Las Vegas and Mesilla, New Mexico, to the south. Other lines unloading in front of the Exchange Hotel included the famous Southern Overland Stagecoach Lines on its way from Kansas City to Santa Fe, and the Barlow and Sanderson Stagecoach Line.

The social and economic life of the plaza and West Las Vegas changed with the coming of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway into East Las Vegas on July 4, 1879. Most obvious among the arrivals by rail were the outlaws, a new breed who would be the cause for much of the growing resentment by the local citizens toward later newcomers. Jesse James the outlaw arrived in December, 1880, taking the shuttle carriage from the Exchange Hotel to the famous Montezuma Resort Hotel. His killer, former gang member Bob Ford became a familiar and much disliked figure on the plaza until he left. Sheriff Pat Garrett placed "Billy the Kid" and his gang in the jail just off the plaza after capturing them at Stinking Springs on December 23, 1880. Sheriff Garrett nearly lost the outlaw, Dave Rudabaugh, to an angry mob on the plaza while enroute to the train depot on the following Rudabaugh had killed the jailer earlier. "Doc" Holliday stopped over on his way from Dodge City to Tucson and visited one of the saloons on the southside of the plaza where he shot a Charles White, an acquaintance from his "Dodge City Days." A Vigilante Committee was formed in East Las Vegas in the 1880's, and they would often march in force on the jail and take the

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

HATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

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81 SIGNIFICANCE Continued:

prisoners and hang them on the "Hanging Windmill" in the center of the plaza; and after 1881 when it was dismantled, from the bridge over the Gallinas River and later from telegraph poles. The violence continued into the 1890's when the notorious Vicente Silva and his "Society of Bandits of New Mexico" controlled West Las Vegas from his "Imperial Saloon" on the south side of the plaza. He was killed by his own men after having his brother-in-law murdered, and killing his wife. Members of the Gorras Blancas (White Caps), a movement formed by small Hispano farmers opposed to the enclosure of their lands, donned white sheets on the night of March 10, 1890 and rode around the plaza distributing copies of their "platform" and firing their pistols.

The plaza area benefitted at first from the coming of the Santa Fe Railway. But the fact that the tracks were not laid across the Gallinas River to West Las Vegas inevitably resulted in the shifting of importance and activity to the new railroad town of East Las Vegas, built on railroad contracts. Business from the surrounding area died slowly as local customers became unwilling to pay extra to have goods further transported across the river from the depot. And the boom expected after the completion of the 1882 spur line across the river, north of the plaza to the Montezuma Hotel resort proved illusory.

The first Annual Reunion of Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders was held in Las Vegas, 24-26 June, 1899, and featured Colonel Roosevelt, then Governor of New York at the head of his Volunteers in the Regimental Parade which was reviewed by New Mexico Governor Miguel A. Otero, Colorado Governor Alva Adams, and N. O. Murphy, Governor of Arizona. This event was celebrated annually until the mid-1960's

Despite the changes and declining activity of Las Vegas, the original plaza of 1835 continues to serve as the economic and political center of West Las Vegas and much of the surrounding area.

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(See Continuation Sheet #7)

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

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