

WESTSIDE SCHOOL  
(Branch No. 1, Las Vegas Grammar School)  
Corner of Washington Avenue and D Street  
Las Vegas  
Clark County  
Nevada

HABS NV-65  
*HABS NV-65*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY  
WESTSIDE SCHOOL**

**HABS No. NV-65**

**Location:** Corner of Washington Avenue and D Street  
Clark County, Las Vegas, Nevada

**Present Owner:** City of Las Vegas  
400 East Stewart Avenue  
Las Vegas, NV 89101-2942

**Present Use:** KCEP Radio Station

**Significance:** Built in 1922 with a northern addition built in 1927-1928 and a separate annex building addition in 1948, the Westside School receives its significance as the oldest remaining school in the city of Las Vegas. Westside School was originally called "Branch No. 1, Las Vegas Grammar School". Although socially significant to many groups, the Westside School is especially significant to the local African-American community as it was the initial exposure to racially integrated education along the Westside. Its significance to the state and the local community is indicated by its listing on the National Register of Historic Places No. 79001460, the Nevada State Register of Historic Places, and the city of Las Vegas Historic Property Register.

**PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1922<sup>1</sup>
2. Architect: Allison & Allison
3. Original and subsequent owners and occupants:
  - 1884 Helen J. Stewart
  - 1924 Clark County School District
  - 1967 School closes
  - 1975 City of Las Vegas, Economic Opportunity Board of Clark County
4. Builder, Contractor, Supplier: Unknown
5. Original plans and construction: Original architectural or structural plans have not been located. The building's original form and most of its materials are extant with the exception of the majority of the exterior doors and windows which were reconstructed in the 1980s.
6. Alterations and additions:
  - 1928 Two-room addition to existing building.
  - 1942 "Old County" building added to the site.
  - 1948 Annex addition. The Annex building was designed by A.L. Worswick and built by Lembke Construction. The "U" shaped Annex consists of classrooms and administration offices.
  - 1960 Room addition to the north wing of the Annex building.
  - ca. 1960 Removal of the "Old County" building.
  - 1977 Renovation to the Annex Building
  - 1980 Structural Stabilization

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<sup>1</sup> *Las Vegas Age*, September 2, 1922. Also see *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps* and the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, May 25, 1949 for verification on the construction date even though the National Register of Historic Places nomination form for the Westside School notes 1921 as the construction date and the National Register of Historic Places Plaque on the building states 1923.

B. Historical Context

Westside School was constructed in 1922 on land that was donated by Las Vegas pioneer Helen J. Stewart to the Clark County School District.<sup>2</sup> A petition to build the Westside School was circulated early that year in February 1922, bonds sold that spring, and construction began mid-summer. The two-room building was designed by Allison & Allison and was the first grammar school to be erected in the West Las Vegas area.<sup>3</sup> It was modeled after the Kindergarten and Manual Arts Buildings located at the Fourth Street school campus which was built in the Mission Revival style.<sup>4</sup> The Westside School, however, only contained two rooms to accommodate first and second grades.<sup>5</sup> The first principal of the school was Ms. Ruth Fyfe who served from 1924-1935.<sup>6</sup> The first year in which the first African-American students began attending the school was 1926 and would be the first school of attendance for racially integrated classes. By 1928, two additional rooms were added at the north end of the building to accommodate third and fourth graders.<sup>7</sup>

There were two major waves of migrants that entered Las Vegas. The initial wave occurred during the 1930s when thousands of working men moved their families to the valley for the construction of the Hoover Dam. African-Americans were among the first of many pioneers to settle in the Las Vegas valley where they purchased land and in the 1930s they had established businesses. Due to segregation practices, a racial divide was made in a thriving community and forced African-American families and businesses to relocate to West Las Vegas. Despite being segregated, African-American businesses continued to flourish with the new military and defense industries introduced during WWII and in conjunction with the growing tourism and casino industries.

During the 1940s, the Westside School would be utilized for community events including the USO who would show movies on Monday evenings and host game nights on Wednesdays.<sup>8</sup> In 1942, “the old county building” was moved onto the site in order to include a class for fifth graders.<sup>9</sup> By 1947, the Clark County School District developed plans for the expansion of the Westside School. Designed by A.L. Worswick, the cost of the project was estimated at \$104,000. The Annex building would house 11 additional rooms and an administration room for the school campus.<sup>10</sup> The new building would accommodate grades six through eight. According to the *Las Vegas Review Journal*,

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Julie Nicoletta, “Las Vegas—Downtown, High School Historic District, Westside.” *Buildings of Nevada*. Chicago: Society of Architectural Historians, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Historic photographs of the old Las Vegas school complex along Fourth Street courtesy of Brenda Williams.

<sup>5</sup> “Old Town School House Presents Fine Appearance.” *Las Vegas Age*. March 10, 1923. Also refer to Frank Wright, *Nevada Yesterdays* (Las Vegas: Stephens Press, LLC, 2005), p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Branch No. 1, Las Vegas Grammar School National Register of Historic Places. April 30, 1978.

<sup>8</sup> “New Westside USO Plan Open.” n.d.

<sup>9</sup> “First Class is to be Graduated from Westside.” *Las Vegas Review Journal*. May 24, 1949.

<sup>10</sup> “Disclose Plans for School Improvements: Estimated Cost \$180,000; Bids to be Opened July 9.” *Las Vegas Review Journal*. June 26, 1947.

The Westside project calls for the construction of concrete block buildings...The new structures will be erected in a quadrangle to the west of the present building. The old CCC buildings, now on the rear of the school yard, will be dismantled and the space used for part of the new classrooms, it was explained.

The classrooms, each provided with ample windows for lighting will be connected by canopies and of single story construction. The buildings will have asphalt shingle roofs. Each classroom will be of 22 by 30 feet in size.

Lavatory facilities for boys and girls are included in the new program. The administration building, which will face south, will contain the principal's office and restrooms for teachers.<sup>11</sup>

Completed in 1948, the new building cost came to approximately \$128,000. By 1949, the Westside School would be the third school in Las Vegas with eight complete grades and an enrollment of 535 students.<sup>12</sup>

By 1955, Nevada's African-American population would rise to approximately 16,000 in the Westside. After years of segregation, civil rights legislation established integration policies in the 1960s. Although African-Americans frequented businesses outside of their Westside community, members of the white population did not return the support. The City's decision to allow construction of I-15 through the district was a further detriment. Without the support from their neighbors, the African-American neighborhoods began an economic decline and parts of the community started to fall into disrepair. By 1967, the school was officially phased out of use. In 1974, the School Board of Trustees declared Westside School to be surplus property and adopted a resolution to sell it.

The following year in 1975, the Economic Opportunity Board of Clark County decided to occupy the building and began the process of renovation. Renovation of the buildings would continue until 1977 and included the exterior wood trellis along the Annex building's inner courtyard. By 1979, the site would be listed on the National Register of Historic Places and in 1980, the buildings underwent structural stabilization.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> "First Class is to be Graduated from Westside." *Las Vegas Review Journal*. May 24, 1949.

A.L. Worswick, Architect<sup>13</sup>

A.L. Worswick is credited for designing the Westside School Annex in 1948. Mr. Worswick is one of the most prolific and influential architects in Las Vegas during the early years of the twentieth century. Worswick came to Las Vegas around 1929, where his career continued into the 1940s. He was a native of Kansas and a graduate of Kansas State University. Worswick's architectural career began in 1902 in San Francisco, and in 1904, he joined the city's Bureau of Architecture. Presumably, Worswick had a role in rebuilding San Francisco following the 1906 earthquake and fire.

Worswick served on the Las Vegas City Planning Commission and during his tenure advocated city planning and controlled growth. Among numerous others in Las Vegas, Mr. Worswick designed the Henderson House, the Palace Theater, the War Memorial Building, the Chief Hotel Court on Fremont Street, and the old McCarran Airport terminal building. He lived in what is now known as the Las Vegas High School Historic District, and he designed two Las Vegas buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places: the Whitehead House and the Las Vegas Hospital. Unfortunately, they were both destroyed by fire. Mr. Worswick also made a significant impact on the current culture of Las Vegas by designing the Hotel Apache (now the Horseshoe). This was one of the first hotel-casinos in the city, built shortly after gambling was legalized in 1931.

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<sup>13</sup> Excerpt from "1938 Lincoln County Courthouse, Lincoln County, Nevada National Register of Historic Places."

## **PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION**

### **A. General Statement:**

1. Architectural character: The Westside School was designed in a modest Mission Revival style of architecture. The Annex building also contains Mission Revival style influences.
2. Condition of the fabric: Exterior: Good; Interior: Good.

### **B. Description of Exterior:**

#### **1. Overall Dimensions:**

Westside School is a single story Mission Revival style building that measures approximately 62 feet wide and 100 feet long. The building was constructed in two phases. The front south façade along Washington Avenue was originally a rectangular two-room school building. The “L” shaped addition on the north side was built four years later and doubled the area of the building.

#### **2. Foundations:**

The building foundation is concrete and rests on concrete footings with wood post and beams. A plastered skirt is located at the base with crawl space vents and metal screens throughout. A partial basement is located along the central east façade and includes a concrete finish boiler room which is accessed through an exterior wood basement hatch. The boiler room contains its original equipment and the chimney flue. The foundation and basement appear to be in good condition.

#### **3. Walls:**

The building’s exterior walls are constructed of 8 inch thick concrete. The exterior is covered by plaster with a light dash finish. The primary south façade has four large arched recessed details with plaster sills that flank the centralized bay. The south façade has a central bay curvilinear parapet wall with three wood louver attic vent features. Wood frame attic vents with metal screens are located beneath the eaves on all sides. The total wall height from floor to eave is 14 feet. The walls are in good condition.

#### **4. Structural System, Framing:**

The structural system for the one story building includes wood roof trusses set on the concrete exterior walls which are supported on concrete foundations. The wood floor system is supported on wood posts and beams that are set on concrete piers in the crawl space of the building. A few interior walls are assisting the structural load bearing of the roof. These walls are wood framed and supported by posts and beams set on concrete piers in the crawl space. The structural system is in good condition.

5. Chimney:

An interior brick chimney extends approximately 8 feet 6 inches above the exterior roof. The chimney is located towards the center of the roof ridge on the eastern façade. It connects directly from the basement boiler room. The chimney is in good condition.

6. Openings:

a. Doorways and Doors

The building is accessed through three external doorways via a concrete walkway that leads to concrete stairs and landing with metal railings. An accessibility ramp has been added to the east side of the entry stair along the primary south façade. The accessibility ramp on the north façade is on the west side of the entry stairs.

The primary south façade entry door is located along the central bay. Both the primary south façade and north façade entries consist of non-historic double paneled wood doors with historic wood transom and sidelights. The transom has a non-historic metal boxed security grille. There are five sidelights on either side of the doors. The bottom lights are boarded. A third non-historic wood door is located along the northwest exterior wall that has access to the small room addition. The doors and window features are in good condition.

b. Windows

Fenestration along the east and west façades include two types: a set of inoperable eight-light wood casement windows with eight-light transoms and four-over-four light wood double hung windows along the center. There are also three four-over-four light wood double hung windows along the northeast façade. All the windows have plaster covered sills and appear to be in good condition.

7. Roof:

The Westside School has a hipped metal seam roof with overhanging wood eaves. The original roof framing consisted of 2x6 inch rafters at 24 inches on center spanning from the exterior wall to the ridge. The span was broken by purlins and purlin braces that “kicked” back to the interior bearing walls.

This framing system was extensively altered in the 1980 stabilization project. Within the existing roof envelope a new truss was constructed to reduce the span of the rafters. The truss spans from the exterior wall to the interior bearing wall. It reduced the span of the rafters approximately 50%. This additional framing is at 32” on center. In addition, new purlin braces were installed between the existing purlin braces.

A new layer of 3/8 inch Struct II plywood was installed over the entire roof. New anchor bolts from the roof to the walls at 6 feet on center were installed. This supplemented the existing bolts that are also at 6 feet on center.

There is additional localized strengthening in the attic including several glue-laminated beams.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

The general layout of the Westside School building interior had been heavily renovated for use as a radio station and displays very little original, historic fabric. The main entrance is accessed from West Washington Avenue which leads into a small public lobby. The remaining spaces are accessed through a secured steel door. The original classrooms have been subdivided into office spaces and broadcasting rooms.

2. Flooring:

Non-historic commercial grade carpeting is found throughout the building. There are vinyl composition tiles located in various corridors and 8x8 ceramic tile floors in restrooms.

3. Walls and Ceiling Finish:

The addition of non-historic wood framed walls has been added to subdivide the original 1920s four-room classrooms. Historic 2x6 interior walls are mostly located within the restrooms and closet spaces. The interior renovation also included installation of drop ceiling panels throughout. The original ceiling finish is evident in various corridors and can be seen above the drop ceiling panels.

4. Openings:

a. Doorways and Doors

All of the interior doors throughout the building have been replaced and their hardware is also new.

b. Windows

The majority of the original wood framed casement and double hung windows have been reconstructed during the 1982 Westside School Renovation project. Some windows noted to remain and may be original per the 1982 drawings. The windows are inoperable. The original transoms are extant.

5. Decorative Features and Trim:

A set of casework dating to 1928 is evident at the east offices. The display case is wood with plate glass on the upper cabinet doors. All hardware appears to be original. Some non-historic security latches have been added.

6. Hardware:

All of the original door hardware and doors have been replaced. Some original window hardware appears to be extant.

7. Mechanical Equipment:  
The public spaces, including the lobby and meeting rooms, were supplied with retrofitted heating, air condition, and ventilation distributed via ductwork and wall and ceiling grilles. The original boiler from 1927 is extant in the basement but is non functional.
8. Lighting:  
All of the historic lighting fixtures have been replaced. Much of the lighting is now fluorescent box fixtures which are mounted to the drop ceiling panels.
9. Plumbing:  
All of the toilets, wall-mounted sinks, plumbing fixtures, and toilet partitions are not original.
10. Original Furnishing:  
There is no evidence of original furnishings except for the 1928 casework noted in Decorative Features. Non-original features include interior doors, shutters, office windows, partitions, and new casework.

D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation:  
The building faces south on West Washington Avenue. The school played an important role as the first school constructed in the Westside area of Las Vegas.
2. Historic Landscape Design:  
Ca. late 1960s aerial photograph shows a basketball court and paved playground area at the northeast corner of the site. It appears that most of the area remained unpaved with some trees located at the Westside School entrance.

### **PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

1938 Lincoln County Courthouse National Register of Historic Places.

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- \_\_\_\_\_. "Vegas Grammar School News: Improvements at Westside School." *Las Vegas (Nevada) Evening Review*. March 18, 1938.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Las Vegas Schools, Staffed By 59 Teachers, Open September 6." *Las Vegas Evening Review Journal*. August 31, 1938.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Disclose Plans for School Improvements: Estimated Cost \$180,000; Bids to be Opened July 9." *Las Vegas Review Journal*. June 26, 1947.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Westside School Near Completion." *Las Vegas Review Journal*. January 29, 1948.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "First Class is to be Graduated from Westside." *Las Vegas Review Journal*. May 24, 1949.

Internet Articles

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- "Henderson House." <http://www.lasvegasnevada.gov/TextOnly/FactsStatistics/10531.htm>. Accessed 03.30.2011.

Historic Photographs

Clark County School District Archive Committee.

"Patriotic exercises at West Side School." n.d.

"Las Vegas Public Schools." Four interior classrooms photographs. n.d.

Black and white aerial photograph, ca. late 1960s.

Colored aerial photograph, ca. late 1960s.

Nevada State Museum, Las Vegas

Black and white aerial photograph dated 1938.

Black and white aerial photograph dated February 26, 1973.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Black and white aerial photograph, ca. late 1960s.

Williams, Brenda.

Photographs of the Las Vegas School campus along Fourth and Fifth Street from the 1931 School Report and the 1935 School Report.

**PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION**

The Las Vegas Centennial Commission recently granted \$550,000 for the historic Westside School Rehabilitation and Master Plan project. The Master Plan will include recommendations for programming and use, improved pedestrian and vehicular access to the site, and improved ADA accessibility to the Westside School site.