



Historical context excerpted from:

Fremont Street Pedestrian Improvements, Las Vegas Nevada, Cultural Resources Inventory and Evaluation Report

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Date: May 2006

Geographical limits of Survey: Fremont Street from N 5th St to S. 8th Street. Las Vegas, Clark County, Nevada

Location of Report: Nevada State Historic Preservation Office, 100 North Stewart Street, Carson City, NV 89701

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Fremont Street Pedestrian Improvements, Las Vegas Nevada, Cultural Resources Inventory and Evaluation Report. Prepared for the Nevada Department of Transportation and the City of Las Vegas by Painter Preservation & Planning, Petaluma, CA. May 2006.

FREMONT STREET PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENTS

Las Vegas, Nevada

CULTURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY AND EVALUATION REPORT

Prepared by

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Prepared for

City of Las Vegas
Las Vegas, Clark County, Nevada

May 2006



Figure 4: Area of Potential Effect and Properties Surveyed

FIGURE 5: LIST OF PROPERTIES SURVEYED

| No. | Building/Business name | Addr. | Street | Type | Parcel No. | Size | Const |
|-----|--|--------|---------|--------|----------------|---------|---------|
| 1 | Vacant | 501 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-611-013 | .29 ac | 1952 |
| 1 | Las Vegas Souvenirs | 503 | | | | | |
| 1 | Uncle Joe's Pizza & Deli | 505 | | | | | |
| 1 | Kabob Korner (vacant) | 507 | | | | | |
| 2 | Sunglass City | 506 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-611-005 | .07 ac | 1949 |
| 3 | Shop & Save Market | 508 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-611-006 | .08 ac | 1934 |
| 3 | Mesa Gifts & Cigars (Yeyo's Cigar Factory) | 510 | | | | | |
| 4 | Las Vegas Tadoo & Souvineer | 509 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-611-014 | .13 ac | 1953 |
| 4 | (being remodeled) | 511 | | | | | |
| 5 | Vegas Discount Outlet (vacant) | 512 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-611-007 | .15 ac | 1957 |
| 5 | Vacant | 514 | | | | | |
| 6 | Checks Cashed | 515 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-611-015 | .07 ac | 1934 |
| 7 | A & H Jewelry | 516 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-611-008 | .13 ac | 1952 |
| 7 | Latino Services Express (being remodeled) | 518 | | | | | |
| 7 | Rapid Refund E-file Tax Return (being remodeled) | 518 | | | | | |
| 8 | Salon of Beauty | 517 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-611-016 | .14 ac | ca 1934 |
| 8 | Fremont Check Cashing | 517B | | | | | |
| 9 | Fremont Medical Center | 520 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-611-009 | .23 ac | 1951 |
| 10 | Philly Steak Express | 523 | | | | | 1954 |
| 10 | Hollywood Fashion | 525 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-611-017 | .20 ac | ca 1935 |
| 11 | El Cortez Hotel & Casino | 600 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-612-004 | 2.77 ac | 1941 |
| 12 | Vacant (brick building) | 601 | Fremont | Street | 193-46-110-018 | 1.24 ac | ca 1946 |
| 13 | Fremont Family Market & Deli | 611-20 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-611-019 | .15 ac | 1946 |
| 13 | Mexican Cuban Food | | | | | | |
| 14 | Super 8 Motel | 700 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-612-006 | .82 ac | 1957 |
| 15 | Take 1 Nightclub | 707 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-612-005 | 1.29 ac | 1963 |
| 15 | Days Inn Motel | 707 | | | | | |
| 16 | Art Gallery Botanica | 711 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-612-082 | .28 ac | 1946 |
| 16 | Bee Bee Market | 713 | | | | | |
| 16 | Bee Bee Market | 715 | | | | | |
| 16 | 99C Store | 719 | | | | | |
| 17 | Downtown Cellular | 725 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-612-022 | .22 ac | 1958 |
| 17 | Lao-Thai Cuisine (being remodeled) | | | | | | |
| 18 | Vacant (3 storefronts) | 760 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-612-019 | .70 ac | 1948 |
| 19 | Colfax Motors Used Cars | 800 | Fremont | Street | 139-34-612-029 | .16 ac | 1931 |

Figure 5: List of Properties Surveyed

D. Historic Context

4. Historic Context

a. Downtown Las Vegas' Beginnings

The beginnings of Fremont Street and Las Vegas as a whole lay in Clark's Las Vegas Townsite, within which a portion of the study area is located. It was the town's second townsite. The original townsite was surveyed and laid out west of the railroad tracks by James T. McWilliams in 1904. The second was established by William Clark, a widely disliked and corrupt senator from Montana, who founded the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad in 1905.

Clark established the Las Vegas Land and Water Company and laid out his townsite adjacent and parallel to what would be the east side of the tracks. He auctioned off many of these lots on May 15 and 16, 1905, and many who had previously settled within McWilliams townsite bought lots and literally moved their businesses to the other side of the tracks.

b. The Railroad Era

The town prospered and in 1911 there were two railroads, the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake, which extended between Los Angeles and Salt Lake with a stop in Las Vegas, and the Las Vegas & Tonopah line, which supplied mines in Goldfield, Tonopah and Rhyolite. These two railroad lines provided for about 450 jobs, up from 175 jobs, in a town of 1,500.¹² As a result, there was pressure on the housing market and new additions in the city's residential zones north and south of Fremont Street resulted. Peter Buol opened Buck's Addition between Fifth, Tenth, Linden and Stewart in 1905. The railroad was unwilling to provide water for tracts beyond the townsite, however, and the area was slow to develop.¹³

Las Vegas soon experienced a setback. The Las Vegas & Tonopah went broke in 1917. In May 1921 Senator Clark announced that he was going to sell the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad to Union Pacific. When they took over they fired sixty repair shop employees. Local workers joined the nationwide rail strike of 1922. After the strike, Union Pacific closed the shops in Las Vegas and moved them to Caliente, costing the city 300 jobs.¹⁴

c. The New Resort City

It was about this time that the city began actively promoting Las Vegas as a resort city, appealing particularly to tourists from southern California. The 1920s were the first years that the automobile was widely used for the family vacation. Popular destinations in the west included Santa Fe, Palm Springs, Tucson, Phoenix and Las Vegas. In 1925 the City upgraded the paving on Fremont Street between Main to Fifth (Las Vegas Blvd.) and paved Fifth from Fremont to two miles south of the city limits and San Francisco Avenue in order to attract visitors from Los Angeles.¹⁵

This must have seemed very forward-thinking at the time, as by 1923 absolutely no development had occurred in the downtown east of Fifth Street, the future Las Vegas Blvd.¹⁶ Downtown,

¹² Land & Land, 45.

¹³ Moehring, 8.

¹⁴ Moehring, 10.

¹⁵ Moehring, 10.

¹⁶ Sanborn fire Insurance map, 1923.

meaning the area west of Fifth Street, catered to all the needs of the local population, including the first exclusively residential area between Third and Fifth Streets.

The downtown (between Main and Third Streets) had businesses oriented toward the traveler and local residents. Eight hotels were noted in the 1923 Sanborn Fire Insurance map. They were located primarily on Fremont Street, as were billiards halls, a dance pavilion, a motion picture house, and the typical range of businesses required for a new town. Numerous lodgings and “rooms” (rooming houses) were noted, as was a cluster of tent houses in the block bounded by S. Main, First, Odgen and Stewart. The notorious Block 16 is delicately shown contain an entire street frontage of “soft drink salons” with female boarding houses behind.¹⁷ In other words, there were a variety of accommodations for residents and visitors alike, as well as entertainment-oriented businesses. This pattern of development was to continue through to the end of the decade.

Locally oriented businesses and services included garages, banks, barbers, offices, cigar stores and all manner of shops, a photographic studio, a needlework shop, drug stores, a tailor, auto repair and supplies, a hardware and paint store, a Lodge Hall, Fire Station, jail, undertaker, and hospital. The railroad shops were across the Main Street and the tracks, at the foot of Fremont Street.

d. The Depression

Unlike the rest of the County, which sank into the Great Depression in the 1930s, Las Vegas was buoyed with the announcement in 1928 that the Federal government would construct Boulder Dam outside of Las Vegas. This project – later named Hoover Dam – employed workers from around the country. Gambling was again legalized in 1931 (it had previously been legal from 1869 to 1909) and prohibition was repealed in 1933, and Las Vegas continued to build its reputation as playground for workers and visitors alike.

In 1930 Las Vegas’ population was 5,165 people. New hotel development in downtown was designed to appeal to visitors, and gaming venues appealed to both workers and tourists. The downtown – meaning the stretch of Fremont Street between Main Street and Third, was still the main focus of development. The Hotel Nevada opened up under the new name of Sal Sagez Hotel (soon thereafter they constructed a new building) and the Apache Hotel opened up downtown.¹⁸ The 400-block of Fremont Street, however, still exhibited exclusively residential development, and there was still virtually no development east of Fifth Street.¹⁹ The heart of the young town remained close to the railroad tracks and was focused on Main Street, adjacent to the tracks, and Fremont Street.

After completion of the dam in 1935 – it was fully operational by 1937 – the city continued to grow despite the loss of workers. By 1940 it had a population of 8,422, but needed to generate new revenue sources to offset the loss of Federal dollars. The city focused again on tourism and gaming to bolster the local economy.

¹⁷ As this was the heart of prohibition, soft drink salons are noted, although Las Vegas saloons ignored Prohibition laws (Land and Land, p. 57). Block 16 was Las Vegas’ red-light district.

¹⁸ University of Nevada at Las Vegas Architecture Library, May 2006.

¹⁹ Sanborn Fire Insurance map, 1928.

Buildings and businesses in the study area east of Las Vegas Blvd. at that time were 501 Fremont – Ward’s Cash & Carry grocer; 506 Fremont – E. D. Ciliax, restaurant; 508 Fremont – Luce & Goodfellow, Inc., electrical appliances; 515 Fremont – Standards Mercantile Co., furniture, and Anderson’s Dairy; 517 Fremont – W. G. Hanson; and 520 Fremont – F. W. Gilman used cars.

e. The War Years

Even before World War II Las Vegas saw another boom that bolstered the local economy. Las Vegas was identified – along with Pocatello, Salt Lake, Phoenix and Albuquerque - as a potential site for defense plants and military installations.²⁰ Las Vegas was selected as the site for Basic Magnesium Inc., (BMI), a plant and company town that was established in Henderson to manufacture magnesium for the war effort. Construction of the plant was underwritten by the United States government, which also paid the salaries of the workers. It operated until 1944, and employed 13,000 people at its peak of production.²¹

Additional growth was seen with the establishment of Nellis Air Force base northwest of the city. It started with a small dirt runway used by Western Air Express located eight miles north of Las Vegas. The property was signed over to the U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps on Jan. 25, 1941 and it opened as the Las Vegas Army Air Corps Gunnery School soon thereafter. Initially 2,000 men were stationed at the airfield. By 1943 approximately 8,000 servicemen were stationed there, growing to 11,000 by 1946.²² Later during the war, Nellis Airforce Base was constructed northwest of the city, attracting more families and stimulating the need for more housing.

The growth and pressure for additional housing was tremendous. To meet the demand infill housing occurred in the downtown area and down the strip; motels were built that first accommodated permanent residents; and local residents were encouraged to rent any spare rooms. Federal dollars built three major housing developments in Las Vegas at this time to house defense workers. The private sector responded with auto courts, auto camps, motel units, linear apartment buildings, and the small scale, densely developed infill housing.

Las Vegas also met the ‘recreational’ needs of these new residents. The 1940s saw the construction of El Cortez (1941), the Pioneer Club (1942) and the Golden Nugget (1946) in the downtown.²³ For the first time hotel/casinos began to appear on the Strip. The 1940s also saw construction of El Rancho Vegas (1941), the Last Frontier (1942) and the Flamingo (1946), two-and-a-half-to-three miles south of the courthouse, outside the city limits.

Despite the spread of businesses – particularly auto-oriented businesses – south along Las Vegas Blvd., in the early 1940s the heart of Las Vegas was still downtown. The following was written in 1941: “Las Vegas keeps to the traditions of western towns by having one main street that shoots the works.”²⁴ The 1940s were also the years that Fremont Street east of Las Vegas Blvd. began to take the form it displays today. Buildings constructed in the 1940s, in addition to the El Cortez Hotel, include 509 Fremont, 601 Fremont, 611-20 Fremont, 711 Fremont, and 760 Fremont. Businesses included Town Barbeque, Bartlett Bros. Hardware, Sears Roebuck & Co., Ahswede’s Department Store, Hal’s Barber Shop, Ullom Studio, Fremont Drug, Seaboard

²⁰ Moehring, 31.

²¹ 20th Century Preservation, 12.

²² 20th Century Preservation, 9.

²³ University of Nevada at Las Vegas Architecture Library, May 2006.

²⁴ Erle Stanley Gardner, quoted in Hess, *Viva Las Vegas*, 34.

Finance Co., Food Center and Food Center Liquors, Electric City Appliance, George's Liquor Store; Signal Service, and Oil Products Ltd. Distributors, and an auto showroom.²⁵

f. The Post-War Years

It was in the post-war years that Fremont Street between Fourth and Seventh Streets flourished as an old-fashioned, pedestrian-oriented shopping street. This is ironic, as Las Vegas was growing dramatically as an automobile-oriented city, with suburban residential development and suburban commercial centers all around the city, and hotels, motels, auto courts, and resort/casinos, particularly between the downtown and Charleston and along the Strip. New casinos and renovated casinos in the older portion of Fremont Street focused more heavily on gambling. These businesses advertised their presence with fantastic lighted signs as big as and bigger than the buildings they fronted, continuing this area's reputation as "Glitter Gulch."

But Las Vegas' relatively new retail core was very popular in its own, more subdued, way. Between Fourth and Seventh Streets the following businesses catered to the shopping needs of Las Vegas residents. Department stores included Ronzone's, a local store established in Las Vegas in 1946 (418 Fremont Street, no longer extant); Sears Roebuck & Co. (601 Fremont Street, heavily altered); J. C. Penneys, which had come to Las Vegas in 1917 (520 Fremont Street); National Dollar Stores (501 Fremont) and Ahswede's Department Store (517 Fremont). Other variety stores included Woolworth's (422 Fremont Street, no longer extant); and Cornet (401 Fremont Street, no longer extant). Other businesses include jewelry stores, clothing stores, shoe stores, a fabric store, and two hardware stores.

g. The Suburban Malls

It was the 1960s that lead to the demise of East Fremont Street as Las Vegas' primary shopping district. Consistent with trends across the country, suburban shopping malls that catered to an automobile-driving public developed and drew the department stores from downtown. In Las Vegas the first suburban mall was Boulevard Mall, which opened in 1969 on Maryland Parkway. Sears and Penney's opened stores in the mall, as did Woolworth's and Ronzone's.²⁶ Sears sold its downtown store in 1968 and relocated. Penney's was the last department store to close in the downtown, which it did in 1982.²⁷ By this time the study area had already begun to cater to tourists and display more marginal businesses. The critical mass of commercial and residential areas around the downtown began to convert to surface parking areas, leading to further decline in the downtown, which no longer had the same population base to support.²⁸

In a parallel development, resort/casinos such as Caesars, the Aladdin, and Circus Circus were being developed on the Strip, competing with the downtown casinos. These facilities were able to provide the unencumbered land area and parking not available in the downtown. Inexpensive land also enabled these hotel/casinos to provide such amenities as pools, tennis courts, gardens and spas.

Today the older five-block portion of Fremont Street between Main Street and Las Vegas Blvd. has been redeveloped into the Fremont Experience (1995) and the mixed-use Neonopolis (1996,

²⁵ Building permit data, on file, City of Las Vegas.

²⁶ Moehring, 239.

²⁷ Building permit data, on file, City of Las Vegas, 2006.

²⁸ Page, 21.

2001), which is oriented towards tourists.²⁹ The building stock on Fremont Street within the study area is intact (a unique quality in Las Vegas) and still displays the same qualities that lead to successful retail environments, whether in a mall, small town, or urban neighborhood. Businesses tend to be more marginal however, and the only business that continues from the early days of the area is the El Cortez Hotel & Casino. The old Penney's store is the only remaining intact department store building.³⁰ However, new development occurring in the vicinity of the street should assist with its revitalization, bringing back a local population who may again appreciate the low scale, walkability and street-oriented atmosphere of this neighborhood.

2. Architectural Context

a. Original Platting

The study area or Area of Potential Effect for this evaluation is located over three different original subdivisions. The westerly portion is located on Clarks E V. Townsite; the middle portion is located on Hawkins Addition; and the easterly portion is located within Bucks Subdivision. The Clarks Las Vegas Townsite subdivision was platted in 1905, Hawkins Addition was platted in 1921, and Bucks Subdivision was also platted in 1905.

Clarks Townsite and Hawkins Addition were platted with narrow lots, 25 feet in width and 140 feet long. Blocks were 300 by 400 feet. Street rights-of-way were 80 feet in width and alleys were 20 feet.³¹ They were consistent for the fact that lots faced east and west with an alley running north-south within the gridiron block pattern, with the exception of Fremont Street. At Fremont Street, lots were created that faced north-south, with an alley between this one-lot-deep pattern and the remainder of the block. This resulted in a "T-shaped" alley system for those blocks fronting on Fremont Street. Typically commercial properties took up two-to-three of these narrow lots. The 400, 500 and 600 blocks within the study area exhibit this platting pattern, although several of the alleys have been vacated at this point.

The Bucks Subdivision broke with this pattern. Lots were wide, averaging 50 feet in width, and all faced east-west. Alleys were oriented north-south within this pattern. The 700 and 800 blocks within the study area exhibit this platting pattern.

b. Setting

The setting for this study is an urbanized area, east of the City's redeveloped Fremont Experience and the Neonopolis mixed-use center. The topography is flat, but nonetheless affords views of urbanized areas to the north, east and south. All street rights-of-way are 80 feet, but most of the alleys have been abandoned, leaving larger super-blocks in their place.

To the west the vista is dominated by Neonopolis, with the Fremont Experience beyond. The horizon is defined by the pedestrian skybridge connecting Neonopolis with its parking garage and the barrel roof of the Fremont Experience. The foreground, in addition to displaying the visually

²⁹ The 400-and-500-block of East Fremont Street had been earmarked earlier for a "festival marketplace" called Winchester Station, designed to appeal to tourists: "The objective was to transform the entire downtown region into an attractive showplace." Las Vegas exercised its right of eminent domain to redevelop the 400-block of Fremont Street (Hulse, 219).

³⁰ The old Sears store remains, but has been dramatically altered and no longer displays its characteristic storefronts or earlier design qualities.

³¹ 20th Century Preservation, 2002, 12.

complex architecture of the Neonopolis, also contains the iconographic historic signs of old Las Vegas, mixed in with contemporary signage. These ten historic signs, located in the pedestrian mall between the two sides of the Neonopolis development and on Las Vegas Blvd. are restored and displayed and owned by Las Vegas' Neon Museum.³²

The historic “Hacienda Horse and Rider” marks the beginning of East Fremont Street and forms a counterpoint to the historic El Cortez sign at the east terminus of the study area. Together these signs represent the high style and iconic presence of ‘old’ Las Vegas on Fremont Street, and form a fitting tribute to the 1930s-to-1950s buildings that link them.

To the south of the study area is a growing city skyline comprised of low-rise (two-to-four story) motels with some highrise offices beyond that are visible on the Boulevard. To the east are low-rise motels and casinos, parking lots, and some strip commercial development. The area to the north is being rapidly developed into high-rise housing and commercial uses. Beyond that is the City's civic campus and government center.

c.. Urban Design Characteristics

i. *Development Pattern*

The project area displays the classic characteristics of a retail “Main Street.” Retail storefronts with plate glass windows and glass doors open onto the street and are located immediately to the rear of the sidewalk. Most structures are party wall structures. Individual buildings may incorporate anywhere from one-to-four storefronts, but the rhythm of the storefronts is relatively consistent. Many display complete transparency and some even open up to the sidewalks via wide sliding glass doors. Canopies, which are primarily flat and occur above the transom windows, typically display the same rhythm as the storefronts. Some stores front directly onto the street, while others are designed with recessed entries, maximizing display space at the entry and allowing the pedestrian to step outside the flow of traffic and window shop. 512 and 515 Fremont Street incorporate elegantly designed, projecting glass window bays to attract the viewer.

While the area between Las Vegas Blvd. and Seventh Street displays the classic characteristics of an American “Main Street,” east of Seventh Street the urban landscape takes up the more modern (mid-century) development pattern seen throughout Las Vegas. This pattern is especially characteristic along Las Vegas Blvd. between Fremont Street and the Strip. This is the inward-facing, parking lot and car-oriented pattern represented by the classic mid-century motel. Within the study area, this development pattern is exemplified by the Super 8 Motel and Days Inn Motel, both in the 700 block of Fremont, and the Western Hotel and Casino, at Eighth and Fremont. The prevalent development pattern in the study area is also broken by the new Neonopolis developments, two full-block, mixed-use developments connected by a portion of Fremont Street (the 400 block) that has been made into a pedestrian mall. These developments, while accessed from the pedestrian mall, are primarily inward-oriented, breaking from the street orientation of the study area.

³² <http://www.neonmuseum.org/>.

ii. Signage

Signs abound in the study area, almost always above the canopies, under the cornice. One store has a painted mural in this location. In addition to signs above the canopy are freestanding pole signs, blade signs, vertical signs mounted on the face of the storefront or building, and signs mounted on armatures on roofs. Most are simple, and do not display the exuberance and ‘high-style’ design characteristics of the traditional casino and motel signs (both old and new) seen elsewhere in the city. In contrast, many signs in this area are internally-lit box signs, mounted in various fashions to the building, or painted wood, either fastened to the building face or painted directly on the building. Another popular sign-type is made up of internally lit, freestanding letters mounted to a horizontal support on the building face. Many windows have internal neon and other signs.

An exception to the simple signage along most of the street is the sign for the El Cortez Hotel & Casino, which dates from 1951 and displays the craftsmanship that characterizes visitor-oriented signs from this era. Another exception is the Beauty Bar sign which, while contemporary, is designed in the character of and enhances this art deco building. An additional type of sign is the terrazzo sign in the pavement at the entry to what was Clover Jewelers (515 Fremont). This sidewalk sign is typical of many American “Main Streets,” but is the only one found here.

iii. Pedestrian Improvements

The pedestrian improvements exhibited on Fremont Street between Las Vegas Blvd. and Eighth Street today were constructed in 1978 and are outside the Period of Significance for the properties along the street as a whole. It is worth noting, however, that they represent typical streetscape design elements from that era. Street improvements similar to those displayed here were sometimes accompanied by the closure of streets to automobile traffic. Pedestrian malls, as they are known, got their start with Garrett Eckbo’s 1964 Fulton Mall in Fresno, California. Many cities across the county adopted the vocabulary of this mall – even if they did not close their streets - in an attempt, like Fresno, to stave off the deterioration of their downtowns, which were faced with retail competition from the suburban mall.

Most cities found that street improvements alone could not provide enduring revitalization, as many were installed without the accompanying economic development that would ensure their continued success. Fresno, like Las Vegas, found that their downtown department stores were closing their doors and operating exclusively in suburban malls, despite street improvements.³³ This scenario was played out across the country.

Fremont Street as it exists today has two lanes of traffic in either direction. Side streets have diagonal parking and one travel lane in each direction. Wide sidewalks are comprised of scored concrete, while the edges have a narrow band of stamped concrete ‘brick.’ Curbs are lowered to street grade at the corners to accommodate handicapped access. Crosswalks have brick paving. Overall paving condition is fair-to-poor.

Whimsical period street lighting consists of a round bulb at the street lighting level, mounted on a curved support, and two round bulbs at the pedestrian lighting level, perpendicular to the above, also mounted on a curved support.

³³ Clemings, Russell and Cyndee Fontana, <http://www.fresnobee.com/special/2004/story/9054674p-9952484c.html>, August 29, 2004.

d. Architectural Character

i. *Building Construction and Materials*

The typical building within the study area is a reinforced concrete frame with infill concrete brick, or is constructed of load-bearing concrete brick masonry. Most roofs are flat, with a perimeter parapet, although several of the larger structures display the shallow arch of a bowstring truss. All appear to have concrete foundations. Most buildings are finished in stucco on the front, with painted or no finish on the concrete blocks on the rear. Most buildings are party wall structures or extend the full width of a block or half block. When side facades are visible, they are typically utilitarian, with very few openings, and at most contain secondary businesses with minimal entry features.

Several of the building complexes are made up of several buildings added over time; as a result, it is difficult to distinguish one building from another. All buildings between Las Vegas Blvd. and Seventh except 601 Fremont Street appeal to the street with transparent storefronts. The building at 601 Fremont Street historically displayed a typical storefront, but was enclosed in 1968 when this Sears Roebuck & Co. department store closed and was converted to a telecom facility.

ii. *Building Types*

Richard Longstreth, in his study *The Buildings of Main Street*, developed a typology of ‘Main Street’ commercial structures, defining several types that are seen here between Las Vegas Blvd. and Seventh. They are as follows.

- **One-Part Commercial Block**

A one-part commercial block is a simple one-story ‘box’ with a decorated façade. It first developed in the mid-nineteenth century and became common during the Victorian era, usually as a retail store. In order to minimize the cost of urban land, one-story commercial blocks often had narrow frontages. The front façade consisted primarily of plate glass windows and an entry surmounted by a decorated cornice or parapet. The wall between the windows and cornice was often oversized in order to make the building appear larger than it was, and to provide space for signage.³⁴ Examples of this type in the study area includes 515 Fremont Street.

These buildings often had little or no architectural embellishments until the 1920s and 1930s, when Art Deco and Streamline Moderne came into popular use for retail structures. The free-standing letter style seen on many of these buildings in the study area became popular after World War II.³⁵

- **Two-Part Commercial Block**

A two-part commercial block is a two-to-four story box with two basic zones, one at the first floor level and one above. The zone at the ground floor is typically designed as retail space, with the characteristics designed to appeal to the pedestrian discussed above. The upper level(s) may be devoted to a variety of uses. Historically, this type contained housing above retail spaces, often the quarters of the proprietor. Later, in larger urban areas, the upper floors might be devoted to offices or other commercial uses. These were often larger buildings, taking up significantly-sized parcels or even whole blocks.³⁶

³⁴ Longstreth, 55.

³⁵ Longstreth, 65.

³⁶ Longstreth, 31.

In the examples in the study area, the upper floors were devoted to offices and display areas for two former department stores, Penney's and Sears Roebuck & Co. Sears Roebuck & Co. (ca. 1946) was remodeled in 1947 when a third story was added. It later appeared as the visual counterpart to the 1951 Penney's building (it was diagonally across the street from Penney's). Both had transparent first floors with a flat canopy above that was part of the overall composition of the building facades.

Both had strong vertical elements on the right hand side, into which was incorporated the name of the store or the primary visual interest on the façade, again as part of the overall composition. In the case of Sears, this vertically-oriented design element extended above the roofline. In the case of Penney's, it was contained within the façade as a three-dimensional graphic. Both displayed a tension in the overall building design between horizontal and vertical elements, and between the transparency of the first floor and solid, enclosed upper floors (an exception on the Sears building was the industrial sash along the Sixth Street frontage). Both were commercial retail interpretations of the International Style, although the earlier Sears building had fanciful decorative details not seen on the more severe Penney's building.

Sears was completely remodeled in 1968 when the bottom floor was enclosed, the main entrance changed to face the rear parking lot, and the entire façade above the first level clad in brick. A portion of the ground floor of Penney's was enclosed in 1963. This may be a reversible change, as often new cladding on retail structures is simply added to the existing feature, minimally disturbing the underlying building materials.

- **Enframed Window Wall**

An enframed window wall design motif occurs on small-to-moderately-sized commercial buildings. This was a popular design approach in the 1940s. Earlier examples however displayed Art Deco and/or Streamline Moderne motifs. Visually, an enframed window wall is a framing device in which a bank of windows is 'framed' with vertical elements at each end and a horizontal element above that reads as one plane. Typically the framing occurs over the length of more than one individual retail frontage, lending a horizontal emphasis to the façade (for one story buildings).³⁷ In the case of many of the frontages on Fremont Street, the windows display narrow, light-colored aluminum muntins. As a result, the 'wall of glass' appears to float in the heavy, typically stucco-finished surround. Examples on Fremont Street include 506 Fremont Street (vernacular storefront); 525 Fremont Street (Art Deco storefront); and 725 Fremont Street (vernacular storefront).

iii. Architectural Styles

Most of the buildings in the study area are vernacular storefronts, without distinguishing features that would associate them with a particular architectural style. However, there are examples of the International Style (520 Fremont Street); Art Deco (517 Fremont Street and 525 Fremont Street); Streamline Moderne (800 Fremont Street); and Mission Revival (600 Fremont Street) styles along the street.

³⁷ Longstreth, 68.

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