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CENTENNIAL MOMENT 1: CLARK COUNTY'S SHIFTING BOUNDARIES

July 1, 2009 will mark the centennial of Clark County's creation. The birth was not without a few labor pains, as the area had changed boundaries and jurisdictions a number of times in the past. In 1855 Mormon settlers who built a fort on Las Vegas Creek were in New Mexico Territory. Then in 1863 the area was part of Pah-Ute and Mohave counties, Arizona Territory. Nevada was made a state in 1864 and its border was finalized three years after, to bring parts of Arizona and Utah into Lincoln County, Nevada. Some of the residents, disputing the boundary, continued to pay taxes to Arizona Territory. One of those was Octavius Decatur Gass, owner of the Los Vegas Rancho (formerly the Mormon Fort) who served as legislator from Pah-Ute County. At the same time, the small communities in the Muddy Valley were paying taxes to Utah. In 1870 surveys of the southern part of the state showed that it was indeed in Nevada, and Pah-Ute County was officially dissolved. Residents had to start making the long trek to the county seat, Pioche, 175 miles away, to do business with Lincoln County.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 2: EARLY EXPLORERS AND THE OLD SPANISH TRAIL

Before 1821, the area that is now Clark County was under Spain. The Spanish settled parts of New Mexico in the early 1600s, and spent the next two centuries searching for a shorter route west. They paved the way for later explorers, fur traders, missionaries and pioneers by exploring routes that became known as "The Old Spanish Trail." In late 1829, when the area was under Mexico, a large commercial caravan from Santa Fe, led by Antonio Armijo, set out toward Los Angeles. They reached the Colorado after traveling along the Muddy River, and followed it until they came to Las Vegas Wash. Armijo was the first to record seeing Las Vegas Valley, from their campsite near where Clark County's Wetlands Park is today, but he did not report seeing the Las Vegas Springs. Then in 1844 Lt. John C. Fremont, on a government-backed exploration of the west, noted the abundant Las Vegas springs that Armijo had missed. He also recorded his route through the valley as the "Old Spanish Trail." Fremont's official report was widely circulated, pointing the way for thousands of pioneer settlers to follow. The County will soon commemorate the route west with its

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 3: THE FIRST SETTLEMENT

Mormon missionaries were the first non-natives to try to settle in the area that later became Clark County. Their task was challenging; in 1855 Brigham Young sent a party of thirty men to Las Vegas. They were to build a fort on the Las Vegas creek halfway between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles that would both protect and provide food for travelers on the "Mormon Corridor." At the same time the missionaries were to try to convert the Native Americans and teach them to raise corn, melons and squash. It was challenging on many fronts; trying to tame the arid desert proved difficult; converting the Paiutes, who were happy to help themselves to the crops but preferred their own way of worshipping, was not successful; and a failed mining venture at Mount Potosi set the missionaries against each other. Brigham Young decided to allow the mission to return home in 1858. Several years later the property came under the control of O.D. Gass, a miner from Eldorado Canyon, who turned it into a successful venture, supplying produce and meat to travelers and to area miners. Gass lost the ranch to Archibald and Helen Stewart. After Helen Stewart's husband was mysteriously shot at the neighboring Kiel Ranch, she eventually sold the property to the Union Pacific Railroad, setting in motion the 20th century phenomenon of Las Vegas and Clark County.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 4: THE STORY OF GOODSPRINGS

The story of Goodsprings, Nevada is one that contributes to the rich fabric of Clark County history. Located 34 miles southwest of Las Vegas, Goodsprings was once a mining boomtown with hotels, stores, saloons and a school (still in operation.) The springs, well known to native populations, were identified in 1830 by Antonio Armijo as he blazed the Old Spanish Trail. The springs were later renamed "Good's Spring" after miner Joseph Good, who settled in the area in the 1860s. Goodsprings' short-lived boom period started with World War I in 1914, when the price of zinc and copper tripled. Yellow Pine Mine owners built a narrow gauge railroad to the main railroad line at Jean to handle increased production. Boom-fueled optimism encouraged businessman George Fayle to build the Pioneer Saloon and Goodsprings Café, the Fayle department store, and the elegant 20-room Fayle Hotel (which burned in 1966.) But after the war, the quick decline in mineral prices coupled with the Great Influenza Epidemic of 1918 (which claimed George Fayle) led to a precipitous decline in Goodsprings' fortunes. In 1920 there were only 356 listed residents, down from about 800. Today the 250 residents of Goodsprings proudly treasure their town's heritage, and encourage visitors to enjoy a real western mining town, which still boasts the Pioneer Saloon.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 5: SEARCHLIGHT, FROM BOOM TO BUST AND BACK

Searchlight is a turn-of-the-century mining boomtown which was born from and nurtured on the search for gold—in fact, one of the many stories of how the town got its name was a quote attributed to Fred Colton, discoverer of a rich ledge of the Duplex mine, who supposedly said after a long day of wielding pick and shovel: “There’s something here, boys, but it will take a searchlight to find it.” Searchlight was thriving in the early 20th century, so much so that in 1909 it was a serious contender to be named the county seat of the newly created Clark County. Both young Las Vegas and Searchlight started vying for the coveted honor as early as 1905. A census in 1906 revealed that both towns had almost identical populations, around 320. But the here-today, gone-tomorrow nature of mining towns worked against Searchlight, as Las Vegas had the solidity of the railroad machine shops to bolster its claim. Las Vegas was selected. But although Searchlight’s mining boom played out early, the town lived on to produce some memorable citizens—among them U.S. Senator Harry Reid and famed Hollywood costume designer Edith Head. One resident with a colorful story was ragtime piano player Harold Gibson, otherwise known as Rags M’Goo, who liked to tell about how he learned to play ragtime piano as a schoolboy from Frankie, the Madam at the local brothel. As they say, “only in Nevada.”

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 6: MISSION ON THE MUDDY

In the northern part of today’s Clark County, Mormon missionaries had to contend with heat, humidity, mosquitoes and occasionally the Paiutes to start a farming settlement on the lower Muddy River in the 1860s. Led by Thomas Smith, the original group of settlers consisted of only 11 men and three women. By 1865 there were 100 to 150 people living in the area. Because of their hard work and persistence, the small towns of St. Thomas and St. Joseph prospered, producing good crops of cotton, wheat, corn, grapes and alfalfa. The farmers, who at the time were located in Utah territory, were able to pay taxes in crops. But in 1867 the area became part of Nevada, and Nevada demanded payment of taxes in cash. The settlers couldn’t afford it, and by 1871 Brigham Young gave permission to leave the area. It wasn’t until about 1880 that the Mormon families returned to the Muddy and re-settled the valley. The town of Overton developed and St. Thomas revived. St. Joseph was resettled, moved upstream and renamed Logan (later changed to Logandale.) St. Thomas, however, was abandoned in 1938 as the waters of Lake Mead washed down the streets and slowly covered the cottonwood trees which had shaded them.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 7: THE RAILROAD SETS THE STAGE FOR FOUNDING LAS VEGAS

From Nevada Yesterdays, by Frank Wright

Not long after the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, the Union Pacific Railroad thought to build through Nevada into Southern California. Work actually started in 1890, but it just wasn’t to be. The Union Pacific went into bankruptcy in the Panic of 1893.

Two events in August 1900 led to the revival of the idea. Collis P. Huntington of the Southern Pacific Railroad died, and E.H. Harriman of the Union Pacific seized the opportunity to rejuvenate his own company with a large purchase of Southern Pacific stock. Also that month, Senator William Andrews Clark of Montana purchased a small railroad at the Port of Los Angeles and a "paper" railroad in Utah. His intention to challenge Harriman's new monopoly was clear. The two-year Clark-Harriman War was about to begin.

Both companies began grading. With a right-of-way granted by the Nevada Legislature, Senator Clark had the law on his side. But by paying extravagant wages of twenty dollars a day, the Union Pacific had more men in the field. The first battles were fought with shovels at the Utah-Nevada line in April 1901. Even Clark's lawyer, C.O. Whittemore, wielded a shovel, but it was not enough. Despite heroic resistance, the Clark men were driven from the field by thirty-two charging wagons and a mule team.

The Lincoln County Sheriff enforced a truce that held until November 1901 when all work mysteriously ceased for two years. Just as mysteriously, grading work resumed in 1903. Not until much later was it revealed that Clark and Harriman had swung a joint ownership deal. The way was finally cleared for the completion of the railroad and the founding of Las Vegas two years later.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 8: THE OTHER LAS VEGAS: J.T. MCWILLIAMS TAKES A GAMBLE

It's well known that on May 15, 1905, Senator William Clark's San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad (later the Union Pacific,) auctioned off lots to create the new town of Las Vegas. What is less well known is that a town named Las Vegas existed before the auction was held. In January, 1905, surveyor J.T. McWilliams took a gamble and filed the first plat map for what he called "The Original Las Vegas Town Site." It was west of the railroad tracks, and "McWilliams Town" as people called it, would later be known as West Las Vegas. McWilliams purchased large ads in California newspapers. "Do not be misled" the ads said, "by the false report as to the location of the real town site." By early May his townsite was in contention with the railroad's townsite for the leadership position. McWilliams' ads boasted that his town already had a bank, six general stores, three drug stores, two wholesale houses, many good restaurants, fourteen lodging houses, a hotel, two blacksmith shops and more. Unfortunately for McWilliams, when the railroad's auction took place on May 15, several thousand adventurous souls braved the blistering heat and snapped up all the lots. His townsite was rapidly depopulated in favor of the new one east of the tracks. A fire that destroyed the business district in September only sealed the inevitable. The area was neglected until the 1940s, when it played a major role in the growth of Las Vegas during World War II.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 9: HELEN STEWART: THE FIRST LADY OF LAS VEGAS

When pioneer Las Vegan Helen Stewart finally sold her property to William A. Clark in

1902, making the founding of Las Vegas possible, she was rewarded for her years of hard work and isolation. Helen, at the time only 28, and her husband Archibald had arrived in the Las Vegas Valley in 1882 from Pioche to take over the O.D. Gass ranch. Only two years later Archibald was killed in a still-mysterious dispute at the nearby Kiel ranch. Helen received this curt note from Conrad Kiel: "Mrs Sturd send a team and take Mr. Sturd away he is dead. C. Kiel." By then pregnant with her fifth child, Helen buried her husband and set about trying to sell the Stewart Ranch. She hoped to move to California so her children could be educated. When there were no takers, she resigned herself to running the ranch and raising her children by herself. She found a tutor, the elderly Oxford graduate J. Ross Megarrigle. A few years later she hired Frank Roger Stewart, no relation to her husband, as ranch foreman. He proved a valuable employee who later, in 1903, became her husband. Helen was always a generous hostess, offering hospitality to families from area ranches, miners from Eldorado Canyon and weary travelers. She remained gracious, courageous and stoic, enduring more tragedies in the deaths of her sons Hiram and Archibald. After years of wanting to leave, in the end she remained, having shrewdly purchased another 924 acres near her old property, to become known as "the First Lady of Las Vegas."

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 10: THE FIGHT FOR COUNTY DIVISION

Almost as soon as Las Vegas was created on May 15, 1905, city leaders began talking about the issue of county government. Las Vegas was part of huge Lincoln County, and 18,500-plus area that covered all of southeastern Nevada. The county seat, Pioche, was 175 miles from Las Vegas over rough terrain. Some favored moving the county seat to the south; others favored dividing the county. In 1905 Pioche was in a slump; the mines were played out, half of the town's main street was boarded up. At the same time, Searchlight and Las Vegas were growing. The southern towns waited with bated breath for the County Clerk in Pioche to announce the number of voters. Searchlight and Las Vegas tied—each had 320. The balance of power had shifted from northern Lincoln County. It seemed that either relocation of the county seat to the south, or splitting the county, would be easily accomplished. But Pioche suddenly had a resurgence in 1906, enough to re-open their bank and make an effort to hang on to power. Meanwhile, the voters had elected Las Vegan Ed Clark as Lincoln County Treasurer in 1906. He promptly moved the county funds to the First State Bank in Las Vegas. More controversy followed when Searchlight, seeing that Las Vegas would probably win the coveted position of county seat in a new county, switched allegiances and teamed up with Pioche in 1908. Ed Clark was defeated in his bid for re-election to County Treasurer. The battle for county division began in earnest in 1908.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 11: LINCOLN COUNTY'S MILLION DOLLAR COURTHOUSE

By 1908 Las Vegas community leaders were dead set on separating from Lincoln County and creating a new southern county. They created the Lincoln County Division Club, and businessmen including Ed Clark, W.E. Hawkins, Ed Von Tobel, C.C. Ronnow and Las Vegas Age editor "Pop" Squires, signed a "Declaration of Independence"

avowing their determination to effect a split. They all chipped in to a war chest totaling \$1,630, which helped finance the fight. As success began to seem more of a possibility, Pioche civic leaders grew desperate. They worried that they would be left with the entire debt for their 1872 brick courthouse. The Lincoln County Courthouse had a shady history. Built for only \$26,000, the two-story structure was added on to without much thought to cost. Later, during the lean mining years, its bonds were refinanced and discounted until the debt, at the time of county division, was \$630,000. Ultimately by the time the debt was paid off in 1938, the total was closer to \$800,000—close enough for the town of Pioche to start calling it the “Million Dollar Courthouse.” At any rate, the deal was struck. Part of the price of division was that the new Clark County would assume \$430,000 of the courthouse debt. According to the legislative act, which Governor Denver S. Dickerson signed into law on February 5, Clark County would begin its new life saddled with debt, and with no property or public funds. Money for the first Clark County courthouse had to be raised privately. But it was worth it, and when July 1 came, the celebration was a huge, daylong affair that all the new Clark County residents enjoyed.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 12: THE CELEBRATION

Clark County officially came into being on July 1, 1909. The day was marked at 12:00 a.m. with “the ringing of bells and other noises too numerous to mention,” according to the Las Vegas Age newspaper. But the real celebration took place a few days later on July fifth, starting at 4 a.m. with patriotic music, ringing bells, a gun salute and “plenty of noise” for the next hour. At 10 a.m. the formal program started with speeches and readings, the presentation of the new Clark County Commissioners, and more patriotic music by the band and the glee club. The Honorable Henry Lillis presided and read a congratulatory telegram from U.S. Senator and railroad owner William Andrews Clark. The Senator sent his “congratulations and best wishes for [the County’s] future prosperity...and the hope that the people of Las Vegas may enjoy to the fullest extent the celebration of the birth of the new county contemporaneously with that of the Glorious Fourth.” The speeches ended with the Glee Club singing “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” and the crowd enthusiastically joining the chorus. At 11 a.m. the speakers’ stand was cleared away and the crowd was regaled with youth sports and races, a baseball game against Goodsprings, and a hose contest between volunteer fire departments. The evening’s festivities included an open-air band concert, fireworks, and topping it all off, a Grand Ball. The Age summed up the evening: “The display of fire works was very good and formed a fitting close to the out-of-door celebration. The opera house was decorated in the national colors, the music excellent and a gay crowd ‘tripped the light fantastic’ until a late hour.”

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 13: THE FIRST CLARK COUNTY COMMISSION MEETING

On July 3rd, 1909, the first Clark County Board of Commissioners meeting took place with a minimum of fanfare, with a three-man board appointed by the governor. The first order of the day was to elect a chairman. W.E. Hawkins, owner of Hawkins Dry

Goods Store, got the nod. Since member Samuel Wells was from Muddy Valley and William Bradley from Searchlight, it seemed that Hawkins would have a better chance at keeping up with the day-to-day workings of the commission from his home base in Las Vegas. The next task was for the commission to appoint other county officials and to set the amounts of their bonds. These officials were Sheriff, Charles Corkhill; Frank Clayton, Recorder; County Clerk, Harley Harmon; Assessor, W.J. McBurney; Treasurer, Ed. W. Clark; District Attorney, W.R. Thomas, Surveyor, C.E. McCarthy and Public Administrator, Charles Ireland. With those appointments finished, the commission approved a three-year lease with Las Vegas Township for a building to be used for county purposes, at the rate of \$1 per year. Another important matter was to appoint a committee to come up with the amount due to Clark County from Lincoln County. Finally, the County Clerk, Harley Harmon, was instructed to order "such books, stationery and other supplies as are necessary for the various county officials." And so the work of Clark County government was begun.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 14: CLARK COUNTY GETS A NEW COURT HOUSE IN 1914

So eager were the proponents of Clark County division that before the bill was signed into law, they had raised \$1,800 to build a County Court House. The first "temporary" building was a solid, simple block structure on the Carson (north) side of the block that had been set aside for civic use. It served its purpose well for the next five years until the County's permanent building was completed. The old building was then divided, with half being used as a public library and the other half a temporary City Hall. In 1913 the County hired pre-eminent Nevada architect Frederick DeLongchamps to design a more imposing building. Completed in 1914 for a total cost of \$50,000, the two-story neo-classical structure featured a front façade with wide steps leading to Mission Revival arches that in turn opened into a shaded entryway. Arched windows on either wing repeated the theme, while a row of Corinthian columns separated the windows on the second floor. A red-tiled Spanish roof gave the new courthouse a southwest flavor. With its broad, tree-shaded expanse of lawn in front, the Clark County Court House became a popular community gathering-place. Speeches and sometimes entertainment were set up on the front steps with the citizens comfortably seated on the green grass below. Much like today's Government Center Amphitheater, the Court House lawn was a welcome oasis in the desert.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 15: AVIATION BEGINS IN CLARK COUNTY

On May 7, 1920 newspaper editor and reserve Army pilot Lieutenant Randall Henderson, accompanied by former Las Vegan Jake Beckley, landed the first flight into Las Vegas. Aviation enthusiasts had scraped out a dirt runway just south of the city limits. Townspeople quickly gathered around and soon the bravest were lining up for a short ride. Jake Beckley was reported as saying the trip was just as safe as going by auto, and a lot more comfortable. The first airport, Anderson Field, located on what is now the Sahara Hotel parking lot, opened officially on Thanksgiving Day, 1920, with an air show. A featured performer was Clarence Prest, one of many small aircraft

designers who were active at the time. He brought with him what he called “the world’s smallest airplane” which he named “Poison, One Drop.” Unfortunately Poison’s engine stopped at 75 feet and Prest made an unscheduled landing, which he miraculously survived. A few years later the first scheduled passenger service began with Western Air Express, and although the passengers had to sit on mail sacks, Clark County entered into the world of modern air travel. Today’s air travelers can see Clark County’s aviation history at the Howard W. Cannon Aviation Museum at McCarran Airport, just above baggage claim.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 16: THE RAILROAD STRIKE OF 1922

Las Vegas’ reliance on the railroad as its primary employer was sorely tested in 1922 when the local shop workers and railroad electricians joined a national strike. Back in 1910 the town had had a taste of the railroad’s importance to the local economy, when a flood in Meadow Valley Wash wiped out miles of track. Not only did the town become isolated, but almost immediately there were substantial layoffs. When the census was taken in 1910 the population had dwindled to less than 1,000. Events in 1922 echoed the earlier time. At first, sympathy was on the side of the strikers. But then violence erupted when seven men brought in to replace striking workers were taken from the train, beaten, and sent back to Los Angeles. The trainmaster was given a coat of tar. Governor Boyle arrived to assist in arresting the ringleaders and left a contingent of state officers to keep the peace. At the end of the strike, in October, hope for returning to normal was soon dashed when the Union Pacific decided to close the huge shops that employed so many. The town went into a slump and didn’t start to see an upturn until toward the end of the decade, when the announcement of the Swing-Johnson Bill authorizing Boulder Dam brought hope for renewed prosperity.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 17: SAVED BY THE DAM

When Union Pacific railroad workers in Las Vegas joined the national strike of 1922, it led to the railroad closing the machine shops, which in turn started a downward slide into a recession. But at the same time, the federal government was starting the process that would lead to the construction of a dam of unprecedented height in Boulder Canyon. Since 1902 when President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Bureau of Reclamation Act, engineers had been studying how to control the unpredictable Colorado River. For two years, 1905-1907, the Colorado broke into the Imperial Valley after torrential rains, creating the 150 square mile Salton Sea. In 1922 the Congress authorized the first of the Swing-Johnson bills leading to the dam’s construction. The dam was to be paid for by selling the electricity it would generate. It took until 1931 until construction actually began, but by the late twenties things were already looking up for Las Vegas and Clark County, as preparations for the influx of workers began. The federal government decided it didn’t want dam workers to be distracted with drinking and gambling, so they built a federal reservation, Boulder City, to house them safely away from temptation. But the weekends were times for the workers to

get away to the growing nightclub scene on Fremont Street and on the Los Angeles highway. The dam provided an economic boost while it was being built, and when it was finished, it helped kick off a new industry for Clark County—tourism.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 18: LEGALIZED GAMBLING IN 1931 BRINGS PROSPERITY

In spite of the jobs created by the Dam construction, the Depression hit Clark County hard, as it did the rest of the country. In 1931 the state legislature, casting about for ways to bring in more money, legalized table games and slot machines. Gambling had flourished in Nevada's earlier years but a wave of reform sentiment led to a ban on gambling in 1911. After protests, in 1915 card games were re-legalized. The gambling ban was only sporadically enforced, so that by 1931 it was an easy step for nightclubs and bars to add games of chance. In the city, the first gaming license was issued to Mayme Stocker and J.H. Morgan, owners of the famed Northern Club. Outside of the city, one of the earliest and most lavish casinos was The Meadows Club on Boulder Highway, a couple miles south of Las Vegas. Run by the Cornero brothers, it featured elegant décor, live entertainment and fine dining. Patrons wore black tie and evening gowns. On Highway 91, which was not to be called The Strip until the late thirties, the Pair-A-Dice Club was already operating, probably with illegal gambling and liquor. But its competitor down the road, the Red Rooster, got the first County-issued license. Another industry got its start in 1931 when the Nevada divorce waiting period was shortened to six weeks. Then after California enacted their "gin marriage" three day waiting period, the already-liberal Nevada marriage laws started drawing California residents. When prohibition was repealed in 1933 and the Dam was completed two years later, the stream of visitors to Clark County started growing and hasn't slowed since.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 19: THE STRIP'S EARLY YEARS

Before the The Flamingo and the notorious Bugsy Siegel, before the El Rancho Vegas or the Last Frontier, there were a couple of small nightclubs on what was then called Highway 91 (or the Los Angeles Highway) which paved the way for the more glamorous resorts that were to follow. Hoping to get a jump on the traffic coming in from southern California, the early nightclubs also took advantage of the newly enacted gaming laws. The Pair-A-Dice, which was later incorporated into the Last Frontier, was opened in 1930 and offered fine dining, dancing and entertainment. It also offered illegal gambling for the first year, and illegal liquor until the end of prohibition in 1933. Frank and Angelina Detra opened their establishment as a private club. It soon became a speakeasy, thriving in the climate of tolerance that local law enforcement promoted. As soon as they were able, the Pair-A-Dice owners applied for a gaming license from the county, in 1931. They were beaten to the punch by the Red Rooster, their competitor a mile south. The Red Rooster's owner, Alice Morris Wilson, received a gaming license on April 1, 1931, a month before the Pair-A-Dice got theirs. But the triumph was short-lived. The club was raided by federal agents and told to stop selling liquor in early 1931. They complied temporarily—but after

receiving the gaming license they were raided again by the feds in July, again for illegal liquor sales. This time the county pulled the Red Rooster's gaming license. Then in 1933 the club burned to the ground. Not to be kept down, the Red Rooster reopened New Year's Eve, 1933 and became a popular spot for locals and tourists. Later the club was owned by thirties Hollywood actress Grace Hayes. Today another popular resort sits on the site of the Red Rooster—the Mirage Hotel and Casino.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 20: ST. THOMAS COVERED BY LAKE MEAD

In early 1935 the Colorado River began to collect behind almost-completed Hoover Dam, filling in the canyons and backing up for miles to begin forming Lake Mead. While this long-awaited event finally started taming the mighty and unpredictable Colorado River, it had other consequences. One of the very oldest southern Nevada settlements, St. Thomas, was doomed to end up under the lake, along with the communities of Kaolin and the site of Callville, and the ruins of the ancient Lost City built by the Anasazi. St. Thomas was settled in 1865 by Mormon pioneers from Utah. They built sturdy homes, farm buildings, stores, a school and even a hotel, and the community prospered for many years. Generations came and went in the small town. But after 1935, as the slowly rising waters came closer, people sold their land and in some cases dismantled their buildings as they packed up to leave. The Bureau of Reclamation moved the town's cemetery to Logandale and residents relocated to other nearby communities. Hugh Lord, owner of the auto repair garage, was the last to leave, on June 11, 1938, rowing away after setting fire to his home. The post office, after canceling a record number of pieces of mail, was officially discontinued on June 16. The town remained submerged under 70 feet of water except for a couple of years of low levels in the lake when the remains of the structures briefly peeked out. In 2008, however, foretelling a future of receding Lake Mead waters that may not come back, St. Thomas emerged in its entirety and stands silently as a testament to the loss of the desert's most precious resource, water.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 21: DIVORCE BECOMES A NEW TOURIST INDUSTRY

For a few years after Nevada liberalized its divorce laws in 1931 to bring in a new kind of tourist to the Silver State, Las Vegas ran a poor second to Reno in attracting those wanting to untie the knot. Reno had been the destination of choice for (mostly) women who waited out the six weeks' required residency getting "Reno-vated" as columnist Walter Winchell described it. But things changed in 1939 when Maria Gable, wife of film star Clark Gable, took up residence in a modest home on South Seventh Street in Las Vegas, recently vacated by her attorney Frank McNamee, Jr. The wealthy Maria, commonly known as Ria, was there to, as she put it ironically, "catch up on my knitting." She had been separated from her husband for two years and it was well known that Clark Gable wanted a divorce so he could marry Carole Lombard. But Ria had little time to knit as Las Vegas boosters eagerly took advantage of her stay by dreaming up ways to generate publicity shots. The accommodating Ria had a great time as she was photographed skiing at Mt. Charleston, boating on Lake Mead

and playing roulette at the Apache Club downtown. The pictures went out over the wire service, giving Las Vegas a new standing as the place to get a divorce in style. Clark and Ria's eighteen-year marriage ended, and Las Vegas soon became the world's divorce capital.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 22: THE NEW DEAL'S LEGACY IN CLARK COUNTY

While the rest of the country suffered through the Great Depression, Las Vegas and Clark County reaped the benefit of the construction of the Dam. The dam, which brought thousands to southern Nevada, was the largest infusion of federal dollars but not the only one. Gearing up for the wave of job seekers meant providing housing, schools, improved water and sewer systems and emergency relief services. Roosevelt's alphabet soup of new federal agencies provided direct appropriations and low-interest loans, matched by community dollars and labor. This meant communities received not just the needed improvements, but employment. The new post office and federal building, completed and opened in late 1933, was one such project. The beautiful neo-classical structure dominated the Third Street vista from its location on Stewart Street and gave Clark County residents a new sense of pride in their community. In 1934 the Las Vegas Grammar School burned to the ground, and two years later the WPA provided a beautiful Spanish style replacement. In the mid-thirties the WPA under local administrator Claude Mackay built a youth camp for children in Kyle Canyon on land donated by surveyor J.T. McWilliams. In the late thirties New Deal funds paved and widened the Los Angeles Highway, ensuring that the community's growing tourist industry would receive a steady flow of customers. Elsewhere in the rural areas the Civilian Conservation Corps built parks and rock walls and even the Lost City Museum in Overton. Today we can see three examples of the New Deal's legacy, in the historic downtown Post Office, the Fifth Street School and Camp Lee Canyon, all of which are preserved, used and well loved by citizens of Clark County.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 23: HELLDORADO BRINGS IN THE TOURISTS

By Dorothy Wright

In 1935 Clark County was celebrating the completion of Boulder Dam and the arrival of 125,000 visitors in the first four months alone. While the rest of the country struggled with the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, unemployment and hunger, civic leaders and the Elks Lodge threw a four-day party called Helldorado. Everyone got into the western spirit. Women competed for the title of Belle of Helldorado. Residents wore western clothes, held Kangaroo Courts and cavorted in the specially constructed Frontier Village. The Old Timers Parade featured floats from hotels, businesses and organizations. Stars of the event were cowboy actor and rancher Rex Bell, and colorful character Death Valley Scotty. Helldorado was advertised around the southwest and was so successful that the next year they added a rodeo. Tex Ritter became the featured cowboy celebrity, in which role he continued for years. Big name stars were brought in to perform at hotels during Helldorado Days, to capitalize on the tourists that came for the event. In 1946 there was even a Hollywood movie, filmed in Las Vegas in 1945, starring Roy Rogers, Dale Evans and Gabby Hayes. The word "Helldorado" was considered too risqué, so they dropped one L to make the name of the movie "Heldorado." Although eventually Helldorado faded and finally vanished in the 1990s, the City of Las Vegas 2005 Centennial brought it back, and Helldorado is once again a popular community event.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 24: 1941: THE STRIP, NELLIS AND HENDERSON TAKE SHAPE

In early 1941 Las Vegas civic leaders were still trying to find ways to bolster the town's economic base after the dip in population that occurred when the Dam construction was finished. Helldorado was a great attraction but it was only for a week every year. Then California hotelman Tommy Hull opened the El Rancho Vegas, the first hotel and casino on Highway 91. The El Rancho was so successful that Texas theater magnate R.E. Griffith followed suit with the Last Frontier in 1942. Meanwhile, all was not fun and games, as the war in Europe heated up. The United States, though not yet a combatant, was committed to preparedness. To this end the Army's West Coast Air Training Command decided, after extensive lobbying by Las Vegas officials, to locate their training facility in Clark County. The ideal flying weather and the vast stretches of empty public domain land were big inducements. When Las Vegas civic leaders agreed to shut down the notorious "Block 16," the Army sealed the deal. The first troops arrived in June at the Las Vegas Army Gunnery School (later Nellis.) At the same time during 1941, Nevada Congressional lobbying resulted in a huge magnesium defense plant being built south of town. The plant, Basic Magnesium Inc., was to produce many war-related products. Housing was in such short supply that the government built a town, originally called Basic, to provide homes for the thousands of workers needed to keep the assembly lines going. The town, later called Henderson, became a post-war bonus for Clark County. After the war BMI was privatized, and the temporary plywood houses were sold to their occupants. One of those houses can be seen, with typical 1940s furnishings, at the Clark County Museum on Boulder Highway.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT # 25: THE END OF SEGREGATION

World War II brought an influx of thousands of African-Americans to Clark County to work at Basic Magnesium. The company sent recruiters into the Deep South, to communities in Arkansas and Louisiana, and Black families migrated west in hopes of a better life. Until that time there were only a couple hundred African-Americans in southern Nevada. Blacks had fought hard to get employment on the Dam, but only ten were rewarded with jobs. When thousands came to work at BMI, the factory offered segregated housing in Carver Park. But there was not enough room for all the Black workers at Carver Park, so most were forced to live in West Las Vegas, without paved streets, a fire station, or sometimes even running water and sewers. Not only were the living conditions for blacks deplorable, but also schools were segregated and blacks weren't allowed to patronize hotels and casinos. In the 1950s African-Americans weren't allowed in casinos, and Black entertainers such as Sammy Davis Jr. and Pearl Bailey could perform at but not stay in the hotels. Many courageous African-American men and women worked hard to end segregation. In 1960, Dr. James McMillan, a Black dentist and head of the local NAACP, called for a general strike until community leaders agreed to end segregation. A meeting at the Moulin Rouge Casino with casino owners, politicians and civil rights leaders led to an agreement that African-Americans could gamble, dine and see shows on the Strip. However, it wasn't until 1972 that the Clark County School District, after a lawsuit by the NAACP, adopted a plan to integrate the schools, and it took years before African-Americans lived freely throughout the community. Today Black residents of Clark County have a better life thanks to civil rights leaders and ordinary citizens who took a stand and paved the way for those who followed.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT #26: CLARK COUNTY WOMEN

Women have been the backbone of Clark County history-not always visible, but

always essential. March is Women's History Month, a good time to remember some of these female pioneers. Helen Stewart, who came to southern Nevada as a young bride in 1882, was soon left a widow with five children and a ranch to manage. She stayed on, surviving and even thriving, finally selling the ranch and water rights in 1903 to William Clark's Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake railroad. From that sale the city of Las Vegas was born. In the 1920s Maude Frazier was a visionary educator who could see what the construction of Boulder Dam would bring. She convinced city fathers to float a \$350,000 bond issue to build a new high school beyond the edge of town at 7th and Bridger. It took only two years for the school to be filled to capacity. Later Frazier pushed just as hard for a southern branch of the University of Nevada and raised the matching funds to build the first building on what is now UNLV's campus. Anna Roberts Parks was a woman in an unusual field: she was Clark County's first female mortician. After her divorce she established Palm Mortuary in 1927 and became a successful businesswoman on her own. Parks was also a passionate collector of Native American artifacts. Her collection was donated to what is now the Clark County Museum, and forms the core of the Museum's holdings. Other women include entertainer Grace Hayes who became a Strip nightclub owner in the 1940s; Eva Adams, aide to Senator Pat McCarran who was appointed Director of the U.S. Mint by President Kennedy; and Lubertha Johnson, an African-American civil rights leader who was on the forefront of the fight against discrimination in Clark County. They are just a few of the capable, determined and courageous women who helped shape Clark County history.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT #27: THE POST-WAR BOOM ON THE STRIP

The end of World War II saw a surge of optimism and building on the Strip. The El Rancho Vegas and the Hotel Las Frontier, the two big properties, were soon to be joined by a more sophisticated project—Billy Wilkerson's Flamingo Hotel. Wilkerson, a successful southern California nightclub owner and publisher of the Hollywood Reporter, created, designed and began the construction of an opulent hotel and casino that would attract Hollywood's elite. Unfortunately, about the time he ran out of money he was approached by a group of east coast gangsters headed by Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel, who forced their way into the project and soon muscled Wilkerson out. Siegel's extravagant spending and cost overruns led to his demise when he was assassinated shortly after the hotel opened. The Flamingo was followed quickly by The Thunderbird, 1948; the Sahara, the Desert Inn and the Silver Slipper (originally the Golden Slipper) 1950; and the Sands, 1952. The county land was attractive to builders because of the wide-open spaces available, and because, compared to the city, permits and taxes were cheaper. The new properties in the early fifties were low-rise, with large parking lots and big swimming pools, which catered to Californians driving in on Highway 91. The Strip properties made huge profits for their owners. Seeing this, Mayor Ernie Cragin proposed, first in 1946 and then in 1950, that the City should annex the Strip. Strip property owners fought back in a move that will be de tailed in the next Centennial Moment.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT #28: THE BIRTH OF PARADISE TOWNSHIP

Paradise Township is the largest unincorporated township in the U.S. The story of its creation is the story of the fight over who would control the Strip. Mayor Ernie Cragin's battle to annex the Strip, begun in 1946, continued during the late 1940s. Strip hotel owners fought back. They worked with Lt. Governor (and part owner of the Thunderbird Hotel) Cliff Jones to push through state legislation that prevented any city from annexing an unincorporated township. Armed with this new weapon, in 1950 Flamingo executive and reputed mob front man Gus Greenbaum rallied residents to

support creation of Paradise Township. The County Commission acceded to the petitioners' request. With Paradise established, the City was unable to annex the Strip. Greenbaum was proclaimed "The Mayor of Paradise." According to the book, "The Green Felt Jungle," genial Gus Greenbaum was a beloved supporter of churches and other local charities, but suspected cheaters at his casinos were sometimes given a one-way outing into the desert. Greenbaum continued to make large profits for the mob, first at the Flamingo and then at the Riviera. But when he decided to retire to Phoenix for good, he shortly afterward met the same fate as his old colleague Ben Siegel. However, Greenbaum left a legacy that remains today: a strong County government that derives major revenues from one of the biggest tourist attractions in the world, the Las Vegas Strip.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 29: THE FIRST NEVADA ATOMIC BOMB TEST FROM NEVADA YESTERDAYS BY FRANK WRIGHT

On January 27, 1951, an atomic bomb was dropped at Frenchman Flat at what was then the Nevada Proving Grounds. It was the first atomic test in the United States since the Trinity explosion at Alamogordo, New Mexico ushered in the Atomic Age in 1945.

The first atmospheric blast in Nevada, seen and felt as far away as northern Utah, left people unsettled. But Las Vegas quickly conquered their nervousness. Commentator Bob Considine noted that an early test caused barely a hitch in a craps dealer's motion. "Must have been a A-Bomb," the dealer said. "Place your bets – new shooter coming out." Fremont Street merchants turned the test to advantage. After one particularly violent shaking had shattered a few windows, one businessman swept up the broken glass and displayed it in a barrel with the sign "A-Bomb Souvenirs – Free."

The town came to love the Bomb. The Chamber of Commerce distributed brochures notifying locals and tourists of upcoming blasts and indicating good vantage points for picnic viewing of the shots. Strip hotels featured "Miss Atomic Bomb" contests, and local hair stylists created the Atomic Hairdo in the shape of a mushroom cloud. Only for the brave was the Atomic Cocktail – equal parts vodka, brandy and champagne, with a hint of sherry.

Downwinders in Nevada and Utah had much less reason to love the Bomb; they showed abnormally high incidence of cancer. There have, of course, been no atmospheric tests at the Site since the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963 and no tests at all in the last few years. The present test moratorium takes some of the horror out of the thoughts of physicist Robert Oppenheimer at Alamogordo. At the moment of the Trinity test, Oppenheimer recalled words from the Bhagavad Gita: "I am become Death – the Shatterer of Worlds."

CENTENNIAL MOMENT #30: KEFAUVER HEARINGS MAKE WAVES

In 1950 an event in Las Vegas made national headlines. Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, who had been appointed chairman of the newly created Senate Committee on Organized Crime, brought his traveling show to town. The series of televised hearings had been conducted in various locations. The Las Vegas session, held at the Post Office/Federal Building on Stewart Street (slated to be the Mob Museum,) was to last only one nine hour day, but it had a long range impact. Testimony revealed information that while shocking to the rest of the country, was old news to residents

of Las Vegas and Clark County. Wilbur Clark, the face of the Desert Inn, was found to be only a minority shareholder. Clark had run out of funds during construction and had turned to Moe Dalitz and his mob associates for money to complete the project. Dalitz and others controlled the Desert Inn and left Clark as its genial host and figurehead. Moe Sedway, another organized crime figure, had been openly operating race wires in Las Vegas since 1942. Gus Greenbaum, successfully running the Flamingo after Bugsy Siegel's violent demise, was a well known organized crime figure. The state's gaming control efforts were at that time under the Nevada Tax Commission. The man in charge of the Tax Commission, Robbins Cahill, expressed the view, as did Lieutenant Governor Cliff Jones, that those in the gambling business couldn't be expected to be bishops of the church or pillars of the community. But the Kefauver hearings did put Las Vegas in a bad light nationally. Senator Pat McCarran was able to fend off proposed federal legislation to impose a 10% tax on Nevada gaming, but five years later the Nevada legislature created the Nevada Gaming Control Board and instituted the new regulation that gamers had to be licensed before building their gaming establishments rather than after.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 31: A UNIVERSITY FOR SOUTHERN NEVADA

In September, 1951, University of Nevada English Professor James R. Dickinson arrived from Reno to start university extension classes at Las Vegas High School. With two part-time instructors he began teaching 30 students. Over the next few years civic leaders and residents lobbied for a branch of the university to be built in southern Nevada. In 1954 the university regents met for the first time in Las Vegas. They expressed support for a southern campus while warning that most of the funding was needed in the north. Clark County School Superintendent R. Guild Gray took up the challenge by organizing the Nevada Southern Campus Fund Committee to raise money. Assisted by Assemblywoman Maude Frazier, who was also former School Superintendent, the Porchlight Campaign kicked off with an hour-long telecast. High school and college students then canvassed every home from North Las Vegas to Boulder City. Over \$135,000 was raised, enough to construct the first building. Eighty acres of desert had been acquired on remote Maryland Parkway in unincorporated Clark County. The State Legislature, impressed with the local fundraising and the donated land, provided \$200,000. When the first building was completed in 1957 it was named, appropriately, Maude Frazier Hall. The following year Archie C. Grant Hall opened and the campus was off to a good start. The struggle for state funds continued, however, with UNR always getting the lion's share. In 1968 bankers Jerry Mack and E. Parry Thomas helped start a foundation so the campus could add another 300 acres. And in 1969, Nevada Southern University became the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, putting it on equal footing with the northern campus. Ten years later, UNLV's enrollment surpassed Reno's. In 2009 UNLV has more than 100 buildings and 1,000 faculty members teaching 28,000 students, as well as more than 220 accredited undergraduate, masters and doctoral degree programs.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 32: LAUGHLIN

Western boomtowns aren't just a 19th century phenomenon. In 1966 gaming entrepreneur Don Laughlin bought a bankrupt eight-room motel and bar at the southern tip of Nevada, across the river from Bullhead City, Arizona. Bullhead City was a village created during the construction of Davis Dam in 1951. He saw opportunity in the Arizona residents who might cross Davis Dam to gamble, rather than drive 25 miles further to Hoover Dam. Laughlin brought his young family and they lived in four of the eight motel rooms. In 1968 the Post Office named the place

Laughlin. Don Laughlin began building his Riverside Resort, which by 1972 had 48 rooms and by 1986 had 660. By the year 2000 the Riverside Resort had 1,400 rooms, plus 800 RV spaces. Several casino corporations had followed his lead and built properties on the Colorado. The unincorporated town of Laughlin was created in 1979. Don Laughlin continued to play a major role in the shaping of the town, funding the entire \$4.5 million cost of the bridge connecting Laughlin and Bullhead City. Today Laughlin, with an estimated population of 8,800, is the only unincorporated town in Clark County with a full time Town Manager. And although a large percentage of the workforce lives in Bullhead City, Laughlin boasts schools, parks, a library and other civic amenities. A large “snowbird” population of seniors who go south for the winter enjoy the mild winter climate. Unlike other Nevada boomtowns that went bust, Laughlin is a town that’s here to stay.

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 33: CLARK COUNTY’S MILITARY HISTORY

Clark County has a long military history starting with Lt. John C. Fremont in 1844 (when Clark County was still part of Lincoln) who led his famous expedition on behalf of the United States Army. Camp Callville and Camp Eldorado guarded against Indian attacks that never happened in the 1860s. In the 20th century, the military role is even more important. In 1941 the Army Air Force was considering Clark County as a gunnery school. Before that could happen, however, officials had to promise to close the notorious Block 16, the downtown red light district. By the end of World War II nearly 55,000 aerial gunners had been trained at the Las Vegas Gunnery School. The Gunnery School later became Nellis Air Force Base. Meanwhile the area that is now Henderson was chosen for a massive magnesium plant for incendiary bombs and tracer bullets, which began production in 1943. Basic Magnesium employed thousands, including many women who were wage earners for the first time. Out in what is now Cal-Nev-Ari, General George S. Patton’s Desert Training area, known as Stage Field, prepared soldiers for the rigors of fighting in the overseas deserts. After World War II, which ended shortly after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Clark County was again a focal point, this time for the Cold War efforts. Until the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty thousands of workers made the daily commute to the Nevada Test Site to work as scientists and support staff. The 1950s also saw the development of the Indian Springs Air Base, now known as Creech Air Base, for testing fighter planes. **Clark County’s military history will be discussed at the next Centennial Stories panel discussion on First Friday, Nov. 6 at 6 PM at the County Commission Chambers.**

CENTENNIAL MOMENT 34: MARKETING CLARK COUNTY

When the Union Pacific railroad pulled its repair shops out of Las Vegas in 1922, community leaders began thinking of ways to diversify the economy so as not to be so dependent on one industry ever again. Two major events occurred in the 1930s—the legislature approved relaxed gaming laws, and the Boulder Dam project began to take shape. Both of these were destined to play a large role in the new industry that was to bring Clark County out of the doldrums—tourism. Along with tourism was a need for marketing. In 1944 the Chamber of Commerce decided that a major marketing campaign could be aimed across the country. Under the leadership of KENO radio’s Maxwell Kelch, the Chamber established the Live Wire fund. With that fund, the Chamber was able to hire professional marketing firms to send news stories across the country. The Wild West theme and Helldorado, and later the Fun in the Sun slogan with pictures of water skiing on Lake Mead, were some of the early attempts to coax middle America into taking a Vegas Vacation. The Steve Hannagan agency had the most lasting impact, creating the Desert Sea News Bureau which

became the Las Vegas News Bureau. The genius of some of the early photographers can be seen in their wildly inventive pictures. They often featured beautiful young girls, Hollywood celebrities or what they called "hometowns" with an attractive young couple from Middle America. These early P.R. agencies, as well as the Strip hotels' in-house publicists, were the forerunners of today's Las Vegas Convention and Visitor's Authority. Today's "What Happens in Vegas Stays in Vegas" may seem more polished, but it's hard to beat the humor and sheer exuberance of the News Bureau's photo of Sands publicist's Al Freeman's stunt--the "floating crap game" taken in the Sands swimming pool with an actual craps table in the water.