

## LVHS CLASS OF 1956 - 50 YEAR REUNION



### *History of Las Vegas High School*

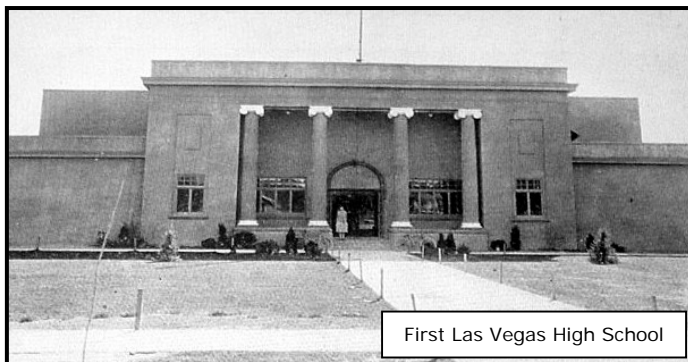
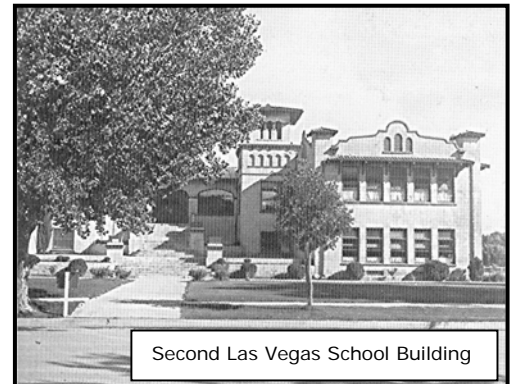
Most people believe that the first school in Las Vegas was held in a tent in 1905. In reality, the first school was held in the old Las Vegas Mormon Fort in 1855. There were never more than three upper-grade students since they were involved in the day-to-day farming activities, and the school was abandoned in February, 1857 when the missionaries were called back to Salt Lake City.



Because funds originally set aside for a school were used to build a jail, a **tent** was set-up under the cottonwoods near the Las Vegas Creek for 20 primary and secondary students, and used for the **1904-1905** school-year. During the summer of 1905, the tent was converted to a courthouse, so the old Salt Lake Hotel was purchased for \$150, moved to the southwest corner of **2<sup>nd</sup> and Lewis**, and remodeled at a cost of \$750. Opened **October 2, 1905** with 64 students and 2 teachers, this 40' x 50' wooden building had three rooms, was heated with a pot-bellied stove, had a patch board ceiling and walls covered with cloth and paper. The school year ended early, on March 30 in **1906** due to "lack of funds". *The first three seniors in Las Vegas* graduated **June 12, 1907**. In December, **1909**, a

\$30,000 bond was approved for a combined grammar and high school, but before the new school was completed, and shortly after the addition of a belfry, the first school building (and another school building that was added next to it in 1908) burned down in October, **1910**. Classes were moved to the Sunday school classrooms at the Methodist Church and nearby boarding house for the remainder of the **1910-1911** school-year. There were 9 high school students.

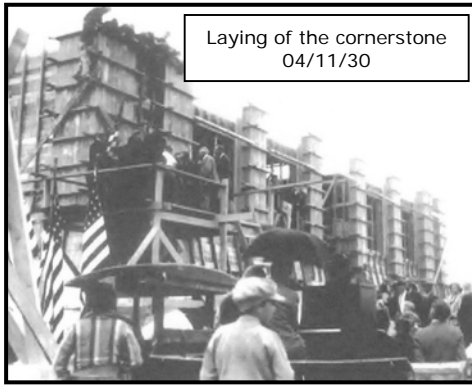
The Union Pacific Railroad donated property bound by Bridger, Lewis, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> streets, and the cornerstone for the new **Clark County School** (later called the **Las Vegas School**) was laid as part of the Independence Day celebration on July 4, 1910. Delayed until wooden steps were replaced with concrete steps, the new two-story school opened on **September 11, 1911**. It was an 8-room building of concrete construction, designed in Mission architecture with a metal roof (fires were a constant concern). There were 17 high school students. In **1912** there were *9 graduates*. In the fall of **1912** the **Clark County High School** was established in separate rooms of the grammar school and opened with 3 teachers. In **1914** and **1915** there were *6 graduates*, and in **1916** there were *7 graduates*.



In **1916**, plans were started for a *separate high school* near 4<sup>th</sup> and Clark streets. The **Clark County High School** (later renamed **Las Vegas High School**) was completed in December of **1917** at a cost of \$42,500 and included a gymnasium and auditorium. Students moved in shortly after Christmas of **1917**. There was no school during October & November, **1918** due to a flu epidemic. In **1921** there was a faculty of 6, there were *12 graduates*, scarlet and black were chosen as the school colors, and the first yearbook, called "Pah-Rah-Wah-Na" (the Paiute Indian phrase for "Rainbow") was published. In **1922** there were *11 graduates*. In December, **1927**, a new gym, additional classrooms and a new auditorium on 4<sup>th</sup> Street opened. In **1928**, with the start of construction of Boulder Dam, the name of

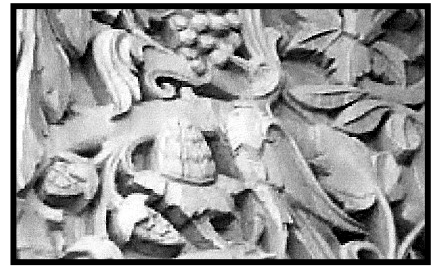
the yearbook was changed to "Boulder Echo" and a \$5 award was given to the student that named it. That same year, the first school football team was formed under the guidance of coach Frank Butcher, and there were *24 graduates*. Plans were started for a new high school, designed for a student body capacity of 500, at 7<sup>th</sup> and Bridger. Many resisted, saying it would be "too far out of town" and would never be filled! There were *29 graduates* in **1929** - the largest class in the history of the school.

The new **Las Vegas High School** at 7<sup>th</sup> & Bridger, built at a cost of \$350,000 and the only Art Deco style building in Las Vegas, opened in the fall of **1930** and was dedicated on November 2.

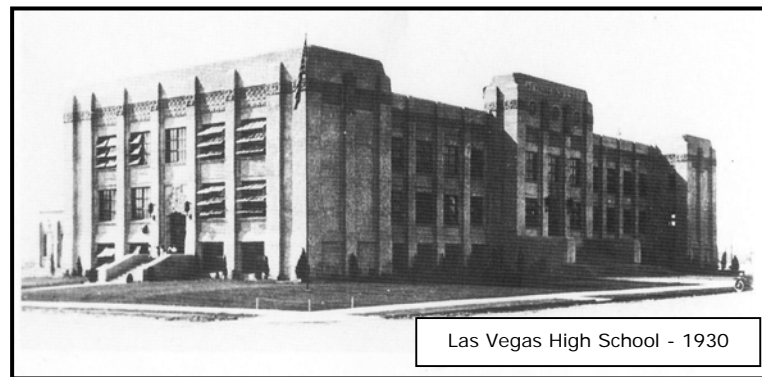


Laying of the cornerstone  
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That year the Honor Club was formed, the Desert Breeze newspaper was started, and Frank Butcher, Head of Athletics, died in a gasoline fire at the age of 26. In **1931**, Butcher Field was named in his honor and the Boulder Echo was dedicated to him. In **1932**, 15 issues of the Desert Breeze were published, and there were *75 graduates*. The Great Depression swept across the country and the unemployed converged on Las Vegas hoping for jobs on the Boulder Dam project. In **1933**, Boulder City became a reality and 165 high school



students were bused to Las Vegas. LVHS enrollment jumped to 473 students and the "Wildcat" mascot was born. There were *100 graduates* in **1934**, and the Desert Breeze was expanded to two pages. That same year, the *original* Las Vegas High School, which had become part of the Las Vegas Grammar School, burned down. In **1935** there were 775 students enrolled (in the school built for 500), and in **1936** there were *69 graduates*. In **1937**, there were *91 graduates* and Bill Nellis graduated (he was shot down over Luxembourg 4 years later and was memorialized by the naming of Nellis Air Force Base).



Las Vegas High School - 1930

Dougan's Café (on the northwest corner of 7<sup>th</sup> and Bridger, later known as the "Kick-Off") opened and became a favorite gathering place for students in **1941**. In **1943** yearbook photos were taken in groups to conserve paper during the war years, and **1944** saw the first decline in school enrollment due to the draft and enlistments. There were *107 graduates* in **1945**, including Bill "Wildcat" Morris. In **1946**, the Annex Building and band room were added, Walter V. Long became Vice Principal, and the Wildcat Lair was established at 4<sup>th</sup> and Stewart. In **1947** construction was started on Frazier Hall, the School Administration Building was added, and Evelyn Stuckey formed the Pep Cat Drill

Team. In **1949**, Frazier Hall was completed, bleachers were added to Butcher Field, the Boulder Echo was renamed "Wildcat Echo" (because Boulder Dam was renamed Hoover Dam that same year), the Rhythmettes were formed, and over 1000 students were enrolled.

The first performance of the Rhythmettes was held in **1950**. The senior boys formed the "Figuerettes", and the first Rhythmette Revue was presented in **1951**. In **1952**, 200 girls tried out for 6 Rhythmette openings, bond issues were launched for a new auditorium and additional vocational shop space, and there were *228 graduates*. In **1954**, Butcher Field was enlarged, there were 1820 students enrolled (in a school then built for 1500) and there were *283 graduates*. In **1955** there were over 1900 students enrolled, there were *387 graduates*, and the Wildcat Lair closed. In **1956** the University of Nevada, Southern Division, shared space at LVHS, and there were *403 graduates*, the largest graduating class in LVHS history and the last graduating class in Las Vegas where all seniors were in only one high school (Rancho and Gorman did not have seniors until 1957). In **1987**, Governor Richard Bryan (LVHS Class of 1955) signed a bill preserving LVHS as an historic landmark, and in **1991** Las Vegas High School was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. A new school was built at East Sahara and Hollywood, near Sunrise Mountain, in **1993** and designated as "Las Vegas High School", and our "old" Las Vegas High School became the "Las Vegas Academy of International Studies, Performing & Visual Arts".

In 1956, teachers earned about \$3810 annually and there were just over 20,000 students in 30 Clark County schools. In 2006, teachers start at \$30,000 annually and there are nearly 300,000 students in 317 in Clark County schools (including 41 high schools). An average of 10 new schools has opened each of the last four years. Three elementary schools are named for our classmates (**James Bilbray, Roger M. Bryan, and Manuel J. Cortez Elementary Schools**) and ten elementary or middle schools are named for our schoolmates and teachers.

Sources: Las Vegas High School - Its People - Its Impact, published in 1992, a compilation of articles in the Las Vegas Sun Magazine from April-November, 1980, Chapter Seven of "Young Las Vegas, 1905-1931" published in the Las Vegas Review Journal on April 10, 2005, and 1921 & 1928 yearbooks.