Getting the most out of your visit ...

Take time to walk the paths and enjoy the feeling of a time in the not-too-distant past when, from this lonely outpost, the desert stretched away to the distant mountains.

For many years, efforts have been underway to preserve this site, which has historical significance in southern Nevada.

Under the Nevada Division of State Parks and other interested historical groups, the Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort has been restored to an historical appearance. One structure is original, while others have been reconstructed using the best archeological and historical information available.

The Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort is located in downtown Las Vegas, at the intersection of Las Vegas Boulevard and Washington Avenue.

The Park and Visitor Center are open from 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Tuesday – Sunday, all year. The park is open Tuesday through Sunday all year.

OLD LAS VEGAS MORMON FORT
State Historic Park

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Las Vegas, Nevada 89101
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oldfort@parks.nv.gov

DIVISION OF STATE PARKS

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OLD LAS VEGAS MORMON FORT

(775) 486–3511
www.parks.nv.gov/olvmf.htm

OLD LAS VEGAS MORMON FORT *The Place Where Las Vegas Began*

PARK HISTORY

More than 150 years ago, a spring-fed creek flowed through this valley, creating an oasis in the desert. With the only free-flowing water and grass for miles around, the site attracted native Paiute people as well as traders, emigrants and gold seekers traveling the Old Spanish Trail to California. The Spaniards called the place *las vegas*, Spanish for the meadows.

In June of 1855, William Bringhurst and 29 fellow Mormon missionaries from Utah arrived at this site and built a 150-foot square adobe fort, the first permanent structure erected in the valley. The Mormon outpost, complete with a post office, served as a way station for travelers. The creek provided irrigation for fields and orchards. Lead was later discovered in the mountains to the southwest, and the mission was expanded to include mining and smelting, but the effort proved unsuccessful.

After less than two years, the Mormon effort was abandoned after dissension arose between two of the local leaders, adding to the discouragement of many in the group. In 1865, Octavius D. Gass bought the site and developed a large-scale ranch that included a small store and blacksmith shop to serve travelers and nearby mining communities.

In 1881, Gass defaulted on a loan using the ranch as collateral. The ranch was passed on to Archibald and Helen Stewart. Although Archibald was killed in a gunfight in 1884, Helen, with the help of her father and others, continued to operate the ranch.

In 1902, Helen sold the ranch and water rights to the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad. A new town, Las Vegas, sprang into existence in 1905 when the rails reached the valley. From this place, Las Vegas has since expanded to become one of the nation's major metropolitan areas.

THE LAS VEGAS SPRINGS AND CREEK

It all started with water. Rising from underground aquifers about four miles west of the Fort, springs supplied Las Vegas Creek with a year-round supply of water that flowed for several miles before being lost in the desert. For thousands of years the creek was the site of seasonal camps for various groups of native people, who hunted the animals and collected the wild plants that grew at the oasis. Later, the creek provided early travelers with a welcome place for water and feed.

Starting in 1895, the water was used for irrigating crops and orchards by the Mormons. After the city of Las Vegas was founded in 1905, the spring water was diverted into the town's water system and the creek largely dried up.

THE OLD FORT

The original fort was built by the Mormons in 1855. It consisted of an adobe enclosure 150 feet on each side, with towers or bastions at the northwest and southeast corners. The adobe building closest to the creek is the only surviving part of this structure. The other walls and the bastion at the northeast corner are reconstructions. The building was most recently used as a testing lab and office for the United States Bureau of Reclamation, which leased and renovated the building in 1929 during the construction of Hoover Dam.

THE RANCH HOUSE

In 1865, Octavius D. Gass, a miner from El Dorado Canyon acquired the Mormon fort site and used part of the foundation and walls to build a ranch house. Gass also bought out other landholders to assemble a sizable ranch, and built a store and blacksmith shop to supply travelers.

Later the ranch was taken over by Archibald and Helen Stewart. Helen occupied the ranch house until she sold it to the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad, and a new town, Las Vegas, sprang into existence in 1905 when the rails reached the valley.

Las Vegas has since expanded to become one of the nation's major metropolitan areas.