



The Christensen Home

built in 1932 by an African American couple,
LeRoy and Carrie Christensen

The home is located at:
500 W. Van Buren Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89106



Elder LeRoy Christensen
(1904-1953)
and Carrie Christensen
(1904-1998)



“The Castle,” with its tower, stone facing, and half-timbered architecture, was the setting for many events. When an elegant fashion show was produced here for television in 1948, local celebrity and eventual Moulin Rouge owner Sarann Knight-Preddy (pictured above) modeled high fashion dresses for the prestigious production.”

PEOPLE SAVING PLACES

SPRING 2021

preservation

The magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation



**BUFFALO'S
HUB FOR FOOD
START-UPS**

**ART MEETS
LANDSCAPE AT
A CONNECTICUT
MUSEUM**

WESTSIDE MEMORIES

**LANDMARKS OF BLACK HISTORY
DOT A LAS VEGAS NEIGHBORHOOD**

The Christensen Home was on the cover of the national *Preservation Magazine*, the Spring 2021 issue. *Preservation* is the magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.



▲ CHRISTENSEN HOUSE

Likely dating to the 1930s, the stone-and-stucco house was built by the Christensens, a prominent Black family in Las Vegas. Carrie Christensen lived in the house until the 1970s, and it eventually was bought by the local Catholic Worker community, which performs social justice work on the Westside. Carrie's grandson Loyal Christensen, who visited the house as a child, says she would approve. "My grandmother was always very hospitable," he says. "I thought that was perfect, the way that worked out."



A grant from the National Trust's African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund enabled the Nevada Preservation Foundation to survey the Historic Westside in 2020. For more on the fund, visit SavingPlaces.org/african-american-cultural-heritage

This is page 43 of *Preservation Magazine*, the Spring 2021 issue.

Interview in 1989 with Carrie Christensen

by Julia Occhiogrosso

I was out on the roof when I heard a fragile yet persistent call. As we worked on rehabbing our newly acquired hospitality house, we were growing accustomed to curious visitors. I went downstairs to meet our guest. An elderly woman stood in the entrance way. Streams of daylight gave a soft glow to her brown skin. Her refined attire stood in contrast to the boarded-up windows and broken glass. She reached out to shake my hand. "My name is Carrie Christensen. My husband and I built this house in 1932," she explained with nostalgic admiration. Still holding my hand, she continued to tell bits and pieces of the story. "We had a prayer room in this house, my husband and I, we prayed about every decision we made. We were just married and living out here on this property in a tent. This neighborhood was just desert back in those days." She continued, "I saw we needed a home. I admired these stones I spotted down at the railroad yard. We had a vision that we could use these stones to build us a home. We prayed that maybe somehow we would get those stones. Then one day I convinced my husband to go down to the railroad yard and ask if we could have them. While he was inquiring, I waited in the car. Meanwhile, a man approached me. I told him what I was waiting for. He said, 'Ma'am, if you want these stones you can have them.' I asked who should I say gave us permission. He told me his name and it turned out he was the manager of the railroad yard. Surely those stones were a gift from the Lord." She paused for a moment and I explained that this house would be used to serve the poor. With enthusiasm she responded, "I always knew this was meant to be a benevolent home ever since my husband and I adopted twin boys."

She slowly moved out into the front yard. There she pointed out all the fruit trees she planted in honor of her favorite scripture stories. "Over there is the pomegranate, and there are the olive trees. On the side of the house are the orange blossoms; in the back, the fig tree still stands." There was a moment of silence as her eyes wandered about the house. I found myself wandering with her on a journey that seemed to be divinely connected to our life here at the Catholic Worker.

We visited for a good part of the afternoon and the next day she returned to show me her wedding picture. Her frail fingers carefully handled the photo. Gently tilting it in my direction, I had the sure sense that she was sharing a rare treasure. Yet more precious than the preserved paper image of her and her young groom was her ability and desire to remember. One could tell she drew strength and vision from this remembering. It was clear to me that even as a young bride she knew who she was, and who she would become was intimately connected to those who came before her.

Mrs. Christensen had to sell the house in 1977; she was a widow and could not manage the upkeep alone. She lives in Kentucky and continues to visit Las Vegas. It is a privilege to live in a house built on such a legacy of faith. Indeed, this house still stands tall in this poor African American community. Many old timers who knew the Christensens have commented that this was a special home, a place where they found good people and Christian love.

Today, as I look out the second floor window of this house, I try to imagine this area fifty-six years ago . . . I see this young, confident African American and Native American woman who arrived here with her African American husband. I try to see what they saw. Before them was a vast desert landscape. They were surrounded by a stretch of earth which provided infinite possibilities. And even with life's struggles of the depression, they were able to dream.

The shatter of broken glass interrupts my reverie. I find myself abruptly brought back to 1989. This same area now is covered with boarded-up buildings and burnt-out homes. It has been economically deprived for so long by a wealthy city that has not learned to share. It seems to be lingering on its last breath. Old time community members work hard to hold small businesses together. The national drug crisis hits even harder in this community that is already on the economic margins. Parent addicts use food money to get their fix. Young children are attracted to the seemingly quick cash that dealing drugs provides. Young men fight to their death over a bad deal.

As a culture, we are steadily losing a sense of our connection to those who came before us. For the poor, who are burdened by the task of survival, reflection on the past is a luxury or a memory too painful to bear. Indeed, the rise in broken families makes it difficult to trace even a portion of one's heritage. The fast lane generation is blinded to the values of faith and community that gave many of our ancestors a life of integrity. The immediate gratification mentality leaves us focused on how much and how fast we can consume in the moment. As a whole, we are left with a society with a disoriented sense of self and an emptiness that breeds more and more addictions.

Our identity stands on shaky ground and it is difficult to find the proper footing to push off into a more helpful future. Indeed, the popular culture would tell us that we should not allow ourselves to even enter a future. Instead, we should stay forever young. The elderly, symbols of our future, are devalued like an obsolete technology. Our apathy over pollution of the earth and the arms race indicate how little sense we have of our connection to the lives that will follow ours.

At the Catholic Worker, we are directly confronted with some of the tragic consequences of a culture which does not understand its place in history. More significantly, it is a culture which does not recognize God moving with us in history toward a new creation.

In this poor African American community there are many who are convinced that their identity lies in embracing the values of the popular culture. Yet, if given a chance to get truly acquainted with this popular culture, they would realize how hollow these values really are.

In our new home we will continue to minister to the poor. We will continue to prepare food for the many homeless on the streets. And in our daily witness, I can only pray that we, like Mrs. Christensen, can share our rare treasure. We too will inspire others to remember our common heritage in Christ. And, in that remembering, give this broken world the hope needed to move toward a vision of the Kingdom.

Reprinted from the Winter 1998 issue of Manna in the Wilderness, the newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker.

History of the Christensen House

This history is taken from the plaque on the SE corner of E St. and W. Van Buren Ave., #10 on the Pioneer Trail:

“This fairy-tale residence reflects the unique family that built it, whose roots stretch back to a pioneering Utah Mormon blacksmith, ranchers in Idaho and Nevada, and railroad workers in Las Vegas.

The life of Las Vegas pioneer Lucretia Tanner Christensen Stevens, mother of LeRoy Christensen, builder of “The Castle,” embodies much of western history. Lucretia’s parents were Susannah Hathaway, a young white girl who came to Utah with her family in the early 1850s, and Tom Tanner, an African-American blacksmith who ran away with Susannah before she could become the plural wife of a Mormon elder. Their daughter Lucretia married Danish immigrant Lars Christensen and had two boys, LeRoy and Ray. After Lars died, Lucretia remarried and had two more children. The entire family moved to Las Vegas in the early 1920s.

The Christensen brothers became cowboys. Ray worked for famous Nevada trail boss Uncle (“Black”) Henry, and later opened a stable in Las Vegas, supplying horses and buggies for the Helldorado parade and competing in the rodeo. LeRoy built the Christensen House in the mid 1930s.”



Study of Christensen House by Nevada Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, March 18, 1982

THE NEVADA DIVISION OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND ARCHEOLOGY
201 South Fall Street — Nye Building — Room 113 — Carson City, Nevada 89710

1 IDENTIFICATION AND LOCATION

A. Name Of Property

Historic Name: n/a

Common Name: The Ghost House, The Castle House

B. Location Of Property

County: Clark

City: Las Vegas

Address: 500 West Van Buren Avenue, Las Vegas, NV

Township, Range, And Section: 20 South, 61 East, 27

Acrage Or Size Of Lot Or Property: 50' x 140', 7000 sq. ft.

2 CONDITION AND STATUS

A. General Condition Of Property

Excellent Deteriorated

Good Ruins

Fair Unexposed

B. Has Property Been Altered

Yes No

Known Alerations: chimney, 2 patios
chain link fence

C. Is The Property Threatened

Yes No

If So, How Or By What:

D. Has The Property Been Moved

Yes No

If Yes, When Was It Moved:

What Was Its Location:

E. Is The Property Occupied Or In Use

Yes No

F. Public Involvement

Exterior Visible From Public Road

Interior Accessible To Public

G. Present Use

Agriculture

Commercial

Education

Entertainment

Government

Industrial

Military

Museum

Park

Religious

Residence

Scientific

Transportation

Other

3 OWNERSHIP

A. Present Owner

Name: Pedro and Valiant Delgado

Address: 500 West Van Buren Avenue

B. Present Occupant

Name: Pedro and Valiant Delgado

4 SITE SURROUNDINGS

A. Immediate Setting:

The house is situated approximately in the center of the property. The lot is surrounded by a five foot chain link fence on two sides and a three foot chain link fence on two sides. There are two very large Ponderosa Pines in the front yard. The rest of the property has abundant shrubbery and small trees.

B. General Setting:

The property in question resembles a small medieval castle and looks quite out of place on a street with sparse or no vegetation and rows of identical, low rent houses. The large trees alone make it stand out, but the architecture certainly makes it appear misplaced.

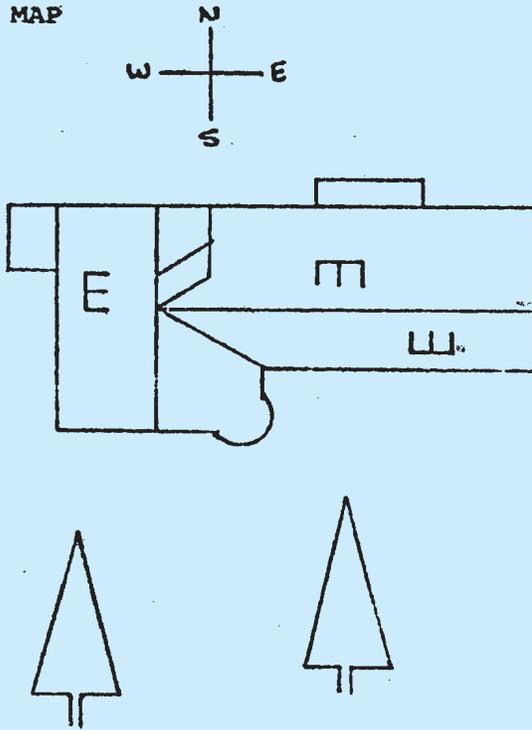
5 FORMS COMPLETED BY

A. Name: Deborah Gilges

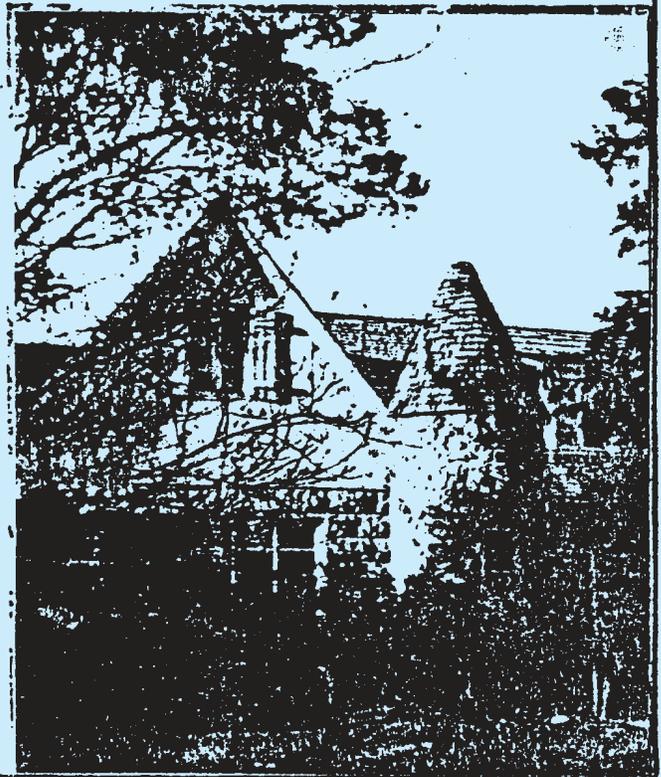
B. Date 3/18/82

C. Organization: University of Nevada, Las Vegas History 117

6 MAP



7 PHOTOGRAPH



FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Theme:

UTM:

Staff Recommendation:

	A	AH	H	HA
INV	---	---	---	---
SR	---	---	---	---
NR	---	---	---	---

Additional Information Needed On:

Map Reference:

Hydrological Basin:



Building Data Sheet

8 IDENTIFICATION

A. Historic Name: NONE.

B. County: CLARK

9 CONSTRUCTION DETAIL

A. Date Of Construction/Alteration(s): Built 1912-no alters.

B. Architect: Unknown.

C. Builder/Contractor: Seems to of been built by original owner.

D. Architectural Style: Period Revival.

10 DESCRIPTION OF THE EXTERIOR

A. Structural System: It,s stucture is of Fuedal or Medieval sources.

B. Foundation/Basement: Structue has a basement of one room complete with a hand made bar & stools.

C. Exterior Walls: Exterior walls were built with large " castle like" stone blocks. The round corner tower is of rubble rock.

D. Fenestration: All windows are inlade in the rock framed in wood. On the inside the windows can be walked into; they are the style of French windows because of there pitch. *ALSO A CHIMNEY*

E. Roof (type and material): The roof is a steeply pitched gabled roof with " picturesque" quality, roofed with shake shingles.

F. Additional Architectural Features: A round rubble rock tower with a pointed roof of shake shingles by the front entrance.

11 DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERIOR

The interior of the house is in fair condition. The stonework is covered with plaster on the outer walls, and the inner walls are "button board" and plaster. The floors are all hardwood (maple), very unusual for Las Vegas. There is central heating and air-conditioning in all rooms, and even in some areas allocated as closet space. On the ground floor there is a sunken dining room, a living room with a fireplace, a kitchen, den and a bathroom. Upstairs there are two small bedrooms and a bathroom. Prevalent in the house are small storage areas that branch off rooms into "hollow walls". Due to the space taken by these hollow walls, the house does not seem as big as its 2400 square feet. The basement is one small room.

12 HISTORICAL DATA FOR PROPERTY

The Planning and Community Development office quotes the house as being built in 1912. Conflicting information dates the building around 1932. Previous owners and an inscription on the chimney would seem to indicate that the 1932 date is more accurate. There was an addition to the chimney, which is also inscribed, in 1942. In 1971, the chain link fence was built, and in 1974, the two aluminum patios were added - one on the north side and one on the west. The property at one time included the adjoining lot which had a swimming pool, (now filled in). An old tombstone in the back yard started the rumor that someone had died in the pool, hence the name the Ghost House. The more recent name, the Castle House, is obviously due to the architecture. Several real estate dealers have owned the house at one time or another, and the property is presently for sale by the owner, Mr. Delgado, who told me he also deals in houses. The present asking price is \$83,000. The chain of title, most recent owner first is: Valiant and Pedro Delgado, (3/78 - present); Iva MacDonald and Lucille O'Brien, (9/77 - 3/78); Cornell and Myra Fields, (76 - 9/77); Carrie Lee Christensen, (5/38 - 76); William E. Ferron, (9/32 - 5/38). Whether sale of the property before this date included the house and land, or just the land is hard to determine due to the conflicting dates, and the records prior to this are on microfilm and are almost illegible.

13 REFERENCES CITED

Present Owners - Pedro and Valiant Delgado
Previous Owner - Lucille O'Brien
Award Realty
Department of Planning and Community Development
County Assessor's Office
Department of Building and Safety
Recorder's Office
On site visit to the property

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after February 17, 1897 and on or before December 31, 1921)

SERIAL NUMBER T-358	1. NAME (Print) LEROY LYLE CHRISTENSEN <small>(First) (Middle) (Last)</small>	ORDER NUMBER T-10378
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2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print)
WEST FIFTH & VAN BUREN-LAS VEGAS-CLARK NEVADA
(Number and street) (Town, township, village, or city) (County) (State)
[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]

3. MAILING ADDRESS
BOX-1411 LAS VEGAS-NEVADA
(Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same)

4. TELEPHONE	5. AGE IN YEARS 37	6. PLACE OF BIRTH Chester <small>(Town or county)</small>
	DATE OF BIRTH June 6 1904 <small>(Mo.) (Day) (Yr.)</small>	Idaho <small>(State or country)</small>

7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS
Bernie Lee Christensen - West Fifth & Van Buren - Las Vegas

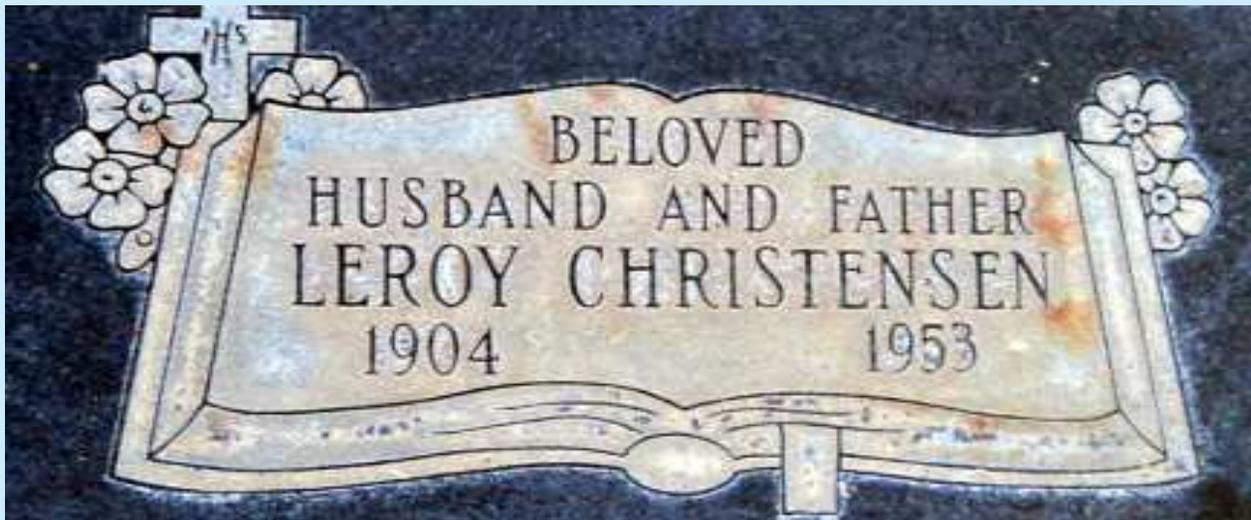
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS
Cragin's Pike, Fremont St. Las Vegas Nevada

9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS
El Portal Theater Las Vegas Clark Nevada
(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.

D. S. S. Form 1 (Revised 1-1-42) (over) ☆ GPO 10-21630-1 Le Roy Lyle Christensen (Registrant's signature)

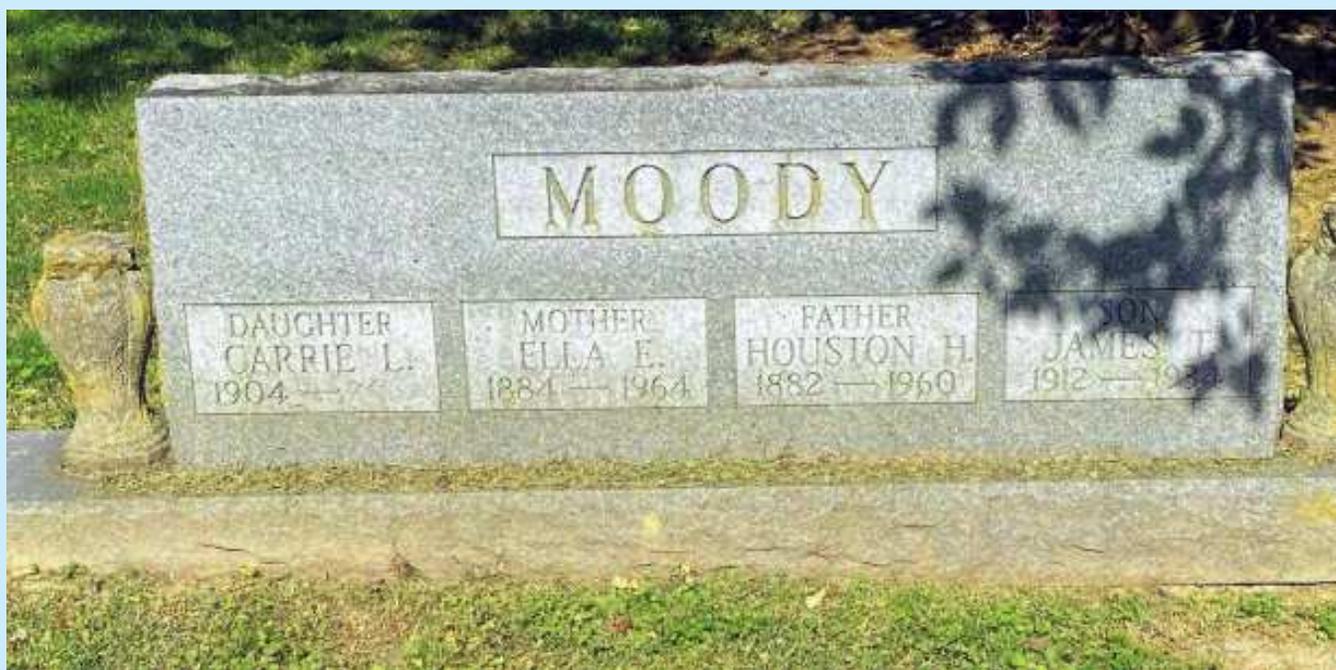
World War II Draft Card of LeRoy Christensen (because downtown Las Vegas used numbered streets, streets in the Westside were changed to letters, Fifth Street in the Westside became E Street).



Gravestone of LeRoy Christensen at Woodlawn Cemetery, Las Vegas, Nevada

NEVADA STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH DIVISION OF VITAL STATISTICS CERTIFICATE OF DEATH				STATE FILE No. <u>53-203</u>			
BIRTH No. _____		REGISTRAR'S No. <u>88</u>					
1. PLACE OF DEATH a. COUNTY <u>Clark</u>		2. USUAL RESIDENCE (Where deceased lived. If institution: residence before admission). a. STATE <u>Nevada</u> b. COUNTY <u>Clark</u>					
b. CITY (If outside corporate limits, write RURAL OR TOWN) <u>Las Vegas</u>		c. LENGTH OF STAY (In this place) <u>22 Yrs</u>		c. CITY (If outside corporate limits, write RURAL OR TOWN) <u>Las Vegas</u>			
d. FULL NAME OF HOSPITAL OR INSTITUTION <u>So. Nev. Mem. Hospital</u>		d. STREET ADDRESS (If rural, give location) <u>500 Van Buren Street</u>					
3. NAME OF DECEASED (Type or Print) <u>LEROY</u>		a. (First) <u>LYLE</u>		c. (Last) <u>CHRISTENSEN</u>			
4. DATE OF DEATH (Month) (Day) (Year) <u>Feb. 12, 1953</u>		5. SEX <u>Male</u>		6. COLOR OR RACE <u>Negro</u>			
7. MARRIED, NEVER MARRIED, WIDOWED, DIVORCED (Specify) <u>Married</u>		8. DATE OF BIRTH <u>June 6, 1904</u>		9. AGE (In years last birthday) <u>48</u>			
10a. USUAL OCCUPATION (Give kind of work done during most of working life, even if retired) <u>Plasterer</u>		10b. KIND OF BUSINESS OR INDUSTRY <u>Building</u>		11. BIRTHPLACE (State or foreign country) <u>Idaho</u>			
12. CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY? <u>USA</u>		13. FATHER'S NAME <u>Lawrence Christensen</u>		14. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME <u>Lucretia Stevens Tanner</u>			
15. WAS DECEASED EVER IN U.S. ARMED FORCES? (Yes, no, or unknown) (If yes, give war or dates of service) <u>No</u>		16. SOCIAL SECURITY NO. <u>630-09-6947</u>		17. INFORMANT <u>Mrs. Carrie Christensen</u>			
18. CAUSE OF DEATH Enter only one cause per line for (a), (b), and (c) *This does not mean the mode of dying, such as heart failure, ashenia, etc. It means the disease, injury, or complication which caused death.		MEDICAL CERTIFICATION I. DISEASE OR CONDITION DIRECTLY LEADING TO DEATH* (a) <u>Coronary insufficiency</u> ANTECEDENT CAUSES <u>Coronary arteriosclerosis</u> DUE TO (b) <u>Severely</u> DUE TO (c) _____ II. OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS Conditions contributing to the death but not related to the disease or condition causing death. <u>Renal ulcer.</u>				INTERVAL BETWEEN ONSET AND DEATH	
19a. DATE OF OPERATION <u>2/12/53</u>		19b. MAJOR FINDINGS OF OPERATION <u>Renal ulcer</u>		20. AUTOPSY? YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>			
21a. ACCIDENT / SUICIDE / HOMICIDE (Specify)		21b. PLACE OF INJURY (e.g., in or about home, farm, factory, street, office bldg., etc.)		21c. (CITY, TOWN, OR TOWNSHIP) (COUNTY) (STATE)			
21d. TIME OF INJURY (Month) (Day) (Year) (Hour) (Min.)		21e. INJURY OCCURRED WHILE AT WORK <input type="checkbox"/> NOT WHILE AT WORK <input type="checkbox"/>		21f. HOW DID INJURY OCCUR?			
22. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from <u>2/2/53</u> , 19 <u>53</u> , to <u>2/12/53</u> , 19 <u>53</u> , that I last saw the deceased alive on <u>2/12/53</u> , 19 <u>53</u> , and that death occurred at <u>2:06 P.M.</u> , from the causes and on the date stated above.							
23a. SIGNATURE <u>Berneth J. Smith M.D.</u> (Degree or title)		23b. ADDRESS <u>110 So 15th St.</u>		23c. DATE SIGNED <u>2/12/53</u>			
24a. BURIAL, CREMATION, REMOVAL (Specify) <u>Burial</u>		24b. DATE <u>1/17/53</u>		24c. NAME OF CEMETERY OR CREMATORY <u>Woodlawn</u>			
24d. LOCATION (City, town, or county) (State) <u>Las Vegas, Nevada</u>		25. FUNERAL DIRECTOR <u>Bunker Brothers</u>		ADDRESS <u>M. rtus Las Vegas, Nevada</u>			
DATE REC'D BY LOCAL REG. <u>2-17-53</u>		REGISTRAR'S SIGNATURE <u>[Signature]</u>		25. FUNERAL DIRECTOR <u>Bunker Brothers</u>			

Death Certificate for LeRoy Christensen



Gravesite of Carrie L. Christensen at Peaceful Valley Cemetery in Mayfield, Kentucky. Carrie was born on April 6, 1904 in Mayfield Graves County, Kentucky to Houston Hill Moody and Ella Emma Moody. Carrie Christensen died on July 5, 1998.



The Christensen House abandoned and boarded up in 1988. The home was purchased from HUD for \$27,000 in 1989 by the Las Vegas Catholic Worker, the price was reduced to \$25,000 due to a fire set by squators upstairs during escrow, thakfully the fire did not destroy the house.





Rear view of the abandoned boarded up Christensen home in 1988. Above: The fire started by squators occurred inside the dormer window.





The process of cleaning up the debris in the Christensen house, 1989.





Images from the 1940's in the segregated Westside. Mayor Ernie Cragin ignored appeals for fire plugs, a sewer system and lighting. The area lacked paved roads, electricity and even indoor plumbing.



The Christensen Home is number 10 on the Pioneer Trail, a plaque commemorating the home is on the SE corner of E St. and W. Van Buren Ave. Websites:

christensenhvouse.lvcw.org

lasvegaspioneertrail.com

hmdb.org/m.asp?m=51052

historiciasvegasproject.com/ChristensenHouse.html

This booklet produced by:

Las Vegas Catholic Worker mail@lvcw.org (702) 647-0728
500 W. Van Buren Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89106

* The Pioneer Trail brochure and plaque list the construction date as 1935, but an inscription on the chimney states 1932. County records list the building date as 1912. The chain of title lists the original date of construction as 1932.

The brochure and plaque also list Leroy's name as LeRoy but legal certificates say Leroy.