

## 2021 Mesa Awards for Outstanding Achievement in Historic Preservation

### NOMINATION FORM

#### PROJECT INFORMATION

Project,  
Individual, W-E NAC:  
or Group

Name: WASHINGTON-ESCOBEDO NEIGHBORHOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE Date: 03/29/2021

Property  
Address or  
Description  
(if  
applicable):

**Project Contact** (Person principally responsible for  
nominated award project)

Name MARIA M. MANCINAS - CHAIR  
and title:

WASHINGTON-ESCOBEDO  
Organization: NEIGHBORHOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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#### AWARD CATEGORY

Archaeology ☐

Restoration/Preservation/Rehabilitation ☐

Adaptive Reuse ☐

Education/Outreach/Media ☐

Landscape Preservation ☐

Local Preservationist ☒

Stewardship ☐

Individual Lifetime Achievement ☐

**NOMINATOR INFORMATION** Please provide the following information about yourself so that we may contact you if additional information regarding the nomination is necessary

Full Name: OSCAR MANCINAS

Title: NEIGHBOR

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### DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT/ACHIEVEMENT

A concise summary (1,000 words or less) of the project, program, organization, or individual that is/are the subject of this nomination. Please submit as a Microsoft Word file in an email attachment.

### PHOTOGRAPHS

No more than sixteen (16) digital JPEG images at a minimum resolution of 250 dpi, and a list of related photo captions. Please attach to nomination email.

### CONTRIBUTORS

If applicable, list the names of the major contributors for this nomination. For each contributor, include organization name (if applicable), contact person name, email address, and phone number (attach additional pages if needed). This can include the architect, contractor, property owners, or other similar involved parties.

#### W-E NAC BOARD:

MARIA MANCINAS - CHAIR

LOKRINE FULLER - VICE CHAIR (IN MEMORIAM)

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ELLEN SMITH - SAFETY

BISHOP LAVERET WHITE - TRANSPORTATION

#### PARTNERING ORGANIZATIONS + INDIVIDUALS:

LOCAL INITIATIVES SUPPORT CORPORATION (LISC)

WEST MESA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

GORMAN COMPANY

CITY OF MESA: NEIGHBORHOOD OUTREACH, PLANNING DEPT., PARKS AND



RECREATION, POLICE DEPARTMENT

FORMER MESA CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS: ~~DAVE~~ DAVE RICHINS + CHRIS GUYER

MESA HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD

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MESA UNITED WAY

DOWNTOWN MESA ASSOCIATION

MEMBERS OF MESA PLANNING COMMITTEE

NEIGHBORHOOD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (NEDCO)

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KAREN SUTHERLAND, JOHN WESLEY

ARIZONA REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER

THE SALVATION ARMY

(FOR ADDITIONAL NAMES SEE ATTACHED FORM)

## **Introduction**

The Washington-Escobedo Neighborhood Advisory Committee (W-E NAC) emerged from a context of need for neighborhood representation, preservation, and collective pride. The W-E NAC is an interdependent body elected by neighbors that collaborates and partners with elected officials, community organizations, school districts, faith-based organizations, developers, businesses, etc., to protect and promote the cultures, traditions, and peoples who have historically defined life in the Washington-Escobedo Neighborhood. Over the course of a decade (2010-2021), the tireless efforts of the W-E NAC culminated in formal recognition of Washington-Escobedo as Mesa's first Heritage Neighborhood, as well as other preservation efforts and campaigns.

## **Brief Historical Background of Washington-Escobedo**

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mesa's Black and Mexican residents lived almost exclusively in the segregated North Town and Verde Vista neighborhoods—later known as the Booker T. Washington and Escobedo, respectively—to the north of downtown. Restricted by segregationist laws, residents of Washington-Escobedo could not purchase homes, open businesses, nor attend religious services or school with white people. Residents, therefore, used their small plots of land not only for housing but also for small businesses, schooling, and communal gatherings. During World War II, the Escobedo Housing Development was constructed as segregated housing for Black military pilots training at Falcon Field before deployment to Europe or Asia. Upon the war's conclusion, the city repurposed these units as affordable, low-income housing for families.

Following federally mandated integration, Washington-Escobedo residents continued to create community while confronting evolved forms of systemic obstacles. For example, the integration of schools meant the closure of Booker T. Washington School—originally established as an elementary and middle school for Black children. Consequently, the school’s loss equaled the loss of a central community space and leaders, such as Veora Johnson—Arizona’s first Black woman principal of a public school. Fortunately, in 1979, the city built and opened the Washington Activity Center (WAC), a community-oriented recreation center, at the site of the former school. Offering after-school activities and hosting communal, cultural events, the WAC served as a vital gathering space, until it was closed and repurposed as STEP UP Charter School in 2013.

Lastly, because Washington-Escobedo’s oldest housing were originally plotted and built without formal financial support from federal and private institutions, as families confronted financial hardship, their homes fell into disrepair. The periodic economic downturns of the 1970s, 1980s, and 2009 resulted in residents shuttering and abandoning their homes, in attempts to relocate for better economic prospects. The 2009 Great Recession also triggered city budget cuts and resulted in the aforementioned closure of the Washington Activity Center, as well as the Escobedo Housing Development, which was ultimately demolished.

### **The W-E NAC Go to Work**

Despite systematic obstacles and financial precarity, the residents of Washington-Escobedo organized and mobilized to protect their community. Between 2010-2012, residents formed the W-E NAC. The W-E NAC held regular meetings, eventually drafting and ratifying the Quality of Life Plan (QLP). Within the QLP, members collaborated to name seven specific

areas of need: 1) Economic Development, 2) Housing Development, 3) Code Compliance, 4) Education, 5) Parks and Recreation, 6) Safety, and 7) Transportation. Partnering with other organizations, the W-E NAC mobilized community members for neighborhood beautification, campaigns for preserving Washington-Escobedo's history, and application for Historic Neighborhood designation.

The community won significant gains for its efforts. For example, one previously barren lot was converted into a community garden for residents to share knowledge and space around horticulture and food sovereignty. In addition, the site of the demolished Escobedo Housing Development retained much of its original purpose, as new affordable, low-income housing was built in its place. The W-E NAC also preserved some of the original Escobedo Housing structures—which now serve as gathering spaces and archives of the community's history.

In 2016, the City Council evaluated properties to consider Washington-Escobedo's application as a Historic Neighborhood and determined the designation could not be granted for lack of historically preserved properties. Nevertheless, officials recognized the community's importance and deemed it Mesa's first "Heritage Neighborhood." Such a distinction finally, formally inscribed the history of Washington-Escobedo into official Mesa History. No longer were the mostly Black and Mexican residents of Washington-Escobedo segregated from the city's story, but, rather, they became central figures and authors of rewriting this story, highlighting resilience and communal action.

2019 brought the W-E NAC's most recent victory. That year, the Mesa City Council voted to rezone the entire Washington-Escobedo neighborhood as an "Infill Zoning District." Previously, the neighborhood was subject to up to seven different zoning codes; thus, the

rezoning protects from developers and officials who would seek to displace residents or demolish properties in favor of denser housing or commercial developments.

### **Notable Preserved Features of Washington Escobedo**

While Washington-Escobedo did not meet the City's criteria for Historic Neighborhood, it is not without its historically significant properties. Several notable structures endure from the neighborhood's early period. For example, in addition to a few preserved houses, two churches built in the 1940s, Mt. Calvary Baptist Church and Pentecostal Church, are also still used by members of their respective denominations for services and other gatherings.

Furthermore, the Alston House stands proudly as federally recognized historic landmark. Originally constructed in 1929 as the home of Dr. Lucius C. Alston, Mesa's first Black physician, currently, the house serves as headquarters for both Mesa's Martin Luther King Jr. committee and the Mesa Association of Hispanic Citizens.

The revitalization and preservation of the Alston House, like the preservation of the Escobedo Heritage Room, symbolize the W-E NAC's commitment to preserving the multicultural heart of Washington-Escobedo. These structures, along with the two public parks—Escobedo Park and Washington Park, respectively—and the murals located throughout the neighborhood, best encapsulate the communal, collaborative spirit alive in Washington-Escobedo. This spirit unites the residents, across race, ethnicity, language, sex, gender, religion, national origin, and ability. Though, the COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily pushed neighbors into isolation, the prior work of the W-E NAC still resonates, keeping the spirit of collaboration alive, prepared for the next era of Washington-Escobedo's future.

Neighbors & Others Who Shared Helped W-E NAC:

Evelyn Adediran, Cenojia Alapizco, Darrell Alexander, Juan Ambriz, Petra Ambriz, Ellie Anderson, Lawrence Andrews, Robert Archuleta, Marian Armonte, Lola Askerneese, Phil Austin, B. Baker, Joyce Bailey, Laura Barranca, Norma Barranca, Rebecca Barranca, Armando Barraza, Maria Barraza, Ruben Barraza, Terri Benelli, Mary Berumen, Arely Binitez, Andre Blake, Cozetta Blake, Fredria Bonner, Gladys Boston, Olivia Brocomontro, Baniel Bucknor, Paulino Campos, Stephanie Castillo, George Cerroles, Isiah Claytor, Andrew Cope, Brent Cope, M. A. Costa, Jennngi Cho, Scott Cumberledge, Larry Dailez, Pat Dailez, Carol Decker, Roger Decker, Dede Yazzie Devine, Barbara Duncan, Van Dunham, Abigail Escamilla, Cristina Escobedo, Maria Escobedo, Charlene Flaherty, Rosemary Flores, Andrea Fray, Tamika Fray, Zach Fray, Patty Gallagher, Patricia Gallego, Beatriz Garcia, Sandra Garcia, Andrea Garfinkel-Castro, Bernadette Garroz, Frances Gaslino, Agustin Gastelum, Pat Gilbert, John Goodie, Andrew Gordon, Randy Gray, Teresa Grasser, Ellie Gunderson, Desmond Hawkins, Doris Hawkins, Etoy Hansend, Clyn Haroolmes, Paul Harris, Robin Harris, Gloria Hemphill, Jerline Hemphill, Yesenia Hernandez, Leslie Hill, Marulia Hill, Mary Hillery, Kristina Hines, Susan Hines, Ellen Hoff, Anthony Hopper, Destiny Howard, Destiny Hunt, DiAnn Hunter, J. Imgram, Eugene Jackson, Nikki Jackson, Barbara James, Catherine James, Marc James, Maria James, Marie James, Mike James, Thomas James, Benita Jeronimo, Linda Johnson, Gabriel Juarez, Maria Juarez, Linda July, Elijah Kefle, Renne Larija, Steve Langstaff, Jasmine Leon, Yolanda Leon, Eliodoro Lopez, Marissa Lopez, Marie Loyon, Erica Mancinas, Oscar Mancinas Jr., Oscar Mancinas, Rocio Manriquez, Mary Martinez, Ricardo Mayen, Jeff McVay, Tommy Medina, Alma Melgar, Christi Miller, Cliff Moon, Erin Murzev, Luis Naum, Tiene Nguyen Dorsey O'Banner, Ken O'Bannon, Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, Cindy Ornstein, Edna Peete, Willie Peete, Ed Perez, Sylvia Perez, Charuscome Perry, Mya Perry, Jamiah Person, J. P. Pierson, Shirly Pierson, Dee Dee Quick, Erica Reyes, Vanessa Reyes, Henry Riggins, Socorro Rios, Carmen Rocha, Connie Rogers, Heather Scantleberry, Laura Skotnicki, Cay Shiry, John Smith, Samuel Smith, Glena Stewart, Martha Stewart, Peggy Stewart, Trevor Stewart, Brian Swanton, Kathy Talmage, Paul Talmage, Jacki Taylor, Walter Thompson, Jerry Toliver, Michelle Udall, Manuel Vanegas, Alejandro Velasquez, Denis Velasquez, Claudia Walters, Anna Washington, Erma Washington, Teresa Wesley, Sherry Wheelock, Maggie White, Maurice White, Chris Widarsler, Robert Williams, Arlene Willis, Tysa Willis, Cheryl Wilson, Jerry Wittis, Kathy Wittis, Melissa Woodall, Jermain Wright, Stephanie Wright, Steve Wylie, Finder Young, Lee Young, Ana Zuniga



1. Aerial view of Washington-Escobedo (c. 1930), from “Washington-Escobedo Heritage Neighborhood.” *City of Mesa*. 2016, p. 4,  
<http://www.mesaaz.gov/home/showdocument?id=19965>.
2. Aerial view of Washington-Escobedo (c. 1949), from “Washington-Escobedo Heritage Neighborhood.” *City of Mesa*. 2016, p. 4  
<http://www.mesaaz.gov/home/showdocument?id=19965>.
3. Aerial view of Washington-Escobedo (c. 1959), from “Washington-Escobedo Heritage Neighborhood.” *City of Mesa*. 2016, p. 5  
<http://www.mesaaz.gov/home/showdocument?id=19965>.
4. Aerial view of Washington-Escobedo (c. 1969), from “Washington-Escobedo Heritage Neighborhood.” *City of Mesa*. 2016, p. 4  
<http://www.mesaaz.gov/home/showdocument?id=19965>.
5. Aerial view of Washington-Escobedo (c. 1979), from “Washington-Escobedo Heritage Neighborhood.” *City of Mesa*. 2016, p. 6  
<http://www.mesaaz.gov/home/showdocument?id=19965>.
6. Aerial view of Washington-Escobedo (c. 2016), from “Washington-Escobedo Heritage Neighborhood.” *City of Mesa*. 2016, p. 1  
<http://www.mesaaz.gov/home/showdocument?id=19965>.
7. Alston House Center for Peace and Justice with plaque from 2012 National Register of Historic Places, (constructed, 1929).
8. Alston House Center for Peace and Justice, front.
9. Calvary Korean Community Church, front, (founded as Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, 1918).
10. Calvary Korean Community Church, front steps.
11. United Hispanic Pentecostal Church, front, (founded as Church of God in Christ, 1932).
12. Mural near corner of Sirrine Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Street (originally painted, early 1990s).
13. Mural behind Alston House (painted, 2012).
14. STEP UP School, front, (founded as Washington Activity Center, 1979).
15. Escobedo Heritage Room, side, (founded as part of Escobedo Housing Development, early 1940s).
16. Trinity Bible Church, front, (founded as North Center Street Baptist Church, 1966).

## Washington-Escobedo Heritage Neighborhood

### Summary

Period of Significance: 1910 - 1980

Area:

The overall Washington-Escobedo Heritage Neighborhood is bounded on the north by 6<sup>th</sup> Street, the south by University Drive, the west by Center Street, and extends east to include Escobedo at Verde Vista along University Drive and the Salvation Army facility along 6<sup>th</sup> Street.

The boundaries for designation of the Washington-Escobedo Heritage Neighborhood are from Center St. to Mesa Dr., 6<sup>th</sup> St. to University Dr. as shown in the following map.



## Cultural and Social History:

The supporting material provided with this application paints a very clear picture of a neighborhood that has its roots during a time of segregation that drove the residents of the area to create a close-knit community. The following are excerpts from the documents neighborhood residents and property owners submitted in support of this designation. The full document provided by the neighborhood is available for review in the Historic Preservation Office.

“African-Americans arrived in Mesa starting in the early 1900’s, but discrimination kept them from owning homes in the original town site. The first housing subdivision to welcome them as buyers, homesteaders and residents was the Mitchell addition created on the land North of University and East of Center Street.”

“Verde Vista surveyed and recorded in Sept 1916, but sales and construction started in 1920. Hispanic title, street names and lower cost lots show intent to be sold to Hispanics. Almost all buyers of lots were Hispanic.”

“As the community grew, the Escobedo Apartments were also built in 1941 in order to house the African-American soldiers who were stationed at Williams Air Force Base. At the conclusion of the Second World War, the City of Mesa assumed ownership and leased the apartments to low-income families.”

“From the early time of slavery to today the African American community has embraced the church as a symbol and site for inspiration; guidance and hope. The celebration of movement in the black churches has deep roots dated back to the first African Slaves in America. The Washington Park neighborhood had five churches.”

“The Washington Activity Center (WAC) was opened in the mid 1940’s; it was originally used as a Hospitality House for the Colored Soldiers living in the Escobedo Projects. Later it became known as the Colored Center to be use by the colored people of Mesa. It remained a segregated facility until it closed around 1975. A new structure was built in 1977 on the site of the former segregated school, Booker T. Washington.”



“My Grandmother, Josephine Espinoza, lives here for about 50 year. It is a place where we could go play, not worry about anything. We played baseball with the other kids until night. We never got bored because we also had swimming pools at Escobedo Park and we could also swim all day with other kids.”

The neighborhood had its own school, Booker T. Washington School, on Pima. The five churches in the neighborhood played an important role in the neighborhood for spiritual edification, community building, activities for children, and political activity. The neighborhood also had a few stores and its own doctor. While residents did go outside the neighborhood for work and shopping and other activities, much of their life centered around their neighborhood.

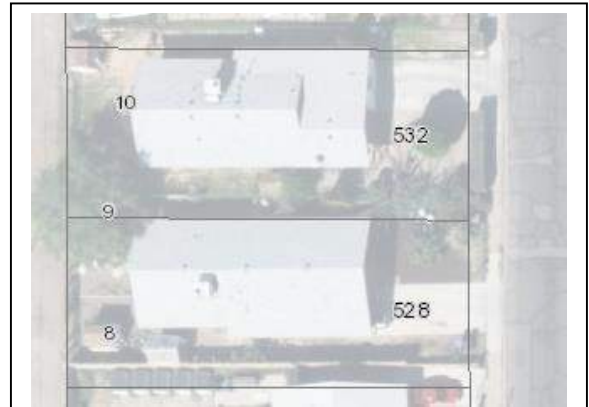


### Physical Characteristics:

The western portion of the Washington Park-Escobedo area is characterized by small, narrow lots with single-residence homes that have the long axis perpendicular to the street. The homes in this neighborhood built during the period of significance (1910 to 1980) are typically single-story with the carport or garage to one side, have a front porch, and a low fence defining the front yard. Historically there have been several non-residential uses dispersed throughout the neighborhood. These uses have included churches, schools, offices, and retail activities. This combination of lot size, building form, street pattern, and mix of uses helped to create and reinforce the cultural and social nature of the neighborhood. A mix of uses is still appropriate, provided the single residence use stays the dominant activity and the non-residential uses are in scale with the neighborhood setting and provide services directed to the neighborhood.

The Escobedo Apartment area has been redeveloped. The new buildings are larger than existed during the historic period. However, the buildings were designed to engage the streets and the street system remains open and integrates with the rest of the neighborhood. This area still remains an integral part of the fabric of this neighborhood. This dense type of residential use is not intended to spread into other areas of the Washington-Escobedo neighborhood.

The development pattern along University and Center is more mixed and has a variety of uses. The historic era lots and buildings were similar to the pattern for the rest of the single residence area – smaller lots with primarily single-story structures. The newer, two-story brick office building on University is not consistent with the historic context of the neighborhood.

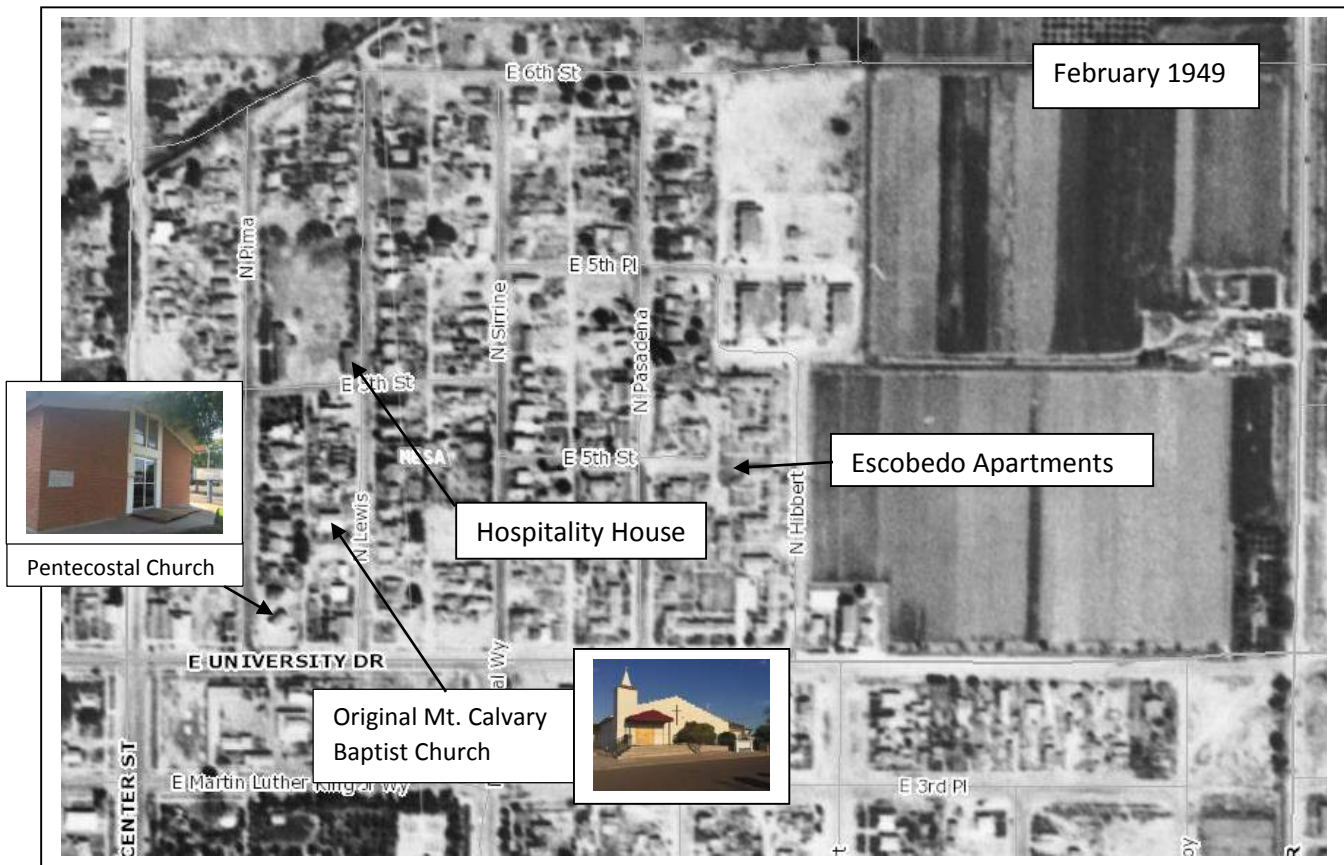
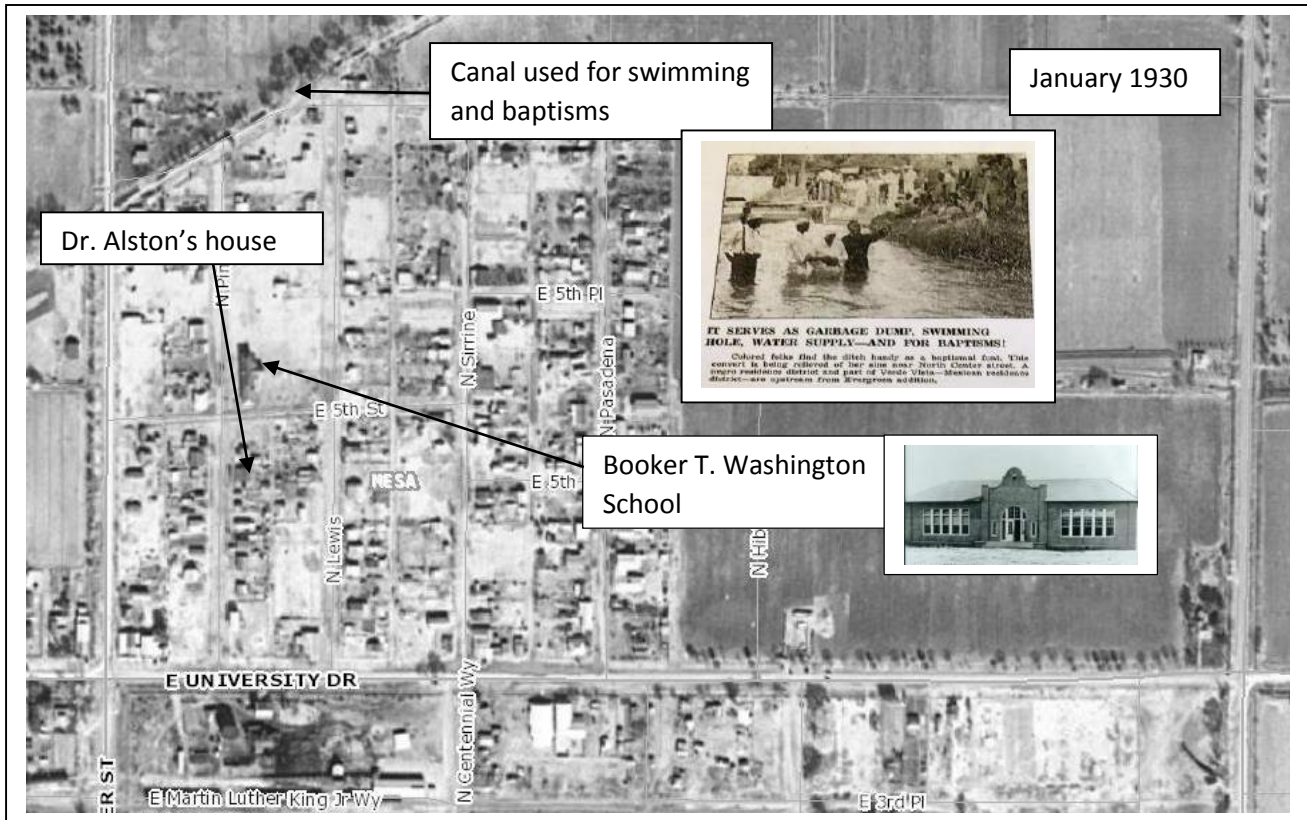


Example lots and building form

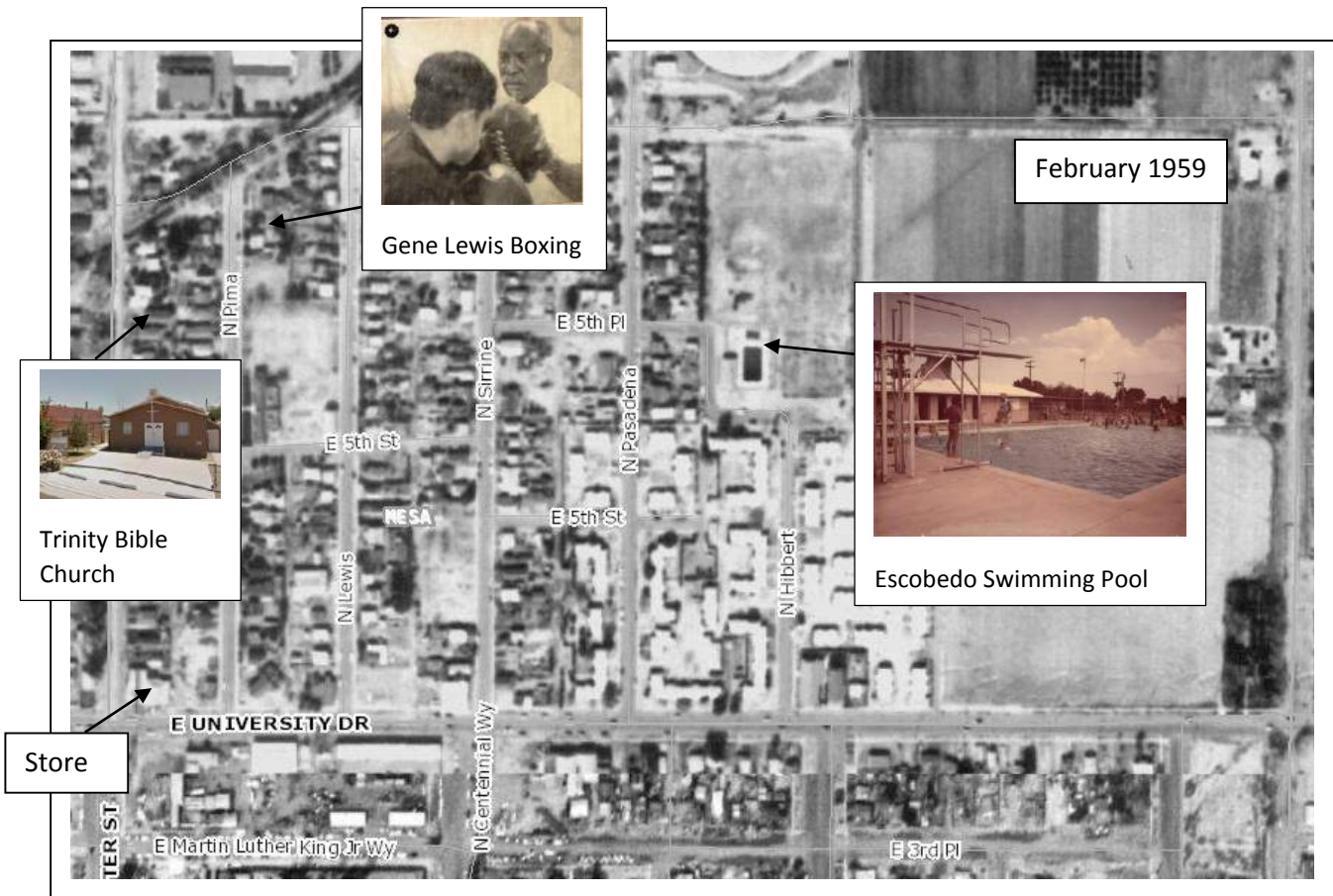


Typical residential building fronts

Following are historical aerial photographs of the area showing the development pattern and the location of some of the historic elements of the neighborhood.











Veora Johnson

Began her teaching career at Booker T. Washington School in the Washington-Escobedo neighborhood in 1927. She became the first African-American principal in Arizona. In 1953 she was included in the Who's Who of Women in America. In 1968 Mesa Community College established the Veora Erma Johnson scholarship.



Clara McPherson, circa 1920. In 1905 the McPherson family was the first African-American family of Washington-Escobedo.

Dr. Lucis Charles Alston was the first African-American doctor to practice in Mesa. Dr. Alston moved his family into this house at 453 N. Pima in 1922. This house doubled as his home and office. It is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

