

## 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.

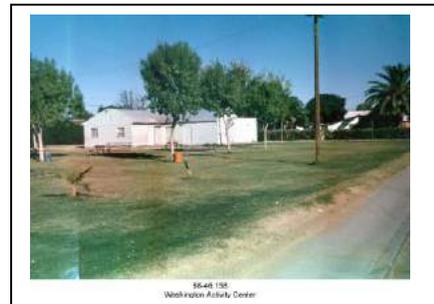
“African-Americans arrived in Mesa starting in the early 1900’s, but discrimination kept them from owning homes in the original town site. The first housing subdivision to welcome them as buyers, homesteaders and residents was the Mitchell addition created on the land North of University and East of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

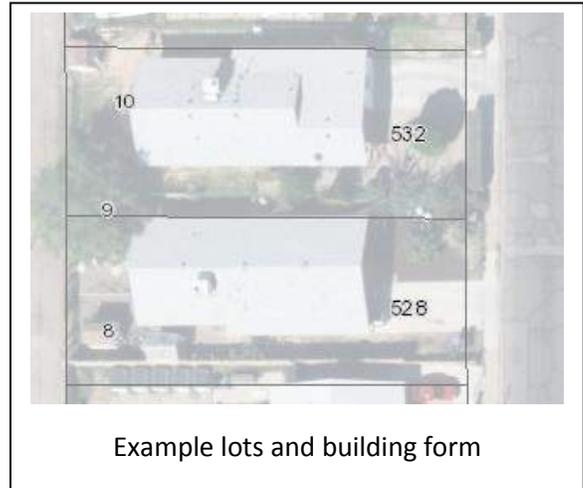
The neighborhood had its own school, Booker T. Washington School, on Pima. The five churches in the neighborhood played an important role in the neighborhood for spiritual edification, community building, activities for children, and political activity. The neighborhood also had a few stores and its 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:

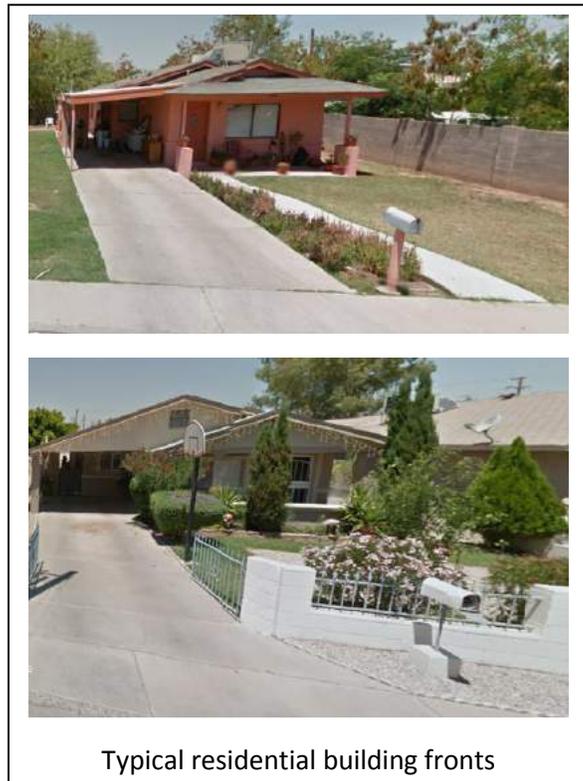
The western portion of the Washington Park-Escobedo area is characterized by small, narrow lots with single-residence homes that have the long axis perpendicular to the street. The homes in this neighborhood built during the period of significance (1910 to 1980) are typically single-story with the carport 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.

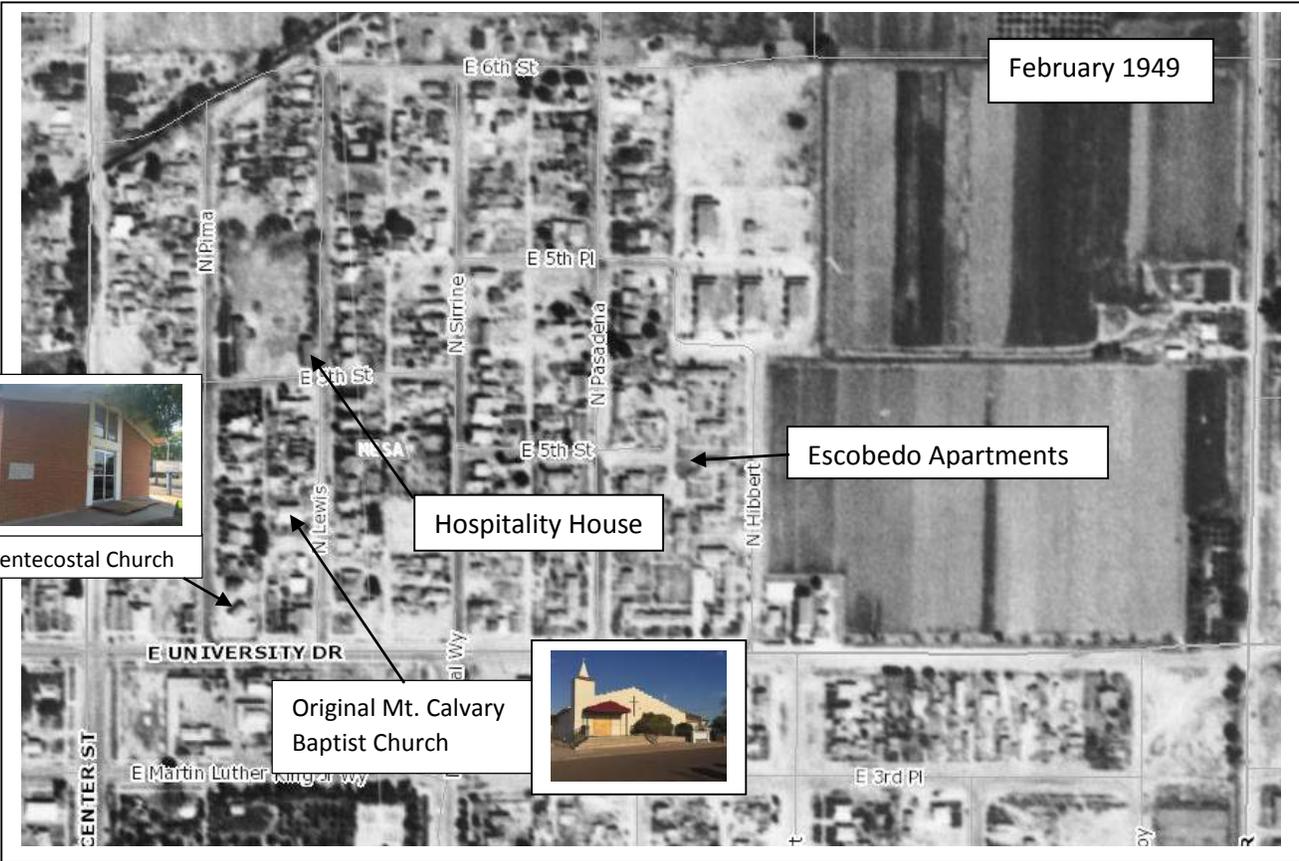
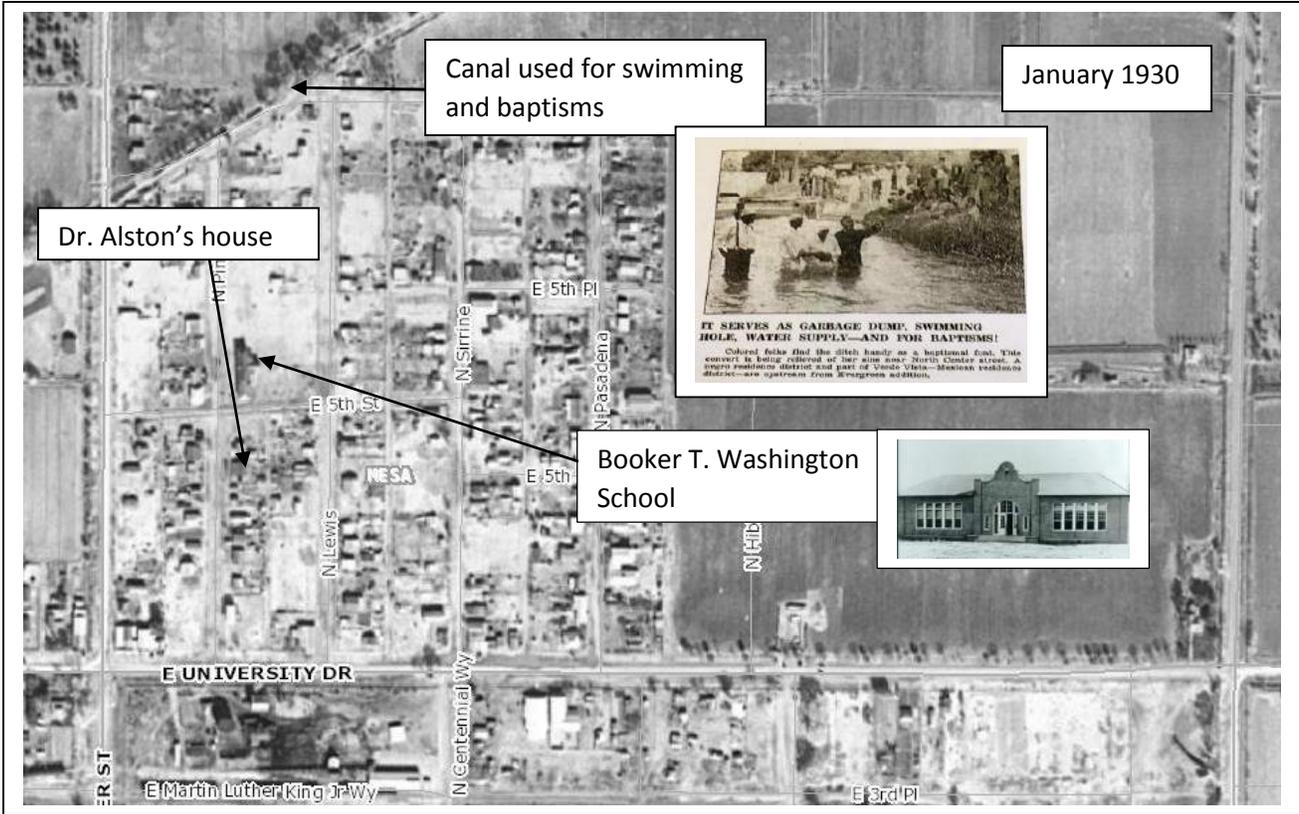


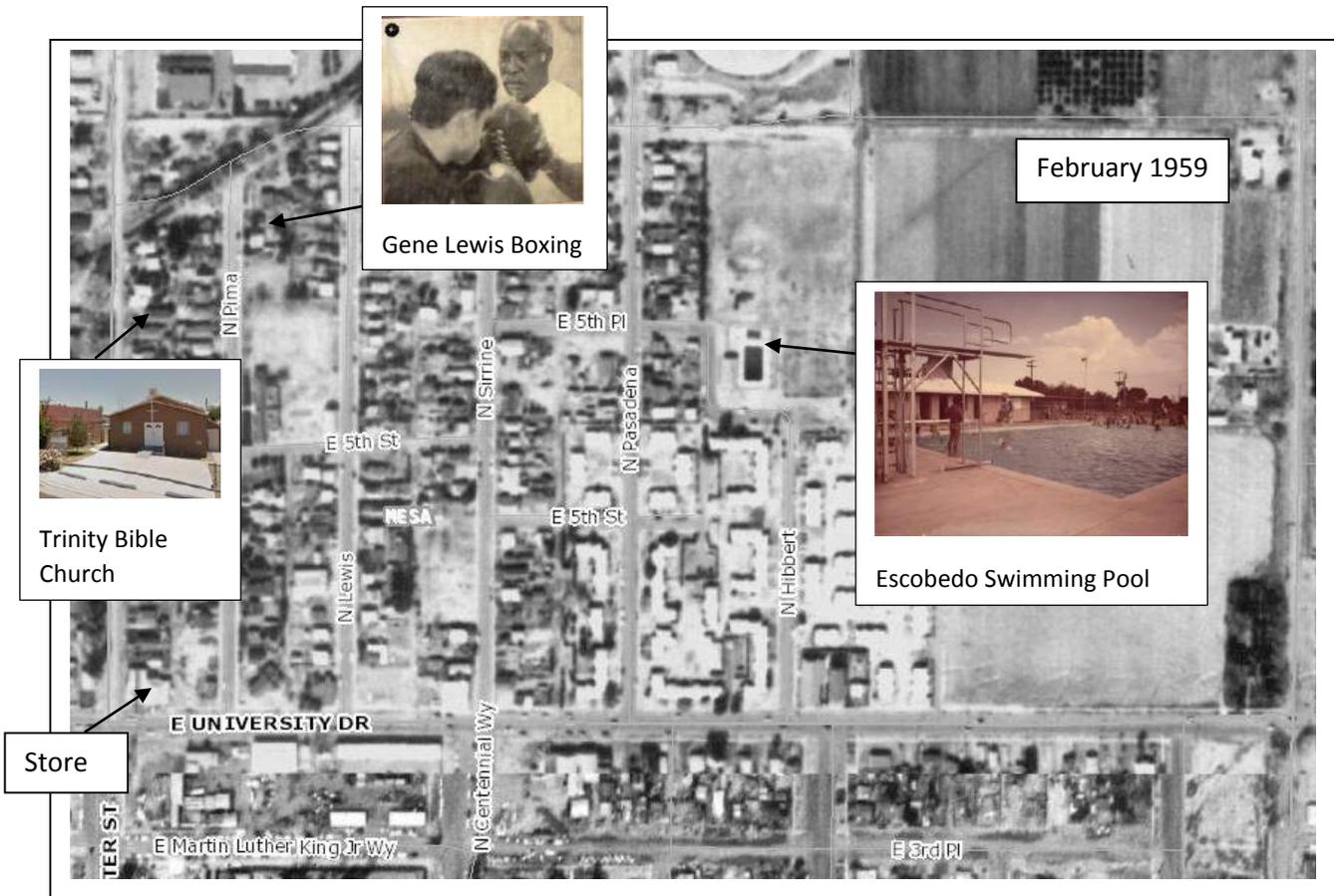
Example lots and building form



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.

