

Historic Reno PRESERVATION SOCIETY

FootPrints

Dedicated to Preserving and Promoting Historic Resources in the Truckee Meadows through Education, Advocacy, and Leadership.

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Reno's Arches: The Whole Story

by Debbie Hinman

Editorial Staff Note: *There is nothing more gratifying to an editorial staff than to know that their publication is being read, appreciated and is fulfilling its purpose of provoking thought and stimulating memories. That this is so of FootPrints became evident with the last issue, when we heard from so many readers about the arch we pictured with the caption "first Reno arch." Those of you who contacted us were absolutely right—while the structure and framework of the pictured arch was that of the first arch, the design elements indeed belonged to a later version. In the interest of historical accuracy and as clarification, we offer the following story. Thanks to all of you who contacted us for your insightful and helpful comments – you keep us honest.*

When I hear Paris I think of the Eiffel Tower. In London, it's Big Ben. In Rome, the Colosseum and in Athens, the Acropolis. In Reno, what else could it be but the Reno Arch? Many people from all over the world who may not know anything else about Reno know the slogan "The Biggest Little City in the World" and nearly all who visit Reno will drive beneath the famous arch at some point in their visit. But where did the idea come from and how long has the arch been here?

If you really want to include a loose interpretation of the term "arch," imagine yourself back in the Reno of 1899. You are a small child standing outside the white clapboard Riverside Hotel, looking toward the Virginia Street Bridge and northward through town. The streets are dirt, and passing horses and wagons stir up dust clouds in the air.

The bridge you see is an iron framework one, with high arches on both sides. The clip-clop of the passing horses' hooves ring in the air as they move from the dirt road to the wooden planks of the bridge. Looking up you see a garland of juniper branches and a banner spanning the bridge—you tug at your mother's skirt and ask her what it says and she reads "Welcome Home to Reno's Soldiers," referring to

those returning from the Spanish American War. Our first "Reno Arch?" Possibly.



1,500 Shriners from San Francisco's Islamic Temple help dedicate the Transcontinental Highway Exposition Arch, October 23, 1926, on Virginia Street. Postcard courtesy of Gordon Foote.

Now we move ahead 27 years. This Reno of 1926, while still small, is more sophisticated and cosmopolitan. It is an exciting time for Reno—the coast-to-coast motor routes, the Lincoln and Victory highways, have just been completed and run east/west, right through the town. A Transcontinental Highways Exposition is being planned for the following year and a flurry of preparations are underway. A

commemorative arch is being planned to celebrate the event. It is decided that the arch will be fashioned after California city gateway structures and will be erected across Virginia Street at Commercial Row.

The arch is designed by Norman W. Prince and is erected by the J. L. Stuart Company of San Francisco; the steel structure costs \$5,500. Large block letters announce the Exposition and the dates, June 25 to August 1, 1927, and stylized torches surround the word "Reno."

Continued on page 2

Reno's Arches: The Whole Story (continued)

Continued from page 1

On a crisp fall day, the 23rd of October, you stand in your Sunday finery, in a throng of excited onlookers waiting for the dedication ceremonies to begin. Suddenly there are the strains of a brass band in the distance. As the music soars you witness an amazing sight—an 80-piece band accompanied by a 400-man marching unit moving down Virginia Street. Also present at the ceremonies are 1,500 Shriners from the San Francisco Islamic Temple. Speakers include the California and Nevada governors and Reno Mayor Ed Roberts, a local favorite. Suddenly the light bulbs blink on, illuminating the words on the arch, and the torches blaze. You and those around you emit “Oohs” and “Ahhhs” and then erupt in an explosion of cheers and applause.

After the Exposition, the Reno City Council decides to keep the arch as a permanent downtown gateway. Mayor Roberts puts out a call to the citizens of Reno to suggest a slogan for the arch to replace the “Transcontinental Highways Exposition” signage. Nearly everyone trades suggestions when you meet on the streets of downtown while doing your shopping. Ideas are thrown out between cocktails at the Corner Bar at the Riverside. The mayor’s office is deluged with letters, cards and notes. Some believe that the slogan should advertise Reno’s industry, as with “Reno: If You Are in a Rush, We Will Get You a Divorce in Three Months.” Other entries look to the simple pleasures of the area, such as “Reno: A City of Sunshine with Warm Welcomes For All”; “Reno: the Gateway to Prosperity and Happiness”; “Reno: Nevada’s Silver Lily”; “Reno: the Last of the Free Towns in the U.S.”; and the poetic but wordy suggestion “Reno: Here in Nevada Where the Sagebrush Grows, Nature has forgotten to Record its Woes.” You and your friends have

a chuckle over that one; how would it ever fit on the arch framework? The city council is not able to find an acceptable slogan and the idea dies down.

Toward the end of 1928, the Reno Chamber of Commerce and Sierra Street Improvement once again call upon the city council to find a slogan. This time the enticement of a \$100 prize is offered and as before, entries flood the Chamber of Commerce office. A *Reno*

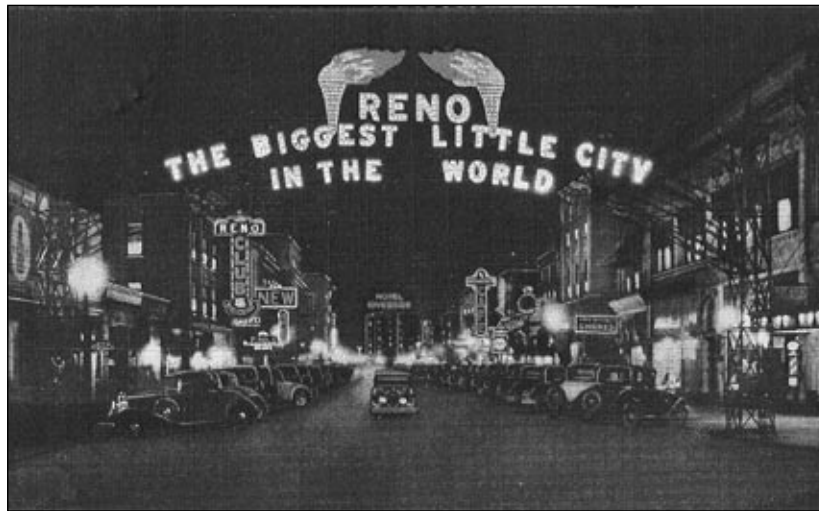
with friends at the Waldorf Café on chicken and circle steak dinners for 65 cents a person, you muse on why this Mr. Burns was selected as the winner and bemoan the fact that the prize money will not be yours. In July the *Reno Evening Gazette* reports that the lights for the new slogan will soon be installed on the arch by the same company who erected it, as a courtesy to Reno.

With the Great Depression come hard times for many in Reno. You spend more evenings becoming creative with leftovers and dining frugally at home, and in November 1932, the lights go out on the Reno Arch. The City Council has voted to cut the \$30 monthly electricity charge from their budget.

One day in April of 1933, your neighbor calls to you from her side of the short picket fence dividing your yards. “You’ll never guess what Rose Morgan has done!” she tells you enthusiastically. You know and admire Rose, a smart, outspoken

businesswoman who owns a local hotel. “Rose has convinced other business owners to join her in footing the bill for the lights on the arch! She says it’s worth the cost for the advertising—the lights go back on tonight!” You and your neighbor walk the short distance to the center of town that evening in the brisk, early spring air, along with many other friends and neighbors. Once again, a rousing cheer arises as the arch lights flicker and then blink into sudden illumination.

In 1934, the arch enters the neon age but loses, for a time, the hard-won slogan that many townspeople argue is “small townish” and “boastful.” You are intrigued by the green neon “RENO” but feel that the arch looks bare and somewhat diminished without its “Biggest Little City” appellation. You voice your protest



The post-Exposition arch with its new slogan, installed in 1929. The original stylized blowing torches show up well. Postcard courtesy of Cindy Ainsworth.

Evening Gazette article in February of 1929 declares, “Gems of Thought Hidden Away in 300 Envelopes.” The article states that a couple hundred more entries are expected before the closing date of March 1. You and everyone you know get serious about your suggestions this time...if you have a good one you keep it to yourself—and dream about what you will do with your \$100 prize! Some catchier, more succinct entries reflect a greater depth of thought, such as “Reno: the Best Out West” and “In Progressive Reno, Loiter, Linger, Locate.” Many writers submit a slogan that has been used for some years in various advertising campaigns—“The Biggest Little City in the World”—and on March 14, you are sitting in your front room reading and listening to KOH radio when you hear the announcement that this is the winning slogan and the prize money is to be awarded to a G. A. Burns of Sacramento. That evening as you dine

Reno's Arches: The Whole Story (continued)

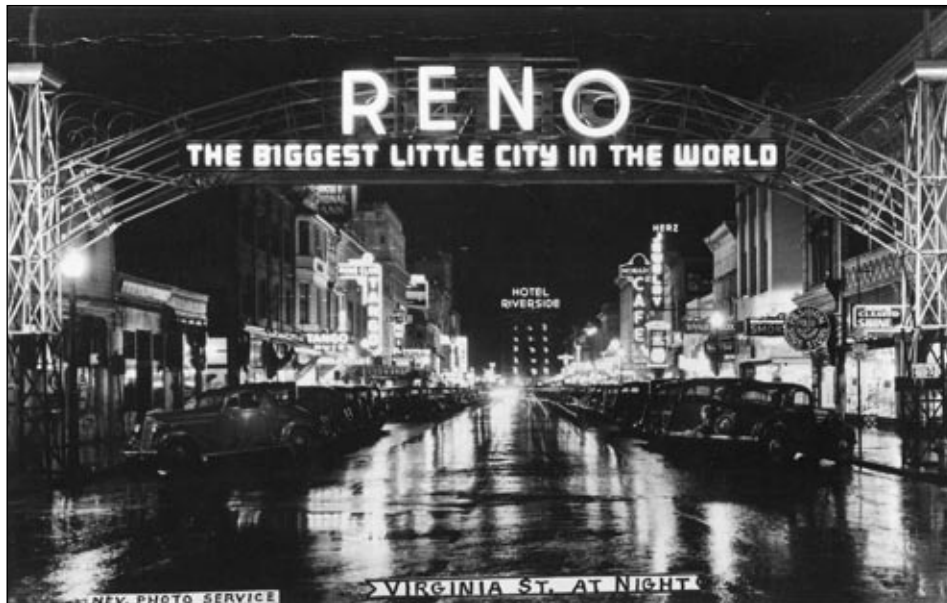
along with other townspeople and on June 12, 1935, the slogan returns with new art deco neon lettering.

For the next thirty years, the arch remains about the only constant in the growing, bustling “biggest little city” while everything around it changes. There are new hotels and casinos; old ones are lost to fire or the wrecking ball. In 1950, the V&T makes its final run through Reno and the river floods the city—and floods again in 1955.

In 1963, just a year before Nevada's statehood centennial, Harold's Club publicist Roy Powers launches a campaign to raise \$100,000 to replace the arch in honor of the centennial milestone. You feel sad to see the old arch go but admit that it is looking a bit shopworn. At any rate it isn't going far—just over to the site of the 1927 Exposition at Idlewild Park. With a construction speed that impresses many, the new arch is completed before Christmas of 1963. This time you and your neighbor take the car downtown on New Year's Eve to watch the lights go on. You find yourself experiencing the same anticipatory thrill that you did many years ago, for the lighting of this arch's predecessor. And while you appreciate the colors and modern geometric shapes contained in the new arch, you feel a tug of regret for the one you remember so well. Perhaps feeling the same emotions, your neighbor turns the car south and then west along Riverside Drive, and you realize you are on your way to Idlewild Park.

In 1969, a street-widening project at Idlewild necessitates the removal of the tired old arch to a third location, at Paradise Park on Oddie Blvd.

The newest downtown arch remains in place, but not without its own problems. In 1977, the arch catches fire due to the combustion of pigeon droppings. The following year you nearly choke with laughter on your morning coffee while reading the newspaper headline “Reno pigeon condo closes, arch is fixed” and “Pigeon droppings and chicks found in the arch.”



1935 redesign of the arch, replacing the lights with green neon tubes. This was the fourth and last change for the old arch, to include the stylish art deco neon. Years after it was removed, it was reconstructed for the movie Cobb, and later placed at Mill and Lake Streets in 1994. The Reno Historical Resources Commission placed an interpretive plaque on the arch in 2003. Postcard courtesy of Cindy Ainsworth.

In 1986, the threat is again raised to turn off the arch lights, in order to save the city \$12,000 a year. Your neighbor calls to remind you of the earlier “arch blackout.” “What we need is another Rose Morgan,” she crows. You wholeheartedly agree and write a letter to the editor. An editorial later that week proclaims, “The idea deserves a quick burial” and the lights stay on. You and your neighbor have a nip of sherry on the front porch to celebrate.

It is now 1987, and another new arch, designed by Ad Art of Stockton, California is dedicated on Virginia Street. You and your neighbor agree that August is a much better time for an arch dedication, recalling that freezing New Year's Eve of 1963. You stand on the sidewalk, leaning on one another for support and watch in awe as 800 feet of neon tubing and 1,600 lights burst upon the night sky. It crosses your mind that this is very possibly the last new arch you will see at this location. Your neighbor smiles and squeezes your hand and you know that once again the two of you are on the same wavelength.

The next year, the 1935 arch is removed from Paradise Park, as it is now badly deteriorating. You hear on the television news that a group of well-meaning citizens are proposing to send the arch to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. While the idea that it would then be preserved in history is attractive to you, you feel a twinge of regret at Reno losing its early landmark. When the Smithsonian declines comment, you feel some satisfaction. But restoration is deemed too costly and the arch is placed in the city's storage yard.

Meanwhile, you follow with interest the controversy surrounding the 1963 arch. A Las Vegas physician offers to buy it. A Reno Councilwoman you greatly admire states, “I have problems with the arch going to some guy's house in Vegas.” Kathryn Wishart goes on to say, “I'd rather give it a decent burial if that's our only other option.” You agree with her; while you don't have the same attachment to this arch as to its predecessor, it shouldn't be someone's

Continued on page 4

Reno's Arches: The Whole Story (continued)

Continued from page 3

personal possession. In 1990, the Reno City Council gives the arch to Willits, California. You are not terribly pleased that the arch is leaving Nevada, but at least it will again be a public monument. And after all, it isn't the one you secretly think of as "your arch." Your neighbor mentions that the two of you could take a drive sometime to visit the arch at its new location in Willits, but you both know you never will.

It is now 1994, and though you spend more and more time dwelling in the past, you haven't thought about that first arch in some time. There is a knock on your door and you open it to your neighbor, who stands there leaning heavily on her cane, shoulders heaving with the effort of her trip from next door, but her eyes are shining. "Have you seen the morning paper? A movie production company is going to pay to restore the old arch and have it installed on Fourth Street! A woman named Robin Holabird of the state's Commission on Economic Development has located it on a storage lot!" "No kidding! What's the movie?" you ask, the same excitement leaping to your face. "Cobb!" she replies, with a grin. "It's the story of baseball legend Ty Cobb!" You laugh in



*The 1963 arch, with modifications after the incident with pigeons.
This arch was given to Willits, California in 1990.
Postcard courtesy of Cindy Ainsworth.*

sudden comprehension of your friend's excitement—she is the biggest baseball fan you know.

After the filming, the arch is removed but a nostalgic public demands its return. A grassroots effort is spearheaded by Phillip I. Earl, then Curator of History at the Nevada Historical Society. The Reno Redevelopment Agency launches a campaign to find a permanent home for the historic landmark. Over afternoon tea you tell your neighbor, "I hope they find a place downtown. It shouldn't be hidden away in a park, it should be somewhere everyone will see it." A cooperative effort among the Agency, the Reno City Council, the Holiday Hotel (now the Siena Hotel and Casino) and the National Auto Museum

secures a prime location on Lake Street near the Truckee River where it once again will welcome visitors on their way through downtown Reno.

The dedication is over and the crowd has dispersed but for two elderly friends, standing on the Lake Street Bridge looking up at the steel frame structure with smiles on their faces and eyes toward the past. 📷

This article was based on the following information:

An article written by Cindy Ainsworth for the 2002 Society of Commercial Archeology conference; "A Parade of Arches," Reno Gazette-Journal story from February 14, 1994; information from Phillip I. Earl, Nevada Historical Society and Gazette-Journal archives. The local color and personalized detail are flights of fancy wholly from the author's imagination.

Debbie Hinman is the HRPS Walking Tour Director and a member of the FootPrints Editorial Staff.



*The current Reno arch on Virginia Street, installed in 1987.
Photo courtesy of www.nevadamax.com*

Memories of the Mizpah

by Debbie Hinman

Last May I exercised my prerogative as Walking Tour Director and reworked one of our “tried and true” walks, “Beyond the Arches,” which covers the downtown Reno core. I also decided to try leading it myself. One thing that makes this tour special is that unlike the walks through residential areas, we have numerous opportunities to see the insides of some of the historically significant public buildings along the way. One of these special places is, or should I say was, the Mizpah Hotel.

On that Saturday morning, eighteen of us trooped into the hotel reception area and were greeted by the friendly desk clerk who seemed genuinely glad to see us. He showed the group the unique message box located on the wall, pointed out the original woodwork adorning the spacious area, and the large black safe which, he announced proudly, was salvaged from the Overland Hotel.


When asked about the meaning of the word “Mizpah,” the clerk pointed to a yellowed clipping on the wall bearing the words “Mizpah is an emotional bond between people who are separated (either physically or by death).” The word “mizpah” can often be found on headstones in cemeteries and on other memorials.

As we moved into the next room, a few residents of the hotel who were seated comfortably in the large lobby looked up, smiled shyly and seemed pleased at our open appreciation of the quaint and well-preserved interior.

We walked outside on that beautiful spring day and admired the handsome brick exterior. I told the group how the hotel had been built in stages, in 1922, 1925 and 1930, and that it had been originally known as the Pincolini Hotel. Pincolini was the surname of the brothers who built it with the profits from their agricultural holdings, and who still have family in Reno. We talked about how that area of town was a center of early

to those gracious residents we met that day, with a fervent hope that they were fortunate enough to have survived the fire. I wondered if any of the others on the walk that day were thinking similar thoughts as they heard the news of the Mizpah fire.

As if in answer to my musings, just a few days later I received an e-mail from Lloyd Walker, an Oregon resident who took the walk with us in May. (Lloyd had previously written to me, thanking me for the walk and telling me how he enjoyed learning a little more about Reno.) This time he wrote to say he was following the story on the fire with great sadness. We commiserated on the catastrophe in another exchange of mails, and I reflected that here was yet another justification for the HRPS walking tours. How many other people have seen public buildings or homes on our walks that no longer exist due either to calamity or “progress?” Thanks to the walking tours, they were able to experience a little bit of transient history and create a memory.

Lloyd’s final sentence was poignant and meaningful, and seemed to sum up the feelings of so many of us: “This fire was such a tragedy on so many fronts; loss of life for some, loss of hope for others, and certainly a loss of history for the entire community,” he wrote. Thank you, Lloyd, for a worthy epitaph for another grand piece of old Reno, reduced to rubble and memories. 

Debbie Hinman is the HRPS Walking Tour Director and a member of the FootPrints Editorial Staff.




*The Mizpah Hotel in Reno, January 2002, Lake Street side. Note the Pincolini Hotel sign near the rooftop. Good view of the three sides of the building that were built at different times.
Photo courtesy of www.nevadamax.com*

Reno ethnic diversity. Establishments catering to Basques, Chinese, Japanese, and African Americans as well as Italians were prevalent. Walkers noted how the architecture allowed for storefronts on the ground level, with the rooms above. The old building gave us all a real sense of what many of the downtown structures must have looked like in the 20s and 30s.

As I stood in my front yard on Halloween evening watching the billowing smoke from downtown fill the air, I recalled that May morning and my thoughts strayed

Shangri-La was Home to Shaws, the Mission and Seach Family

As this issue goes to press, the editorial staff notes with great regret the loss of another piece of local history to fire. The stately white colonial at 1640 So. Arlington, once known as Shangri-la, was the childhood home of Virginia Shaw Henningsen who recorded her memories of the property in *FootPrints* Volume 6 No 2. When Virginia’s family bought the home in 1935, it sat on 10 acres of land just south of the Reno city limits. Upon the death of Virginia’s father, her mother Ruth converted the lovely home to a comfortable, welcoming guest ranch for the divorce trade, calling the ranch Shangri-la, after the land popularized in a favorite novel, *Lost Horizon*. Our sympathies are with the Seach family who lost their new home—we join you in mourning this terrible loss. 

The Sanborn Maps of Reno

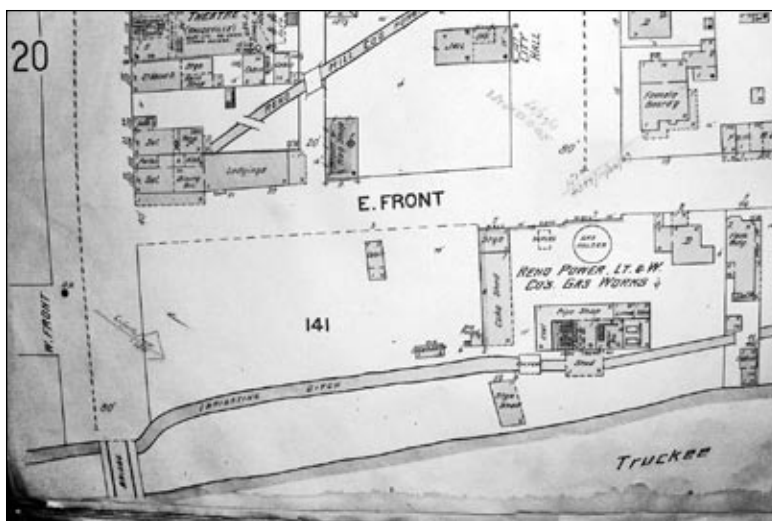
by Kim Henrick

The young man stepped out of the Southern Pacific Railroad passenger building, pulled his heavy winter coat closed against the sharp westerly wind and hurried down the street. Before entering the Overland Hotel on the corner of E. Commercial Row and N. Center Street, he glanced back at the unimpressive train depot and made a mental note: *one story, brick-lined frame building with a slate roof*. He was weary from his long, cross-country trip from the east, but his observational skills were still sharp. He looked forward to a hot bath and a good night's sleep but was eager to start his survey of this spunky little town on the river. He was a Sanborn man and like hundreds of other well-trained Sanborn surveyors throughout the country, his job was to map, in precise detail, the man-made structures of our country's towns and cities. Today he found himself in Reno, Nevada, during the bitter cold month of January 1904, and he was ready to get started.

The next morning he strolled south on N. Center Street and found the typical array of western-town businesses such as stables, barbers and boarding houses. He passed the "Vaudeville Theatre," a few "Chine" laundries, and the local telegraph office. He stopped at City Hall to introduce himself to the mayor (a polite and often advantageous gesture) and then continued down to E. Front Street (now E. 1st Street). On the northern bank of the Truckee River stood the business called the "Reno Power, Light & Water Co's. Gas Works." He strolled one more block west and stood at the intersection of Front and N. Virginia Streets, what appeared to him to be the center of this bustling town of 8,000. He examined the wood and iron wagon bridge that crossed the Truckee River at Virginia Street to the

south and noted that except for the Reno Power business on this central river-front property and a few small structures near it ("Calaboose," "Dog Pound," and "Coke Shed") this city block was bare.

The surveyor could not have known that this prime piece of land on the river would eventually host some of Reno's most historic buildings: the Reno U.S. Post Office, the Reno Y.M.C.A., the Majestic Theatre, and the Mapes Hotel. Also, he could not have known that by the year 2000, with the demolition of the Mapes Hotel, this core city block would once again stand bare—a stark contrast to an elegant period in Reno's past.



1904 Sanborn map of E. Front Street (now E. 1st St.) between N. Virginia Street (left side of photo) and southern end of N. Center Street (upper right side of photo). Note the Sullivan and Kelly ditch (located in 1872 by Sullivan, Kelly and Hymers) running between Reno Power and the Truckee River. Access to photograph the three Sanborn maps courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society.

The Sanborn character portrayed in this article is fictional (as the author has no personal knowledge about Sanborn's 1904 Reno surveyor) but the businesses, buildings and population numbers come from the 1904 Sanborn map. What we do know for a fact is that exhaustive surveys were conducted by Sanborn surveyors in thousands of cities, time and time again, for over a century, thanks to D.A. Sanborn.

In 1867, while John Wesley Powell studied geographic maps to prepare for his famous 1869 expedition down the Colorado River and while Clarence King received congressional approval to survey the Great Basin region, a civil engineer from Somerville, Massachusetts, looked to our cities for mapping opportunities. He recognized the specialized market for fire insurance maps and established the D.A. Sanborn National Insurance Diagram Bureau. Based in New York City, his company published colorful, detailed maps for the exclusive use of insurance companies. In her book *Fire Insurance Maps: Their History and Applications*, Diane Oswald describes fire insurance maps this way:

"With uniformity and clarity, these maps relay architectural details of residential, commercial and industrial buildings. They provide at a glance, through the use of symbols, colors and labels, a snapshot of the built environment. For countless underwriters, who were unable to personally inspect properties, fire insurance maps were a vital part of their fiscal survival."

The fire insurance map industry dates back to the late eighteenth century in London and for a time some British insurance companies even insured properties on the east coast of the United States. You can imagine the difficulty these companies had in assessing insurance risks across a vast ocean. Several important events—primarily, the War of 1812 between Great Britain and

the United States, and changes in laws concerning insurance companies in reaction to devastating city fires—led to the establishment of fire insurance map companies here in the United States by the mid-nineteenth century.

In 1850, George T. Hope, the secretary of the Jefferson Insurance Company, hired William Perris to map a large portion of New York City. That was the beginning

The Sanborn Maps of Reno (continued)

of the U.S. fire insurance map industry. Hope is also credited with establishing a committee of fire insurance officials that set the standards for fire insurance maps (colors, cartographic symbols, format and scale) that would serve fire insurance companies for over a century. There were many other successful fire insurance mapmakers, among them Henry Browne, William H. Martin, Ernest Hexamer, and William Lochner, but no name came to be associated with these maps like *Sanborn*. D.A. Sanborn died in 1883, but his company continued on—expanding and shrinking with economic and political changes, merging with and acquiring other businesses, operating under a myriad of corporate names—and is still doing business today as The Sanborn Map Company, although they no longer publish fire insurance maps.

In 1981, Walter W. Ristow (then Chief of the Geography and Map Division of the Library of Congress), explained that the library's Sanborn map collection "includes some fifty thousand editions of fire insurance maps comprising an estimated seven hundred thousand individual sheets." Various sources claim between 12,000 and 13,000 American towns and cities were mapped by The Sanborn Company.

Diane Oswald obtained access to The Sanborn Map Company's historical records and the following several paragraphs are a summary of her research on the map giant's operations, including several interesting firsthand surveyor stories.

Also called striders, trotters or pacers, these well-trained, respectable professionals were at times accused of being tax collectors and burglars and everything in between. With those false accusations (in spite of surveyors carrying ample com-

pany identification) came charging dogs, police chases and general bad behavior from some of our cities' citizens. At times Sanborn surveyors were fried by the hot desert sun and at other times they suffered from frost bite. But, for the most part these were ambitious, well-trained men who loved their jobs.

Within a town's or city's core area (of most interest to insurance companies) the Sanborn surveyor would complete his detailed survey, having noted in prescribed fashion such things as: the exact dimensions of all structures, the number of stories, the layout of interior walls and stairs, the location of water pipes and fire hydrants, the type of heating source and the street addresses. But most important

used for brick and the color blue was used for stone.

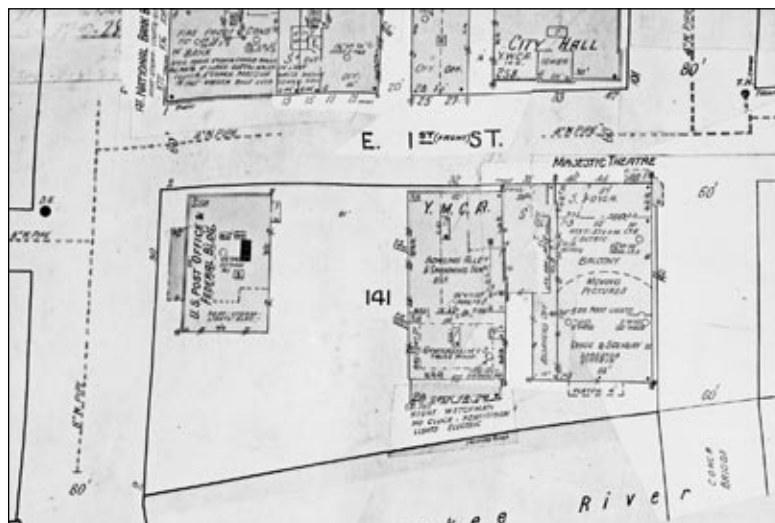
The surveyor would send his completed package of standardized notes and diagrams to a home office where several departments would do their part to produce a quality fire insurance map. Here is an abbreviated process flow: the Examining and Indexing Department checked the survey for errors and omissions; the Drafting Department drew symbols and lettering on the maps; the Proofreading Department checked every detail of the map including sheet numbers, water pipes and house numbers; the Lithography Department transferred the maps to lithographic stones for printing ("In 1923, seventeen employees and two presses

were credited for printing a record 33,901 map sheets in a single week."); the Coloring Department hand colored each map; the Print Department printed the index for the map; and finally the Stock House stored the maps until the maps were sold. A Sanborn map sold for \$20 to \$200 depending on its size and complexity.

Corrections (revisions) to each Sanborn map were usually made every year or two, and in cities of extreme change, this meant hundreds of variable-shaped correction slips might be made to update just one map. The 1918-1953 Reno map at the Nevada Historical Society had 25 revisions in that 35-year period. For

large correction jobs, a Sanborn map employee might have been sent to the insurance company to glue the correction slips on, instead of leaving the huge task to the customer.

An unfortunate result of the corrected maps is that you can't see beneath the correction slips to view what has been covered up. For instance, let's say on one busy city lot a frame house burned



1918-1933 Sanborn map of E. 1st (Front) Street between N. Virginia Street and N. Center Streets. Note the U.S. Post Office (opened in 1909, demolished 1945), the Y.M.C.A. (opened in 1911, demolished in 1953), and the Majestic Theatre (built in 1910, rebuilt in 1925 and demolished in 1981). The Center Street bridge on the lower right side of photograph was completed in 1926.

of all, he would note the materials used in each structure — the critical information insurance companies needed to know in order to estimate how safe the structure would be in a fire.

Building materials translated into various colors on the finished Sanborn maps. A glance at one of these beautiful maps would reveal instantly the areas of high or low fire risk. The color yellow was used to represent a frame structure, pink was

Continued on page 8

The Sanborn Maps of Reno (continued)

Continued from page 7

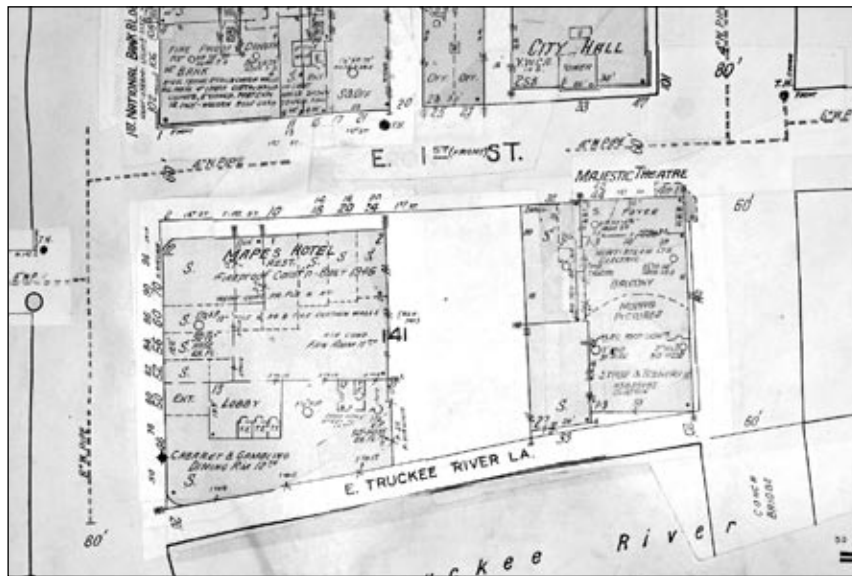
down and was replaced by another frame dwelling, which was demolished to make room for a blacksmith shop, which was eventually razed to accommodate a two-story brick hotel. If each of these structures was updated on the same Sanborn map, today you would only see the two-story brick hotel that is reflected in the last map correction. Sadly, master copies were not kept for each map revision.

"Maps serve many masters," writes Mr. Ristow in the *Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress*, July 1968. This is certainly true of Sanborn maps. These fire insurance maps successfully served the insurance industry for over a century and then they went on to serve historians, engineers, genealogists, environmental agencies, architects, writers, city planners and fire departments—anyone with an interest in looking at a city frozen in time on the date that the last correction slip was carefully glued into place.

The Nevada Historical Society has 11 Sanborn maps of Reno, ranging in dates from 1879 to 1972 (this includes revision dates) and approximately 75 Sanborn maps of other Nevada communities. One of the oldest Sanborn maps of Reno, published in 1885, reveals far more in its five, large, colorful sheets than just the shape of and materials used in Reno's buildings. The title page gives us a peek into the past when Reno had "2500 residents, 7 steam and 7 hand engines, 2 independent hose carts...prevailing winds west...Fire Department: Volunteer...Roofs are so called fire proof, having brick and mortar and earth between ceiling and outer roof. Grade of streets

about level." It describes Reno's water supply as "reservoir covering about 12 acres...above town level and filled by flume from the Truckee River."

The main library of the University of Nevada, Reno, has the 1879 and the 1918 Sanborn maps of Reno and approximately 30 others for communities around the state, such as Goldfield (1909) and Lovelock (1914). Linda Newman, the Geoscience and Map Librarian at the university's DeLaMare Library, hopes to



1918-1953 Sanborn map of E. 1st Street between N. Virginia Street and N. Center Street. Note the Mapes Hotel (opened in 1947, demolished in 2000). The Y.M.C.A. was demolished in 1953, around the time of this Sanborn map revision.

complete a project in 2007, whereby all pre-1923 Nevada Sanborn maps that are made available to UNR, will be scanned "in color" and posted online for access by the general public. (There are digitized Sanborn maps online today, but they are black and white and you must subscribe to the database service to access them.) Since the color schemes used on the Sanborn maps were an integral part of the maps' usefulness and now their desirability, the completion of the UNR Sanborn map project will be an exciting milestone for historical-map lovers and will help to preserve the delicate original fire insurance maps, some of which are being damaged due to constant use.

Information for this article came from:

Diane Oswald, *Fire Insurance Maps: Their History and Applications*; Walter W. Ristow, "United States Fire Insurance and Underwriters Maps (1852-1968)," *Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress*, July 1968; "Retrac: An Historic Achievement," booklet published by Reno Magazine; Rick

Van Noy, *Surveying the Interior*; newspaper articles of various dates (*Reno Gazette-Journal/Reno Evening Gazette/Nevada State Journal*); William Kaiser, "A Pictorial History of Reno, Nevada Post Office and Its Stations 1868-2000," (paper at the Nevada Historical Society).

I would like to thank Phillip Earl, Beth Miramon and Mella Harmon for sharing their vast knowledge about Reno's buildings and ditches. Thanks to my friends at the Nevada Historical Society:

Michael Maher (Librarian), Marta Gonzales-Collins (Assistant Librarian), and Eric Moody (Curator of Manuscripts); and UNR Librarian Linda Newman, for caring for and sharing Nevada's precious historical Sanborn maps.

Kim Henrick has written articles for the *Senior Spectrum* and the *Sparks Heritage Museum Spotlight*. We are pleased she has joined the Editorial Staff of *HRPS FootPrints*.

The Anniversary of the Interstate

by Carol Coleman

Recently, my husband mentioned that 2006 was the 50th anniversary of the Interstate Highway System. I didn't believe him. What about the highway system that Congress approved in the late 1910s which resulted in the Lincoln and Victory Highways? Wasn't that completion what the Transcontinental Highways Exposition and Reno's California Building and the ensuing celebration were all about? What about Highways 30 and 40 and the immortalized Route 66? Don't they count?

I decided to do some research and found the following information, much to my surprise. The Interstate Highway System was actually a totally different concept. Although planning for an interstate system had occurred as early as the late 1930s, the National Highway Defense System (NHDS) was approved by Congress in 1956 for the strategic defense of the country. Quoting from Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET), "this is a network of highways which are important to the United States' strategic defense policy and which provide defense access, continuity and emergency capabilities for defense purposes." In the 1950s, my husband remembers wondering if people in their cars would ever use the system.

The story of the system's origins is enlightening. In an article from the June 2006 issue of *American History* magazine, author Logan Thomas Snyder reports: "In 1919, following the end of World War I, an Army expedition was organized to traverse the nation from Washington, D.C. to San Francisco, leaving the nation's capital on July 7. Joining the expedition as an observer was a young lieutenant colonel, Dwight D. Eisenhower." Supposedly, this military caravan took several months of travel. This experience planted the seed for his grand idea, but the officer's later experience in wartime Germany nurtured it. Snyder writes: "It was not until the Allies broke through the Western Wall and tapped into Germany's sprawling autobahn network that Eisenhower saw for himself what a modern army could do with an infrastructure capable of accommodating it." Eisenhower wrote, "The

old convoy had started me thinking about good, two-lane highways, but Germany had made me see the wisdom of broader ribbons across the land."

As President, Eisenhower threw the full weight of his office toward promoting a plan for the military to have a better way to move from coast to coast and to



DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

*Sketch of Dwight D. Eisenhower,
Courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society.*

evacuate cities quickly. With highways like 30 and 40 and 66, every farm and house could have an entrance onto the highway. Highways connected to the streets of towns and cities, like Highway 40 connected to Fourth Street in Reno.

The Interstate, however, was to be a Limited Access Highway, with a limited number of ways to get on and off the highway. And there would be no stop signs or stop lights in the entire span.

The 1956 Act proposed the length to be 41,000 miles, and established standards for the system: a minimum of two travel lanes in each direction, 12-foot wide lanes, 10-foot wide right shoulder, 4-foot wide left shoulder. Major interstates would have one- or two-digit numbers, with odd numbers running north-south, and even numbers running east-west.

Rest areas and interchange designs were specified. The Act stipulated the most complex aspect, how to fund the Interstate. All of the Interstate segments and interchanges must be approved by the Secretary of Transportation.

Quoting a June 2006 editorial in the *Reno Gazette-Journal*, "no development since the transcontinental railroad has had a bigger impact on life in the United States than the Interstate Highway System." The impact of the Interstate on commercial transportation has been enormous. Prior to the Interstate, most cross-country movement of goods was done by train. Today a container can be moved from Japan via ship and placed on a truck or train for rapid shipment across the United States.

As in many communities, the completion of I-80 through the Sierra Nevada contributed to the tourism boom of the 1970s, but it was also responsible for the decline of U.S. 40 (Fourth Street) east and west of downtown. Decline was similar in other towns on the route. On May 22, 1974, a 19-year contentious quest to put a freeway through the Truckee Meadows ended with the opening of the final leg of Interstate 80 through downtown Reno and Sparks. By 1961, a route through Reno and Sparks was chosen, after eliminating several other prospective routes around Reno and through Reno. By 1971, the Sparks portion of the freeway was complete. The Reno section, however, was beset with funding cuts, steel shortages, vandalism, welding flaws and major dips in the roadway until it was completed in 1974.

Thanks to I-80, the Reno-Sparks area has become a giant in the warehousing and distribution industry. And thanks to the Interstate, Americans travel all over this country with relative ease. However, nothing is gained without something else being lost, and that is certainly the case with the Interstate system. Snyder quotes the late CBS news commentator Charles Kuralt, "It is now possible to


Continued on page 10

The Anniversary of the Interstate (continued)

Continued from page 9

travel from coast to coast without seeing anything. From the Interstate, America is all steel guardrails and plastic signs, and every place looks and feels and sounds and smells like every other place." But savvy travelers plan their trips to use the safe and efficient Interstate for the long hauls, leaving it every so often to take a less-traveled and more scenic route to "see the country."

I remember a 26-day trip in 1946 from northern Vermont to southern Arizona in a 1941 Ford, beset with flat tires, broken fan belts and an overheated radiator. Today automotive technology has reduced the probability of breakdowns. And today that trip would take five to six easy travel days. Where a trip across the country in the 1940s involved 200-mile days, today a 500-mile day is quite reasonable.

The Interstate system now includes 160,000 miles of roadway of critical importance to the nation's economy, defense and mobility. The nation's transportation system has come a long way in 50 short years. 

Information for this article came from:

The National Highway System, www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep10/nhs/index.html; Bill O'Driscoll, "Interstate drew new local map," Reno Gazette Journal, June 26, 2006; Sadia Latifi, "Interstate Turns 50," Reno Gazette Journal, June 29, 2006; "Get Your Kicks On . . . I-40," editorial, Reno Gazette Journal, June 2006.

Carol Coleman is the Managing Editor of FootPrints.

HRPS Annual Party October 25 And Thanks to Silent Auction Donors

- "Reno 89501: A Postcard Revue" was the theme of this year's annual HRPS party which was held October 25 in the spacious and historic California Building. Around 140 guests mingled and meandered easily, thanks to the large, open venue, accompanied by Big Band music. Colorful enlarged postcards of historic Reno served as eye-catching placemats and the centerpieces were comprised of bright mailboxes filled with festive greenery and decorated with tiny postcards.
- A delicious buffet-style meal, catered by the Elegant Herb, included an assortment of tasty chicken, pasta and shrimp dishes.
- The popular silent auction (featuring donated books, historic photos and postcards, gift baskets and many other quality items) brought in \$1275 for the organization.
- Entertainment for the evening was a sure thing as Jack Hursh and Jerry Fenwick put on an informative and nostalgic PowerPoint presentation of historical Reno postcards.
- Thanks are due to the party committee, capably and creatively led again this year by board member Marilyn Turville. Assisting Marilyn were Phyllis Cates, Felvia Belaustegui as menu coordinator, Carrie Young and Mark Taxer as silent auction chairs, and others who worked very hard to make this year's party so successful.
- Many thanks also to the generous people and organizations who provided silent auction items for the HRPS Annual Party:

Cindy Ainsworth
Felvia Belaustegui
Karl Breckenridge
Phyllis Cates
Neal Cobb
Joan Collins
Joan Dyer
Jerry Fenwick
Gordon Foote

Blythe Forman
Debbie Hinman
Jack Hursh
Pat Klos
Beth Miramon
Anne Simone
Jim Smith
Marilyn Turville
Sharon Walbridge

Carrie Young
Casale's Half-way Club
Gold -n- Silver
Lake Mansion
Nevada Museum of Art
Nevada Historical Society
Pinocchio's

January Program: "Reading Reno"

- "Reading Reno," a tantalizing program designed to make you want to curl up with a good book about Reno on a cold winter's evening, will be the HRPS January 24th offering.
- A panel of five readers will share some of their favorite reads about our city, including Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr.'s *RENO*, written in the 1920s, works by Walter Van Tilburg Clark, selected Basque based excerpts, and even a little Will James.
- The readers are Pat Ferraro Klos, founding president of HRPS; UNR retired art professor and HRPS favorite Jim McCormick; Will James biographer and filmmaker Gwen Clancy; Elko-born Basque politico Pete Ernaut; and loyal HRPS member and former student of Walter Van Tilburg Clark, Barbara Swart Courtney.
- The readers will each read six to eight minutes of material on their chosen author and/or book, and will then entertain questions at the end of the program. At this time we are hoping to have selected materials for sale at the end of the evening. This program will be appropriate for teenagers studying Reno and Nevada literature, so invite some of your younger friends.

Corrections, Corrections...

In *FootPrints*, Vol. 9 No. 4, page 7, the photo caption of Mayor Roberts erroneously identified him as Edward E. Roberts. Roberts' first name was Edwin, as stated in the body of the story. Good catch, Guy Rocha!

Also in *FootPrints*, Vol. 9 No. 4, in the story on Reno Press Brick Company, it was stated that the Riverside Hotel was constructed of Reno Press Brick. Author and researcher Beth Miramon has since discovered that the Riverside bricks were not RPB, they were produced by the Ward Brothers (who also built the Mizpah Hotel) and were common brick, not pressed. Thanks, Beth.

HRPS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please check your mailing label! Renew your membership and help HRPS preserve historic Reno!

Please make checks payable to **Historic Reno Preservation Society**, and mail along with this application to:
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Additional donation: _____

Thank you for joining HRPS. An organization is only as strong as its members. There are many areas in our organization where your enthusiasm, skills, and dedication will be invaluable to historic Reno and future generations. The goal of the Historic Reno Preservation Society is to preserve the historic resources of our community. What would you like to contribute to HRPS?

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Membership Report July 1, 2006—November 24, 2006

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Help Needed: A New Walking Tour Director...

HRPS is looking for a new Walking Tour Director. This position requires a coordinator who is organized, dependable and can handle detail. The Director does not necessarily have to give walks. Walking tours occur three times a year, in May (Preservation Week), July (Artown) and in September. The Director decides how many and which walks to run, contacts the guides to have them select times that work for them, and prepares a schedule of walks. The Director writes up the walks for publicity. For each walk, the Director or a representative helps to collect money and handle sign-ins. The Director handles the money collected and works with the Treasurer. For information and a complete job description, contact Debbie Hinman, 322-9400.



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WINTER PROGRAMS 2007

Jack Hursh, Jr. – Program Chair: 746-3252

All program events are on the 4th Wednesday of the month at 7 pm, at Mt. Rose School (Lander Street between Taylor and LaRue, just off Arlington), unless otherwise noted.

Wednesday, January 24

"Reading Reno." A unique evening of entertainment with readers reciting from important literary works about Reno. Five readers: Pat Perraro Klos, Jim McCormick, Gwen Clancy, Pete Ernaut, and Barbara Swart Courtney will tantalize you with their favorite reads. Works include excerpts from Cornelius Vanderbilts Jr.'s 1920s novel *RENO*, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, selected Basque based excerpts, and Will James (**see page 10 for more information**).

Friday, February 16

Closing date of the Nevada Historical Society's exhibit in the Changing Gallery: The Art & Architecture of Frederic DeLongchamps.

Wednesday, February 28

Matt Fockler, a master's student in geography at the University of Nevada, will present, "The Role of Irrigation on the Growth of Reno-the Cultural and Physical Development of the Truckee Meadows from the 1850s to about 1902."

Wednesday, March 28

Dave and Sunny Minedew will present a two-part program, including both photographs and video, of the history of and residents' reflections on Zephyr Cove, Nevada.

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