

# Historic Reno PRESERVATION SOCIETY

# FootPrints

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

VOL. 11 NO. 3 ❖ SUMMER 2008

## Downtown Reno Comes Full Circle

*by Sharon Walbridge and Debbie Hinman*

Since Reno came to be in May of 1868, the downtown has been its heart and soul. The heart of town originally centered around Commercial Row, due to the proximity of its lifeblood, the railroad. Reno slowly expanded south to take in Virginia Street and the properties that began to pop up, particularly following the legalization of gambling in 1931 and the repeal of prohibition in 1933.

Downtown Reno was the shopping mecca for all local residents as the 20th century progressed, with J. C. Penney's, Sears, and Montgomery Ward department stores. There was the locally-owned Grey Reid Wright Company, which moved to the north end of the city center, and also the smaller, exclusive stores such as Joseph Magnin, The Wonder, Herz Brothers Jewelry, Menards, and Lloyd Gotchy Shoes.

Older residents may recall a grocery, operating from the Senator Hotel building well into the 1950s. The Food Shop at 142 West Second Street, was an Italian grocery store that sold imported and domestic groceries, fresh meats and pasta, made daily. Fresh vegetables were displayed in the front window. Canned foods formed aisles. The meat counter was toward the rear. "We cut all our own meat, and I remember the machine we used to pull the tendons from the turkeys," reported Bob Ferrari, son of Ben Ferrari, owner of the Food Shop.

But it was the handmade ravioli that was the original impetus for the Food Shop thanks to "Nonna," the strong-willed and resourceful grandmother who left her small Italian village at the age of thirteen. Mary Martinengo came through Ellis Island in 1905 and eventually joined an older brother in Reno. She worked as a cook and seamstress at the McCarran Ranch until she met

and married a Virginia City miner, Dave Gardella. She later became a very successful owner and seamstress of a silk shop on Second Street near the Grand Café.

"The Food Shop had a walk-in refrigerator for meat and pickling barrels," Bob Ferrari continued, "and there was a full basement for storage. We delivered groceries all over Reno at no charge."

Bob remembers walking a lot of groceries to the homebound elderly at the Colonial Hotel (now Ross Manor) down the street. When he got old enough to drive, Bob delivered groceries around town in a 1946 Chevrolet truck. NOODLES & RAVIOLIS was lettered on the tailgate, and thus did Bob become fondly known as Noodles to his friends.

Ben Ferrari sold the store in 1958 and it is now operated as a convenience store.

Park Lane Mall was built on the outskirts of town in the late 1960s, and had a powerful impact on the downtown shopping area. As stores began to close, so did the downtown eateries. Over time the local favorite on the river, Columbo's, and the lunch staples such as The

Stein Hof Brau and Tony's Delicatessen closed. It was a slow and painful death. By the eighties, once you walked south of Harrah's, you were greeted by closed-down and boarded-up properties, such as the Mapes and Riverside Hotels, the newer Onslow Hotel and Woolworth's variety store. If you saw any pedestrian traffic at all, they were mainly vagrants, or downtown workers hurrying, heads down, to and from their vehicles. The only place to eat was in the casinos.

The river was inaccessible and largely ignored, and while Wingfield Park was quaint and picturesque, no one really went



*The interior of the Food Shop, after WWII.  
On the left is Louis Zunnino, known as "Zaggin" who owned the Sierra Street Bar. On the right is Louis Ferrari, brother of owner Ben Ferrari. Note ice box on the right.  
Photo courtesy of Bob Ferrari.*

*Continued on page 2*

## Downtown Reno Comes Full Circle (continued)

*Continued from page 1*

there. Novice tennis players who wanted to hit a ball where they wouldn't be the butt of spectator jokes found the perfect place in the leafy shadows of the Wingfield Tennis Courts.

But, by the 90s, good things began to happen—Rollin' on the River became the fun thing to do on Friday evenings and Wingfield Park came alive with free music enjoyed by young people, baby boomers and seniors alike. The River Walk made the Truckee accessible and attracted pedestrian traffic with its fountains and unique metal sculptures. A new theater opened on West First Street, along with new downtown eateries. Small specialty shops sprang up in older, long-vacant storefronts on First Street, and the monthly Wine Walk brought shoppers, both locals and tourists, into the shops, and added a new dimension to Saturday afternoons.

Later, the kayak park opened, and the river was soon filled with water enthusiasts and small, colorful boats. You could actually walk into the river,



Roy Powers' painting of the Food Shop. It represents the intersection of Second and West, but not the actual era of the Ferrari ownership.  
Painting courtesy of Roy Powers.

Ravioli, Tagliarini and Noodles Fresh Daily

Lasagne and Green Noodles Made to Order

### THE FOOD SHOP

142 WEST SECOND STREET – RENO

PHONE 2-4036 \*\* FREE DELIVERY

IMPORTED AND DOMESTIC GROCERIES

FRESH MEATS

Directions for Preparing Good Ravioli

To cook 48 Ravioli, use one gallon of water, adding one teaspoonful of salt. When the water boils put in the Ravioli, stirring light now and then. Cook for about ten minutes. Strain well of water and place in vessel, adding, grated cheese and sauce to taste.

KEEP IN COOL PLACE  
NET CONTENTS 48 RAVIOLI  
CARRY BOX FLAT TO AVOID CRUSHING

*The text on the side of a box of raviolis, above, from The Food Shop.*

take a swim, let your dog cool his feet, or just sit on a rock and watch the activity. A few of the abandoned hotels gained new life—the Riverside as Sierra Arts Foundation's Artist Lofts; the Comstock, now the Belvedere Luxury Condos and the Flamingo Hilton, in the process of being converted to the Montage Condos.

On the site of the old Granada and UA Cinemas, the Palladio condo project is nearly full. Today, people are not only just coming downtown to enjoy the explosion of activities, they are living downtown. The small quadrant that many believed was gasping its last breath, has received a transfusion and a new lease on life.

Like a snowball rolling downhill, the momentum has continued to build. Realizing that those who live downtown need groceries and provisions, the developers of Reno's new urban market, "West Street Market" have set an opening date of July 2008 for their progressive outdoor venture on historic West Street between First and Second Streets. A little off the beaten path, this section of West Street is nonetheless historic and charming, with its impressive anchors of the First Methodist Church, Ross Manor Apartments and the Senator Hotel. Some years ago the Beaujolais Bistro found a home here, amid the aged and wonderful brickwork of the storefronts that will soon accommodate the West Street

Market. The indoor market, now in the building stage, will be in the middle of the block, and is set to open in October.

The market is designed to serve as a gathering place that will provide a unique experience, centered around food, friends and shopping. The focus of the food will be homemade, fresh and local. Also featured will be entertainment and demonstrations where you can learn new things from gourmet cooking to being a better steward to the environment.

While the addition of a market in the downtown core seems a new innovation to recent transplants, it's another idea that has come full circle. When the West Street Market opens, the spirit of Nonna Gardella and the Food Shop will no doubt be hovering nearby, scoping out any rival pasta booths. She'd probably have called her own "Noodles by Nonna." It's a pretty sure bet she'd be happy with this resurgence of life in the heart of Reno, making our city an even more special place to live. 🍷

Information for this article came from Bob Ferrari and from "Dozen tenants sign up for West Street Market," Thursday, May 15, 2008 *Reno Gazette-Journal*.

Sharon Walbridge is the originator of *FootPrints* and Editor Emeritus. Debbie Hinman is a HRPS Tour Guide and *FootPrints* Editorial Staff member.

## Roy Frisch – The Man Who Knew Too Much

by Debbie Hinman

**Editor's Note:** The following, in italics, is historical fiction, by Debbie Hinman, interpreting what might have happened based on the presently known facts of the case.

**D**usk was turning to dark that evening of Thursday, March 22, 1934, and the windows of the imposing, stone and wood-shingle home perched on the Court Street bluff, overlooking the island in Wingfield Park, glowed welcomingly. Inside, Louisa Frisch bustled about taking care of last-minute preparations as her sister Alice began greeting the guests who were arriving for the Thursday evening bridge party. Having planned a quiet evening at home reading and listening to the radio, the women's brother Roy, a 45-year-old soft-spoken bank cashier, took his newspaper and moved to the kitchenette. As the shrill laughter of the women reached the area, Mrs. Barbara Frisch eyed her son sympathetically, suggesting he might want to take in a movie. Roy readily agreed, changed his clothes to a dark suit, perched a gray fedora on his head and left the home between 7:30 and 7:45 p.m.

He headed east on Court Street, turning north on South Virginia. Although it wasn't an excessively cold evening—the day's high had actually been 65 degrees—as he turned the corner, Roy felt a gust of chilly wind rush at him and momentarily wished he had worn his overcoat. His path took him past the Riverside Hotel, and the empty windows of the out-of-business Riverside Bank where Roy had once worked in the employ of George Wingfield. He shivered, not only from the cold air, but from the memory of his last few years there, and the situation in which he now found himself. In just a short eleven days, Roy would be called upon to testify against Jim McKay and Bill Graham, associates of Wingfield's and local "businessmen" who had been accused of using the U.S. mails to defraud clients. As a bank cashier, Roy had eye-witnessed some of these suspect transactions and unknowingly handled paperwork for the pair, as the Riverside Bank was being used as a vehicle for laundering investors' money and securities. He didn't like the

*idea of going up against these powerful men, but neither did he like the idea of the innocent people who had been cheated out of their life savings. The fact that Roy had deposited their checks, money they would never see again, grated against his innate integrity, though his assistance had been innocent. He shivered again, as he crossed the river by way of the Virginia Street bridge and glanced over at the gray, churning water far below. Thinking he*



*Very fuzzy newspaper photo of Roy Frisch, from the collection recently donated to the Nevada Historical Society by the Frisch family and Marilyn Fuetsch Turville.*

*heard footsteps behind him, he nervously glanced over his shoulder, but saw no one. He thrust his hands deeper into his trouser pockets and hurried on. Passing the Masonic Building, he crossed the street in front of the recently vacated "old" post office, heading east on First Street, anticipating the warmth and inviting luxury of the Majestic Theater.*

Did Roy Frisch actually see a movie that evening? No one knows for certain. The new release, *Gallant Lady*, starring Ann Harding and Clive Brook was playing and had started at 7 p.m. With the accompanying shorts, Frisch may not have missed too much of the feature presentation. But the ticket agent did not remember selling him a ticket. The theater manager was quoted as saying he may have seen Frisch in the lobby, but couldn't be sure, and other patrons were just as indefinite.

But where else would he have gone, if not there? Newspapers described Frisch as "a total abstainer from alcohol," so it doesn't seem likely that he would have gone to a bar. At any rate, what is known is that he was seen by a friend in the vicinity of Court and Sierra streets, around 9:45 p.m. The friend was Harry Gorline, an employee of A. Carlisle & Co., who had gone out to purchase some liniment at a drug store for his wife's sprained ankle. Gorline reported that he and Frisch had exchanged a few words, then Roy had continued on his way, heading west on Court Street, just a few blocks from home. Gorline also told police he had seen no other pedestrians or vehicles in the vicinity. However, somewhere within this short distance, the brown-haired, ruddy-complected, 5-foot, 8-inch, 175-pound man in the dark suit simply disappeared into thin air and was never seen again.

The bridge party at the Frisch home broke up about 2 a.m. Sister Alice, passing Roy's bedroom, saw that he had not yet returned. Puzzled, but not alarmed, she made sure to leave the porch light burning for her brother and went to bed. The next morning when the family saw that Roy had not returned all night, they began making private inquiries among friends, as it was not like their predictable, considerate brother and son to stay away without letting anyone know. But no one had seen Roy.

After the closing of the Riverside Bank in 1932, Roy had begun working as assistant to Leo Schmitt, receiver of seven of the

*Continued on page 4*



## Roy Frisch (continued)

Wingfield banks. His office was located in the United Nevada Bank, 157 N. Virginia. Secretary Frankie Shaughnessy, concerned when the usually prompt Frisch had not arrived at the bank by 8:30 a.m., contacted his assistant Joseph Fuetsch. Fuetsch had already been contacted by Frisch's family regarding his whereabouts. Fuetsch became seriously concerned, and told the family they should contact the police. This was done around noon on Friday.

The local police immediately went into action. Roy was a well-known figure from a prominent family. He had been a member of the Reno City Council for years, and had even been urged to run for mayor, a suggestion he refused. However, prior to his employment at the Riverside Bank, he did run for County Assessor, winning the office by a large margin.

Everyone knew of his subpoena to testify at the upcoming New York trial. Members of the Reno Police Department and the Washoe County Sheriff's Office began searching for the missing banker. Within a day, Department of Justice agents from Salt Lake City, Utah and San Francisco, California had arrived in Reno to assist in the investigation. At this time, county commissioners authorized the Sheriff's Office to offer a \$1000 reward for information leading to the whereabouts of Roy Frisch.

On Saturday afternoon, National Guard units and American Legion members had joined in the search of the area. They were soon joined by private search parties and Boy Scout troops. Everyone in town was either searching for Frisch or talking about the disappearance. Local newspapers carried daily stories on the front page detailing search information and leads. One interesting tip came in from a Court Street neighbor of the Frisches, a Mrs. M. E. Nicol. She reported that at about 8:30 p. m. on the evening of the disappearance, a man came to her door, looking for a specific Court Street address. She said there was a long, black car parked at the curb. She apparently provided no additional helpful details.

Local law enforcement as well as townspeople began compiling theories

as to Frisch's disappearance. One of the first theories considered was that Roy's disappearance was voluntary. Perhaps he couldn't face participating in the upcoming trial. Or maybe, some people hesitantly suggested, he had some part in the bunco schemes and was running because of his own guilt; or perhaps someone paid him to disappear.

### Frisch Mystery Deepens After 90 Hours Devoted to Fruitless Searching

*"Hot Tip" Spurs Officers on Quest Late Today*

*Front-page headline from Reno Evening Gazette, Monday, March 26, 1934.*

Frisch's family staunchly defended Roy, and all who knew him refused to believe he would ever have knowingly taken part in the schemes, or that he would leave his family without a word. Police soon discarded this theory, as there was no evidence at all that he had planned to run, there were no withdrawals from his personal account and according to his mother, he could not have had more than \$25 on his person. They turned to abduction as the only probable hypothesis.

As days passed with no contact or ransom demands from kidnappers and no valid sightings of Frisch or leads to his whereabouts, both federal and local law enforcement became convinced they were dealing with an abduction/murder case. And the most logical assumption was that it had something to do with the upcoming trial of Graham and McKay. But where was the body? Again, theories abounded. The sheriff's department dragged the Truckee River with no result. Abandoned buildings were searched, as were the hills on the outskirts of town.

One interesting tip came in that the sounds of shovels hitting dirt and rocks was heard behind George Wingfield's home on Court Street, the evening of the 22nd, but this was never confirmed.

But the most popular and most likely hypothesis, according to law enforcement, was that the body had been dropped down a mine shaft. Several in the area were searched. Discoveries included a bloody hat and three spent pistol shells at a mine on Hunter Creek Road in southwest Reno. More pistol casings and bloody rags were found at the Black Panther Mine, north of the city. Of course in these pre-DNA technology days, there was no way to match it to Roy Frisch. Even George Wingfield's Adelaide Mine outside Winnemucca became a possible site, when a prospector reported seeing several men and a couple of cars at the location, on the night of the disappearance.

But the biggest question of all was, if indeed Frisch had been a victim of foul play and with Graham and McKay back in New York awaiting trial, who had killed Roy? Local police tapped into the underworld grapevine and the name of Jimmie Burnell kept coming up.

Burnell was a smiling, affable young man who also happened to be a hardened criminal. Originally from Chicago, but spending more time on the west coast due to warrants for his arrest in the Midwest, Jimmie had been given various jobs, many in Reno, in the service of Bill Graham. He worked as a bouncer at the Bank Club, and as a chauffeur for Graham. Burnell had many aliases—born Lester Gillis, he used "Jimmie Burnell" in Reno, but was best known as George or "Baby Face" Nelson.

Police discovered that Nelson had arrived in Reno on March 20, accompanied by his associate John Paul Chase. He left late on the evening of the 22nd, or early on the 23rd. The timing certainly fit. And Nelson owed Graham a debt of gratitude for making a place for him in Reno whenever things got too hot in another locale. Did Nelson decide to repay the debt by removing a

## Roy Frisch (continued)

threat to his benefactor? Or did Graham and McKay hire Nelson to take care of their "problem"? Or was this all coincidental? There was no real evidence that Baby Face was in any way involved in the alleged crime.

In July of 1935, a break came in the person of Nelson associate John Paul Chase. Chase, doing a life term for murder at Alcatraz, suddenly agreed to talk about the case—perhaps because he had nothing to lose, and because Nelson was dead, having been killed following a shootout with law enforcement agents in the midwest the previous November. However, not only did Chase's versions of Roy Frisch's murder vary from telling to telling, but subsequent newspaper reports were inconsistent as well.

In one version, Baby Face got into an altercation with a pedestrian who walked in front of his vehicle, and who coincidentally turned out to be the star witness against Nelson's former employer and protector. Nelson allegedly struck him on the head with his revolver and loaded him into the car. Chase and Nelson then drove through Virginia City in the direction of Yerington, and turned down a lonely road. There Nelson supposedly shot Frisch several times in the head, the two men stripped his body of any identifying clothing and possessions, and buried him in a depression in the ground, near the entrance to an old mine shaft. Chase claimed they returned to Reno, arriving about 3 a.m.

Two other accounts were attributed to Chase by others covering the case in later years. These agreed that Frisch was grabbed intentionally, to keep him from testifying. In one of Chase's versions, he claimed Nelson and he had driven Frisch to a garage where Nelson shot him to death. In another, he claimed Frisch had tried to escape from the vehicle as they were driving through Sparks and injured himself so severely that he died in the car. Chase and Nelson then drove his



*The Frisch home at 247 Court St. Neighbors in this prominent area included George Wingfield to the east and Pat McCarran across Arlington to the west.  
Photo courtesy of Kim Henrick.*

body out to Spanish Springs, where they buried him.

At some point, Chase was taken from Alcatraz to Spanish Springs in the company of federal agents in order to point out the gravesite of Roy Frisch. But once the group arrived in the Spanish Springs vicinity, Chase claimed he could not recall the exact spot. Investigators spent long hours combing the area on their own, but no body was ever discovered.

The years passed, and police were no closer to finding a solution to the mystery. Graham and McKay had finally, after three trials, been convicted of mail fraud in 1938. This was due in part to the testimony of Joseph Fuetsch, Frisch's assistant at the bank. Following Frisch's abduction, Fuetsch had been placed under police guard prior to giving his testimony, probably a wise precaution. From time to time, unidentified bodies would be recovered in the area, but none was ever proven to be that of Roy Frisch.

In the 74 years since the crime occurred, many tips were called in and false alarms were raised regarding the Frisch case. A few of these, however, seemed as if they could be real leads. In his online publication, *The Nevada Travel*

*Network*, writer David W. Toll relates a story told to him in 1966, by a man who was leasing the Fairview Mine from George Wingfield in 1934.

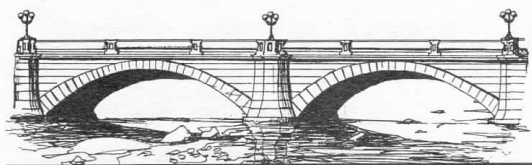
According to the man, his partner's wife looked out the window the morning of March 23rd to see a big black car with three men in it heading toward the machine shop of the mine. A few minutes later, she saw the car return, this time with only two men in it. The man went on to tell Toll the story of the malfunctioning pump, with some unidentifiable brown substance caught in it. He took it to a local doctor with a lab to be analyzed, as he was curious to know what was causing the problem. According to the doctor, the substance was

human hair from a man in early middle age. The storyteller was convinced this mine shaft was the final resting place of Roy Frisch. By the time Toll heard the story, he figured that there would not have been enough evidence left for analysis. The mystery remains.

Roy Frisch was declared legally dead in 1941. His mother, Barbara Frisch, passed away in 1943, never knowing what had become of her son. Roy's father and an infant brother had predeceased Roy, but Roy was survived by three brothers and five sisters. The Frisch family remained in the family home, and left the porch light burning overnight for many years, in hopes that Roy might yet return.

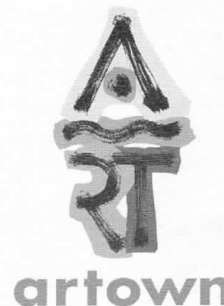
Information for this article came from *Nevada State Journal* and *Reno Evening Gazette* stories from the period of 1934-1935; a biography *Baby Face Nelson: Portrait of a Public Enemy* by Steven Nickel and William J. Helmer and *It Happened in Nevada* by Elizabeth Gibson.

Debbie Hinman is a HRPS Board Member, a HRPS Tour Guide and a *FootPrints* Editorial Staff writer.



# Historic Reno PRESERVATION SOCIETY

## July 2008 HRPS & Artown Walking Tours



Historic Reno Preservation Society will present eight historic walking tours and one bike tour during the month of July in honor of ARTOWN. Walking Tours are \$10 per person; tours are free for HRPS members. Tours generally last about 2 hours. No dogs on tours, please. We would appreciate it if you would call 747-HIST (4478) to reserve space so we can better plan for the appropriate number of guides.

Tuesday,  
July 1, 2008  
6:00 p.m.

**BRICKS & STONES** - A walk in the vernacular Humboldt and Lander Streets neighborhood. Discover the architectural treasure trove of this area--a mix of bungalows, Tudor-style homes, mission revivals and cottage styles. Meet at My Favorite Muffin, 340 California Avenue. Tour guides, Tracy Soliday and Mark Taxer.

Sunday,  
July 6, 2008  
9:00 a.m.

**BIKE TOUR THROUGH OLD RENO** - Ride along quiet streets under a canopy of trees in Reno's oldest neighborhoods. Meet at My Favorite Muffin, 340 California Avenue. Tour guide, Glee Willis.

Tuesday,  
July 8, 2008  
6:00 p.m.

**EL RENO APARTMENT HOMES** - Visit the original site of these charming and unique homes, and view seven of them at their new locations. Other examples of the Sierra Vista Addition architecture will be seen. Meet at the Statewide Lighting parking lot, 1311 S. Virginia. Tour guide, Debbie Hinman.

Saturday,  
July 12, 2008  
9:00 a.m.

**NEWLANDS NEIGHBORHOOD** - An architectural walk through one of Reno's oldest and most prestigious neighborhoods. Meet at My Favorite Muffin, 340 California Avenue. Tour guides, Scott Gibson and Bill Isaef.

Tuesday,  
July 15, 2008  
6:00 p.m.

**UPPER RALSTON/NORTHERN LITTLE ITALY** - Enjoy a walk in a residential neighborhood with a mix of architectural styles. Proximity to the University has traditionally determined the mix of residents, professors and students alike. Meet at the intersection of Washington Street, The Strand, and College Avenue. Tour Guide, Jim Smith.

Saturday,  
July 19, 2008  
9:00 a.m.

**FOURTH STREET CORRIDOR** - Rediscover the historic origins of Highway 40 and the Lincoln Highway, stopping to appreciate the Barengo building, Flanigan warehouse, and other vestiges of the corridor's heyday. Meet at Louis' Basque Corner, 301 E. 4th Street. Tour guide, Cindy Ainsworth.

Tuesday,  
July 22, 2008  
6:00 p.m.

**TRUCKEE RIVER CORRIDOR** - Discover Reno's beginnings with a walk along the Truckee River through "Little Italy," noting historic churches, parks, hotels & motels, homes, and other fine old buildings. Meet at Dreamer's Coffee House in the Riverside Artists Lofts, 17 South Virginia Street. Tour guide, Joan Collins.

Saturday,  
July 26, 2008  
9:00 a.m.

**PARSONS/MILLS ARCHITECTURE** - Join us for a stroll in one of Reno's most unique neighborhoods to view the distinguished designs of two famous local architects, Edward Parsons and Russell Mills. Meet at the corner of Marsh and LaRue Avenues. Tour guide, Anne Simone.

Tuesday,  
July 29, 2008  
6:00 p.m.

**POWNING ADDITION AND LITTLE ITALY** - Discover one of Reno's earliest and most delightful vernacular neighborhoods, predominantly settled by Northern Italian immigrants. Meet at McKinley Arts & Culture Center. Tour guide, Felvia Belaustegui.



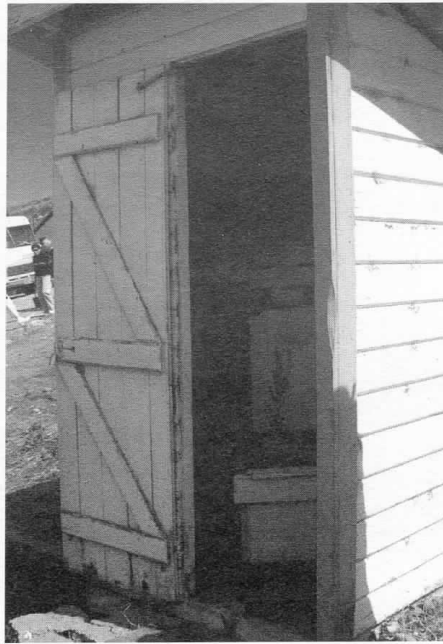
## “Walls of Wrath” Bus Tour

by Debbie Hinman

The sun shone and a soft breeze blew as fifty-one enthusiastic HRPS members and friends, and three tour guides boarded the large green bus behind the KNPB offices on North Virginia Street on Saturday morning, May 31st. They were off on a whirlwind tour of Reno, circa 1939, to view the projects and improvements of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal Administration.

The tour’s title, “Walls of Wrath,” reflected a tongue-in-cheek homage to Steinbeck’s epic novel of the depression era, as well as a tribute to Reno’s many WPA-produced walls still standing throughout the city. Created by HRPS members Cindy Ainsworth, Mella Harmon and Debbie Hinman to commemorate Historic Preservation Month’s focus on The New Deal in America, the tour introduced participants to a wide range of government-subsidized undertakings in the local area.

The tour participants were given background history on the various government agencies, such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). They viewed rock walls on upper Sierra Street, University Terrace, E. Ninth Street, and in Stewart and Plumas (formerly Billingshurst) Parks. In addition to the walls were various concrete abutments marking city ditches and three Reno “New Deal” bridges, the Alameda-Wells Avenue



*One of the few remaining “Fly-Proof Privies” built during the WPA era.  
Photo by Debbie Hinman.*

bridge and underpass, funded entirely by the Federal Works program, and the two river crossings at Lake and Sierra streets. Larger projects such as Virginia Lake and the adjoining park, where all enjoyed a “depression-style” catered lunch, and a tour of the downtown Post Office were highlights of the day.

But perhaps the most popular stop was out West Fourth Street at the historic

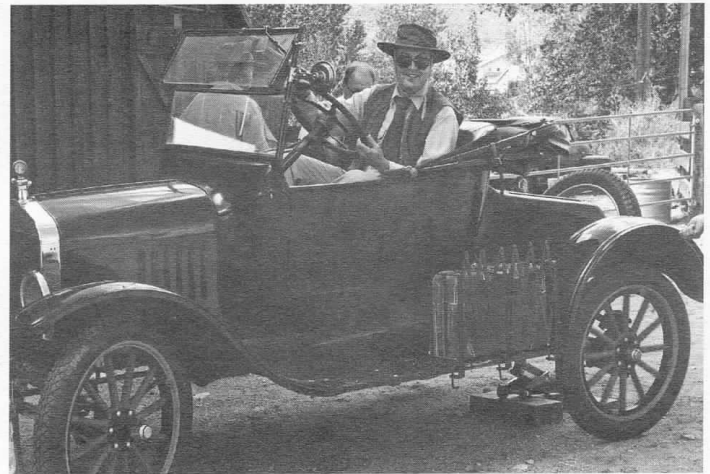
Capurro Ranch. Upon leaving the bus, participants were introduced to a “LEM” from the WPA era, who had arrived in his 1923 Model T Ford. A “LEM” was the term for a Local Experienced Man. These “Men” were hired to head crews of WPA and CCC workers, most of whom were not from the area and needed local knowledgeable supervision. Played by HRPS Program Director and Tour Guide Jack Hursh, the LEM explained his role to the group and directed them to one of the few remaining “Fly-Proof Privies,” located on the property. It is one survivor of the 1,092 Fly-Proof Privies constructed in 1938 by the WPA in eleven Nevada counties. The units were built to U. S. Public Health Service specifications and the project provided employment for more than 100 needy workers.

A curious pony looked on from a nearby paddock while Mella Harmon, a well-versed expert on the topic, described the WPA effort towards improving sanitation and health in rural areas by constructing these durable outhouses, impregnable to vermin and supposedly tip-resistant.

Participants were surprised at the wide range of the New Deal projects and the great number still in evidence in our city. The bus tour concluded the HRPS programs for Historic Preservation Month. Please join us in July for a new round of Walking Tours in support of Artown—we hope to see you there!



*A short wall built by the WPA as a barrier on the Cochran ditch that flows through Virginia Lake Park. The lake and the park were created as a WPA project. Photo by Kim Henrick.*



*A “LEM” from the WPA era, played by HRPS Program Director Jack Hursh, arrives in his 1923 Model T Ford.  
Photo by Kim Henrick.*

## Helen J. Stewart, First Lady of Las Vegas

*Edited from text by Carrie Townley Porter*

**Editor's Note:** Helen J. Stewart was among the first to be inducted into the Nevada Women's History Project Roll of Honor. Carrie Townley Porter of the Women's History Project offered a Chautauqua presentation of Helen J. Stewart to the Nevada Historical Society Docent Council on May, 2008.

**H**elen Jane Wiser was born in Illinois in 1854. She moved to California as a child. After marrying Archibald Stewart, they moved to Pioche, Nevada and then to the isolated Las Vegas Ranch.

After the murder of her husband in 1884, Helen J. Stewart was faced with learning to run the business of the isolated ranch and rearing her four children alone. She did this for twenty years.

Stewart's second husband was Frank Roger Stewart. He had worked on the ranch for her since 1886. She required him to sign a prenuptial agreement, ensuring that her money and belongings would go to her children. Helen never used the name Mrs. Frank Stewart. After Archibald's death, she used the name Helen J. Stewart and she continued to do so after marrying Frank.

Helen J. Stewart became extremely



*Helen J. Stewart  
1854—1926*


proficient as a rancher and a business woman. Realizing that someday the land in the Las Vegas Valley would become valuable, she began buying land adjacent to her ranch. By 1890, she was the largest landowner in Lincoln County, which at that time included present-day Clark County. In 1903, she sold the ranch to the railroad and the town of Las Vegas was begun.

She was the first postmaster of Las Vegas. Helen was the first woman

elected to the Clark County School Board, and the first president of the southern branch of the Nevada Historical Society. She sat on the first jury which had women jurors in Clark County and was one of the first women jurors to participate in a murder trial.

She was the first historian of southern Nevada and wrote a chapter of Sam Davis' *The History of Nevada*.

Helen was an authority on Native American women's arts in southern Nevada. She was active in furthering the education not only of Las Vegas children but the children of the Paiute Indians, who had been her friends, companions, and helpers throughout her adult life. Helen contributed a parcel of her land for a Paiute colony. The Paiute women gave her baskets. Her collection of over 550 baskets was considered the finest in the state.

She was in the process of turning her work and the basket collection over to the State of Nevada when she died of cancer in Las Vegas on March 6, 1926. The day of her funeral, all businesses closed for the day. People and flowers came from all over the west to pay tribute to this brave pioneer woman. 

### Nevada Historical Society Shows *After Dark* Films

**T**he Nevada Historical Society has created a new film series, *After Dark*, which features showings of classic feature films that relate to Nevada, to be shown on the third Tuesday of the month at 7:00 pm at the Nevada Historical Society, 1650 N. Virginia St. in Reno.

The Nevada Historical Society has an eclectic collection of unique documentary short films, many of which have been seen by only a few people. Each month a different short will be shown following the feature film. We hope you will enjoy the rare opportunity to view these gems.

**Tuesday, July 15 at 7:00 pm.** *The Oxbow Incident* (1943, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, b&w). The story of western justice on the Nevada frontier through the eyes of two drifters, who are drawn into a posse formed to find the murderer of a local man.

Based on the best-selling novel by Nevada author, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, the movie starred Henry Fonda, Dana Andrews, Anthony Quinn, and Harry Morgan. It was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture. In 1998, the *Ox-Bow Incident* was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant." The novel is a masterpiece that satirizes man's dependency on appearances of masculinity. Western drama. The accompanying short film is *Holiday USA: Reno* (1955).

**Tuesday, August 19 at 7:00 pm.** *Godmonster of Indian Flats* (1973, Bremson International, Inc., Technicolor). A small Nevada town is terrorized by a mutant monster. Filmed in Virginia City or American Flats. Horror (of the especially bad variety). The accompanying short film is *Tonopah Mines* (1915).



## On The Historic Register: "Hawkins House" 549 Court Street, Reno, NV

*Edited from text from Darla Potter and SHPO*

The "Hawkins House," as it is still called by local Renoites, is tucked away in the corner where Court Street ends and Elm Court begins. The 2-1/2 story home was constructed in 1911 on a bluff overlooking the Truckee River in the Newlands Heights area, so named because the first house in this area along the bluff belonged to Senator Newlands, author of the Reclamation Act of 1902. The Newlands Heights district was developed in an era of rapid growth in Reno, fueled by the wealth of the Tonopah and Goldfield mining areas. It was the most fashionable district of Reno, and many prominent families built new homes there.

The Hawkins home holds two historic distinctions: the dwelling was entered on the National Register of Historic Places on December 17, 1979, and the State Register of Historic Places on March 4, 1981.

The "Hawkins House" takes full advantage of the lofty location above the river. The building was commissioned by Prince A. Hawkins in 1911 from Elmer Gray, a prominent Los Angeles architect whose major projects included the landmark Beverly Hills Hotel and the Pasadena Community Playhouse. The Hawkins house was designed in the Georgian tradition in red brick with handsome architectural trim in wood painted white. The façade is enhanced by an imposing portico with Doric columns. It is of extraordinary historical value that architect Elmer Grey's original house plans and designs for the landscaping have been preserved among the family papers.

The Hawkins family owned the home from 1911 until it was purchased by the Sierra Nevada Museum of Art in 1978.

The Hawkins family was considered one of the first families of Nevada, prominent in Nevada's business and

banking circles for over a century. Prince Albert Hawkins was born January 1, 1871, in Tennessee, into a family of lawyers; his father was a judge and his four uncles were lawyers. Prince graduated in June of 1904 from Vanderbilt University with an LL.B. degree and practiced law in Tennessee for five years. He practiced law in Boulder, Colorado for a number of years. With his wife Myrtle Ziemer and four children, Robert, Elen, Carson and Elizabeth, the family moved to Reno in 1910. Prince Archer Hawkins was born December 28, 1918, in Reno.



*The Hawkins House, 549 Court Street, Reno, NV.  
Photo by Kim Henrick.*

On June 10, 1910, Prince Albert Hawkins joined the law firm founded by Azro E. Cheney in 1880. In 1929, his son Robert joined his father in practicing law. Prince Albert Hawkins died on April 10, 1939, at 68 years of age. Prince's son, Prince Archer Hawkins then joined his brother Robert in the law firm, and it became Hawkins and Hawkins.

After Prince's death, his wife Myrtle bought the home at 546 Court Street (corner of Court and Lee streets); the home is located across the street to the southeast side of the Hawkins house, and she would continue to live there until her death in November 1969, at age 96.

Following the death of Prince Hawkins, his son Robert lived in the Court Street mansion. Robert Ziemer Hawkins was married to Katherine Mackay, granddaughter of Clarence Mackay, owner of the famous Virginia City mines bearing his name, founder of International Telephone & Telegraph Corporation, and a benefactor of the University of Nevada. Katherine Mackay Hawkins made her own unique contribution to the history of the home, bringing from Paris the contents of her grandfather's apartments which included, in addition to the period furniture, the handscreened 19th century wallpaper, sections of which remain on the second floor of the home.

After Robert's death in September 1979, a charitable trust was established under the terms of his will. The Robert Z. Hawkins Foundation was formed, and has contributed greatly to the community, i.e. the Robert Z. Hawkins Amphitheater at Bartley Ranch Regional Park.

In its usage as the headquarters of the Sierra Nevada Museum of Art, the City of Reno accorded the Hawkins property the city's first historical landmark status.

This recognized not only the significance of this major architectural commission in Reno, but also the fact that the museum would preserve the building. The use as an art museum took advantage of the spacious, elegant nature of the house, without requiring major internal changes. The house was home to the Sierra Nevada Museum of Art until 1991. The property has since been sold to Dan and Melinda Gustin.

Information for this article came from the nomination papers for the Historic Register from the State Historic Preservation Office and from Darla Potter, Independent Researcher.

## From Your HRPS President

As HRPS' fiscal 2007-2008 season comes to a close, I would like to thank all our members and board members for all the support and work that has made this an outstanding year.

First of all, the walking tours from July 2007 to present drew more than 750 participants. Thanks to Ed Wishart and all the tour guides for such a successful endeavor.

Our annual dinner, which celebrated our 10th Anniversary, was well attended by more than 120 attendees.

The preservation awards lunch, co-hosted with the City of Reno Historical Resources Commission and HRPS, was attended by more than 50 people and held at the new Pavilion at the Lake Mansion.

HRPS's special showing of the film *Apartment for Peggy*, in February, drew well over 80 people.

The monthly meetings at Mt. Rose School average 85 to 90 people and of

course, much appreciation goes to Jack Hursh for arranging the speakers who offer such an exciting variety of talks.

*FootPrints* continues to be the backbone of our organization in bringing many




Felvia Belaustegui  
HRPS President  
Photo by Debbie Hinman.

interesting and varied topics each quarter. This is due to all the hard work by Carol Coleman, editor, editorial staff Kim Henrick, Debbie Hinman, Linda Sievers and guest writers.

Plans are in progress to obtain an office so that all of our records and paper work will be at one location and preserved for the future. Cindy Ainsworth, HRPS's Administrator, will oversee the organization and set up of the office.

As for our preservation projects, the City of Reno's Preservation Plan along with the Powning Conservation District was approved by the City Council, the Historical Resources Commission and reviewed by the HRPS board and volunteers. Also, because of HRPS's University of Nevada endowment, an internship will be awarded to a student next semester with a major or minor in Historic Preservation.

As President, I am looking forward to another exciting year and I thank everyone for their support. 

## Save the Date: HRPS Fall Social to be Wednesday, September 24


### Historic Preservation Master's of Science Option at UNR

by Mella Rothwell Harmon, M. S.

The University of Nevada, Reno's Department of Geography's Land Use Planning Policy Program has just reinstated the Master's of Science emphasis in historic preservation. This graduate option breathes new life in the Historic Preservation Program, which is administered by the Department of Anthropology, under the direction of Professor Donald Hardesty. It is also good news for students applying for HRPS's historic preservation scholarship. They will be guaranteed a full course of study and a degree in the historic preservation field.

Graduate planning students can select the historic preservation emphasis beginning fall semester 2008, and students already enrolled in the program under the current requirements will have an opportunity to request changing over with the approval of the Land Use Planning Policy director Tony Brinkman, and Geography Graduate Director, Gary Hausladen. The degree will be a Masters of Science in Land Use Planning Policy granted within the Department of Geography with an emphasis in Historic

Preservation. The other two emphases are growth management and environmental planning.

I encourage anyone with an interest in historic preservation to consider enrolling in this program. For additional information, contact Professor Anthony Brinkman at 784-4762 or [brinkman@unr.edu](mailto:brinkman@unr.edu). 

Mella Harmon holds a Master of Science degree in Land Use Planning Policy with an emphasis in Historic Preservation. She graduated in 1998, not long before the emphasis was phased out. Mella is a HRPS member and the curator of history at the Nevada Historical Society. She is pleased historic preservation has been reinstated in the program and she wishes to thank Department of Geography Chair, Scott Mensing, Dr. Tony Brinkman, and Dr. Donald Hardesty for their efforts, and Dr. Jeanne Johnson for her support.

## HRPS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Join HRPS or 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:  
P.O. Box 14003, Reno, NV 89507

- ☐ New Member  
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Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Annual membership includes:** Footprints (HRPS Quarterly) • Free participation in walking tours

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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?

**FOR OFFICE  
USE ONLY**

PAID: ☐ Check ☐ Cash Amount: \_\_\_\_\_ Membership # \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Nevada Historical Society Offers High Noon

**T**he Nevada Historical Society invites you to a free documentary series in the Research Library at noon on the fourth Monday of each month. High Noon features a selection from the series *Exploring Nevada* produced by Gwen Clancy, with a special guest speaker present to discuss each film.

**Monday June 23, 12:00 noon**, the film is *Dangberg Home Ranch*. The speaker following the film will be Dr. Michael Fischer, Director of Nevada's Department of Cultural Affairs.

The historic Dangberg Home Ranch is one of Nevada's first and largest ranches. The ranch was home to German immigrant Heinrich Friedrich Dangberg who founded the site in 1857. A local businessman, rancher and politician, Dangberg started his ranch with just a log cabin. At the time of his death in 1904, he had created a 20,000 acre ranching empire that his son, H.F. Dangberg Jr., later grew to 48,000 acres.

More than five acres of the ranch are now owned by Douglas County and managed

by Nevada State Parks. The county and state are restoring the original buildings, which include a main house, a stone cellar, a laundry building, a carriage house, a garage and a bunkhouse. Buildings and original artifacts are on display. The ranch is operated as a museum with tours on Wednesdays and Sundays. Call to make tour reservations. The ranch is located on State Route 88, one mile south of the junction between U.S. Hwy. 395 and State Route 88.

**Monday, July 28, 12:00 noon.** *The 24-Hour Show* with Karen Burns as the speaker. The film is about making a living in Las Vegas. Karen Burns was a Las Vegas showgirl who performed in MGM's *Hello Hollywood Hello*. When the show closed she purchased costumes and memorabilia. During the 2007 Las Vegas Showgirl Art Show, Karen Burns Productions provided historic MGM showgirl costumes.

**Monday, August 25, 12:00 noon.** The film is *Mining in Nevada* and the speaker is NHS docent John Gomes.

## It's Membership Renewal Time Check Your Mailing Label

**B**ecause of our expanding membership and related administrative issues, HRPS has decided to change its membership period to a fiscal-year cycle. All memberships will run from July 1st through June 30th of the following year.

In order to move our members to this cycle, everyone joining or renewing between January 1, 2008 and July 1, 2008 will have July 1, 2009 as their renewal date. Members who renewed in 2007 will need to renew on July 1, 2008.

Check the mailing label of this newsletter to see when your next renewal date is.

You should have received either an email or a postcard if you are past due, but if you have questions regarding your membership status, you may call membership chair Gordon Foote at 329-6455 or send him an email at [gorfoote@charter.net](mailto:gorfoote@charter.net).





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**HISTORY LIVES! CHECK OUT THESE PLACES**

*HRPS Speaker Programs will resume in September 2008.*

**Bowers Mansion (tour)**, 4005 U. S. Hwy 395 North, Carson City, 849-0201. Call to make reservation.

**Churchill County Museum**, 1050 S. Maine St., Fallon, NV 423-3677.  
Monday - Saturday, 10 am - 5 pm, Sunday, noon - 5 pm

**Fourth Ward School Museum and Cultural Center**, 537 S. C. St., Virginia City, 847-0975,  
Daily, 10 am - 5 pm

**Genoa Courthouse Museum**, 2304 Main St., Genoa, 782-4325. May - October:  
Daily, 10 am - 4:30 pm

**National Automobile Museum, The Harrah Collection**, 10 S. Lake St., Reno, 333-9300.  
Monday - Saturday, 9:30 am - 5:30 pm, Sunday, 10 am - 4 pm

**Nevada State Capitol**, Musser and Carson streets, Carson City. (800) 638-2321. Daily, 8 am - 5 pm.

**Nevada State Railroad Museum**, 2180 S. Carson St., Carson City, 687-6953. Daily, 8:30 am - 4:30 pm

**Nevada Historical Society**, 1650 N. Virginia St., Reno, 688-1190. Monday - Saturday, 10 am - 5 pm

**Nevada State Museum**, 600 N. Carson St. Carson City, 687-4810. Daily, 8:30am - 4:30 pm.

**Sparks Heritage Museum**, 820 Victorian Avenue, Sparks. 355-1144, Tuesday-Friday, 11 am - 4 pm,  
Saturday, 1 pm - 4 pm.

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