

# Historic Reno PRESERVATION SOCIETY

# FootPrints

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

VOL. II NO. 4 ❖ FALL 2008

## Reno Halls, Theaters and Movie Houses: A History

*by Debbie Hinman*

**T**he Majestic...the Crest...the Granada...the Tower... What do these exalted names call to mind? The awe of a plushly-appointed theater, perhaps a winding wrought-iron staircase to the balcony, rich velvet curtains and gilded wall décor? The anticipation of a long-awaited double feature, preceded by your favorite cartoon characters in a new, hilarious adventure? Or for live theater, do you picture your favorite local players on a brightly-lit stage within the cozy confines of the red brick Reno Little Theater on North Sierra Street?

Live theater and movies have a long local history. The longevity and variety of the entertainment may be a surprise to those who think of it as a more recent institution.

Early Reno is perceived by most as a rough-and-tumble town populated by coarse, rowdy, uneducated men, who worked hard to eke out a living and relaxed by letting off steam and over-imbibing at the nearest saloon. What few women there were in the young town were no doubt too preoccupied with trying to raise their children and create some sort of home with minimal comforts, one would imagine, to worry about outside entertainment. While these perceptions have some validity, theater performances of many different types were popular with the townsfolk, and very early on, rudimentary halls and theaters were constructed to showcase these performances.

When Reno came into being that May 9, 1868, there wasn't much in the downtown core but there was a building on the Truckee River, on the southeast corner of First and Virginia Streets. It had begun life three years earlier as Myron Lake's grist mill, but was soon transformed into a lodging house,

saloon, school and upstairs, an all-purpose hall, known as the Alhambra. This hall was quickly put into service for such diverse uses as 4th of July celebrations, grand balls, and the occasional dramatic presentation by traveling performers. In April 1869, an actor named Stark gave a reading of Hamlet, to the great delight of locals.



*The Wigwam, 2nd & Sierra, 1909-1942, photo circa 1910s.  
Photo courtesy Jerry Fenwick.*

It wasn't long, however, before the Alhambra had competition from a new hall, Peters' Pioneer Hall and Philadelphia Brewery, sometimes just referred to as Peters' Theater, on Virginia Street near Second. As a theater venue, though, Peters' was far from satisfactory. Patrons complained that however good the performances, it was difficult to appreciate them while sitting on rough planks in the stuffy hall.

Local newspapers called for the construction of a new theater. In 1871, local resident L. H. Dyer, who

ran a stage line between Reno and Carson City, obliged the townspeople by building an establishment known as Dyer's Theater on the corner of Center and Plaza Streets. It was a large hall with a much bigger stage than previous venues, and it was put to immediate use. It became the site of the Grand Ball that year, celebrating the move of the Washoe County seat from Washoe City to Reno. Many traveling dramatic troupes on their way to California from the East via the Central Pacific railroad stopped to perform at Dyer's. The stage was enlarged in June of that year, and the seats were removable to allow for the new craze of roller skating, which was particularly popular as entertainment during the winter months.

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## Reno Halls, Theaters and Movie Houses (continued)

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In 1872, a traveling Doctor of Phrenology gave a demonstration of the art of reading the bumps on one's head, using several local dignitaries, to the delight of the crowd. However, not all entertainment was positively received. A scathing article in the *Reno Crescent* of March 9, 1872 castigated the local troupe, the Reno Amateurs, for being "silly drunk" in their third performance, which was "exceeded in its gross vulgarity only by its utter lack of point in wit or humor." Meanwhile, Peters' Hall was put to a more serious use—it was the scene of the first district court held in Reno, as the new courthouse was still under construction.

Dyer's reigned supreme until September of 1875 when the performing McGinley family arrived in Reno. Wishing to capitalize on the visitors to the county fair that year, but finding Dyer's already booked, R. H. McGinley, known as "the man of many faces," ordered lumber for a new theater on Virginia Street near Commercial Row on a Monday. He had his theater built by the following Saturday, and opened two days later on Monday night, October 4th with a revue featuring his entire family, the Reno Brass Band, two plays and an olio, or program of various musical selections. McGinley's came to be known as the Reno Opera House.

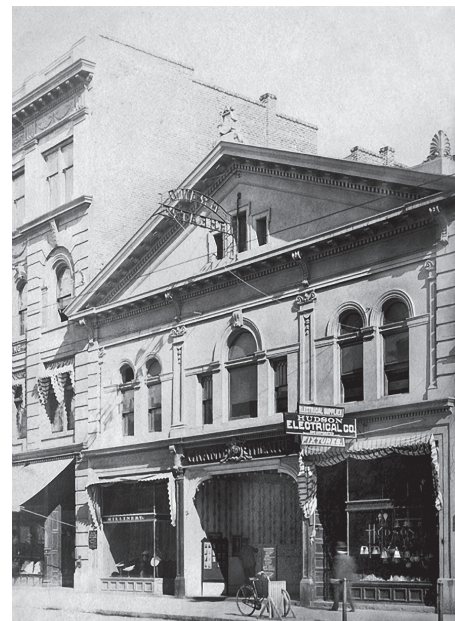
In January 1877, Dyer's Theater, in the mournful words of the *Nevada State*

*Journal*, "succumbed to the Snow King." Following a snowstorm the roof fell in. The following day the ends and one side collapsed, leaving only one wall standing. Local townspeople R. Smith stepped up and rebuilt on the same site, apparently deciding that there was enough business for McGinley's and his new Smith's Academy of Music. Smith's was a large hall as well, with seating for 500 patrons. One new innovation was the rounding of the walls for better acoustics, and the raising of the rear seats so that they were 16 inches higher than the reserved seats. Sadly, Reno's Great Fire of 1879 burned this new theater to the ground.

In 1879, a structure known as Reno's Pavilion was erected on the northwest corner of First and Center Streets. This hall became the venue for social events and McGinley's became exclusively a theater. An interesting footnote to the Pavilion is that it was apparently so noisy that it interfered with the doings at the Alhambra Hall, down the street. Myron Lake had the Alhambra picked up and moved closer to the edge of Virginia Street, nearer the Truckee, to put a little more distance between the two. The Pavilion was later moved to the fairgrounds and race track, north of the city.

Another theater opening in September of 1879 was Hammond & Wilson's, built over their livery stables. The theater, later known as the Nevada Theater, was located at the corner of

Commercial Row and North Center Street, on the site of what would later be the Overland Hotel. Local painting contractor T. F. Laycock was engaged to paint the curtain, as he had for Piper's Opera House, and other theaters in Nevada. Hammond & Wilson's curtain, however, was proclaimed to be "the prettiest in the state" with its depiction of St. Goar on the Rhine.



*The Grand Theater 1904-1926.  
Photo courtesy Jerry Fenwick.*

From time to time, small theater houses would spring up, such as the Theatre Comique on Plaza Street. This theater, in particular, only gained newspaper space when drunken patrons came in, knocked over benches, put out the lights, and nearly set the stage on fire. The angry proprietor reportedly clubbed the unruly persons out of doors, and then proceeded with the show as if nothing had happened.

By 1887, Reno was ready for a larger, more accommodating theater once again. The area was beginning to attract better talent; the world-famous Lily Langtry appeared at the Nevada Theater in *Pygmalion and Galatea* in July.

In that year, Jacob McKissick of Long Valley furnished the funding to build an opera house on the corner of Plaza and Sierra Streets. He partnered with businessman C. W. Bouton for the project. Locals may remember one of the Opera House's later incarnations, the McKissick Hotel, later the Plaza Hotel, which was torn down in 1975. No expense was spared in the building of "A Thirty Thousand Dollar Temple of Thespis," or "Reno's Crowning Glory," as extolled by the June 12, 1888 *Reno Evening Gazette*. The paper rapturously



*McKissick Opera House, operated 1888-1908.  
Photo courtesy Jerry Fenwick.*

## Reno Halls, Theaters and Movie Houses (continued)

described the fire safety precautions, with two hydrants, one on stage and one in the box office, and 100-foot reels of hose, with exits all opening outwards and a lobby stair where twelve people could walk abreast. The sumptuous interior featured thick red carpet, plush upholstered seats with the seat backs bearing an iron "J. McK" monogram, and natural pine and redwood facing on the balcony boxes. McKissick and Bouton used all local labor and materials as available so the local economy would benefit from the project.

The McKissick's opening performance was *Ramona*, presented by a local troupe known as the Irving Dramatic Club. The star was Lillian Bouton, daughter of the project's manager, who went on to a stage career, married a count, and moved to Paris. Also in the cast were Charles and Frank Norcross, prominent local men, the latter going on to a career as a judge.

Later that year, the McKissick was leased by John Piper, who started out as a German saloonkeeper and became well-known in Nevada as a theatrical manager. The Opera House was also used for more unusual acts and occasions other than theatrical events. In January of 1891, the local paper announced the "extraordinary engagement" of Miss Fannie Louise Buckingham and her gallant gray horse, James Melville, in a dramatization of Lord Byron's poem, "Mazeppa." In June, the Opera House was the setting for a Nevada University



*The Majestic 1910–1974.  
Photo courtesy Jerry Fenwick.*

graduation. The institution's first three college degrees were awarded to male graduates in Liberal Arts.

For nearly 30 more years, the McKissick would remain the premiere Reno venue. By 1908, the stage was declared inadequate for the growing productions appearing in Reno, and the building was converted to a hotel, under the management of Jacob's brother Howard. Jacob had died in 1900, leaving the Opera House to Howard.

Between the opening and conversion of the Opera House, other smaller theaters popped up in the city, meeting with varying degrees of success. The Reno Wheelmen, 1896–1909, a bicycle group that raced other clubs and was quite a prestigious organization, built a hall on First Street that was the scene of not only their many events, but other local programs as well. In November of 1909, John Philip Sousa and his band appeared at the hall for two performances. The hall would

burn to the ground just a little over a month later.

The year 1904 would see the establishment of three new theaters, two small ones and one "Grand" one. The two small theaters were the Vitagraph and the La Petite Theatre, on Second Street. Both theaters regularly featured various vaudeville acts. The Grand Theater on the east side of Virginia Street between First and Second Streets was open for business on April 11th.

A few days before its opening, as the scaffolding was removed, the *Reno Evening Gazette* extolled the stunning new building as "the finest vaudeville theater west of the Rockies." Built by investors John Wagner, Senator William Westerfield and Richard Kirman, the playhouse was first managed by lessors Mr. Funge and Mr. Lobelski. Lobelski had the following to say about the theater, "Reno is now on the largest vaudeville circuit in the world, comprising eighty-five houses and the same attractions precisely will be presented here as in all the other leading cities of the west."

While it began as a vaudeville house, as motion pictures came into vogue, the Grand expanded to accommodate them by featuring three small movie theaters (Reno's first multiplex!). In July of 1926, the Grand Theater was razed in preparation for the construction of the six-story Arcade Building. At the same time, the Rialto Theater was in the process of being remodeled, and the Grand's electric organ found a home there.

The years between 1904 and 1908 saw a rush to open new theaters in Reno, although not all of the elaborate plans came to fruition. In March of 1907, a group of businessmen known as the Nevada Hippodrome Circuit Company proposed the building of an \$800,000 first-class theater that would seat 1500. The Reno Hippodrome would be on a circuit with the Goldfield and Tonopah Hippodromes. By June, the first phase, a large canvas tent theater, was erected behind the Riverside Hotel, on the river. Plays were held there throughout the summer, but no ground was broken for



*An early 1920s shot looking north on Sierra Street. Note the streetcar in the distance, and the McKissick Hotel on the corner.  
Photo courtesy Jerry Fenwick.*

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## Reno Halls, Theaters and Movie Houses (continued)

the elaborate permanent Hippodrome, although there was a Goldfield Hippodrome erected about the same time the Reno tent was being set up. Because a canvas structure was not practical in terms of Reno winters and floods, it closed in the fall. There was not enough backing by investors to support further expenditures, and in October, creditors were grabbing whatever they could salvage from the tent theater on the river, to try and minimize their losses.

In 1908, a new theater opened at Second and Sierra Streets known as the Wigwam. It was stylish, small and intimate, and instantly popular. The theater boasted the newest film innovation, the Actophone, which was billed as a machine that, unlike the cinematoscope, “presents a picture that actually sings and talks as in real life.” But live acts were still popular, as evidenced by a reporter’s hilarious backstage interview with twelve performing monkeys and their trainer in 1910.

The theater was remodeled several times, and became a long-lasting piece of Reno history. In 1942, it became the Nevada Theater, and in 1948, underwent a complete remodel, with only the walls and roof remaining the same, becoming the well-known Crest Theater. The Crest closed in 1977 and was demolished, along with other storefronts on the block, to make room for the Money Tree expansion. Its famous neighbor, Les Lerude’s Wigwam Coffee Shop, had closed back in 1971, sending throngs of Reno residents into hot-apple-with-rum-sauce withdrawal.

But the pinnacle of Reno theaters, the grand dame that would reign supreme for the next sixty-four years, was the aptly-named Majestic Theater, built by gold-mining millionaire, Senator George Nixon at First and Center Streets. At three minutes before the opening hour of 8 p.m. on March 29, 1910, contractor George Holesworth handed over the theater to manager Aylesworth. There was a full house that night, complete with every local dignitary imaginable,

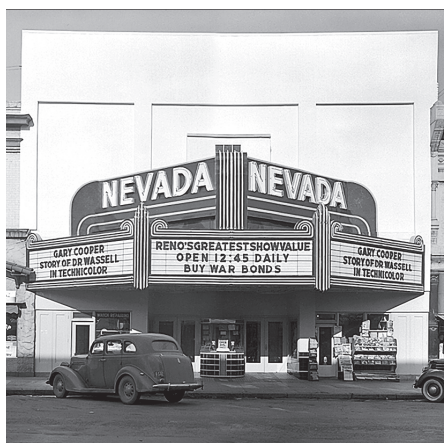


*A 1928 view of the Granada Theater, 1926—1990.*

*Photo courtesy Jerry Fenwick.*

to witness the play *In Hayti* by McIntyre and Heath. Mr. McIntyre was present that night and gave an opening speech that most claimed was more entertaining by far than the production, but the sumptuous theater with its fabulous décor and two balconies, was appreciated by all.

The *Nevada State Journal* claimed that Reno could now hold its own with any



*The Nevada, occupying the site of the old Wigwam. Circa 1940s.*  
*Photo courtesy Jerry Fenwick.*

New York theater in terms of having a venue to attract the best theater and opera in the country. And attract the talented and famous it did—actress Sarah Bernhardt performed *Camille* at the Majestic in 1911. In 1913, according to long-time projectionist Mike Nelson, the Majestic purchased Thomas Edison’s invention, the Kinetophone, and was the first local theater to feature a “talking picture.”

In 1925, the theater was completely renovated, the work of local architect Frederic DeLongchamps, primarily to make it more suitable for motion pictures. At this point the theater was owned by T&D Enterprises, as were the Grand and the Rialto. The upper balcony was torn out and the edifice was converted to a Moorish design, a very popular look for theaters of that era.

The Majestic continued to serve Reno’s theater-goers until it closed in 1974 and was demolished. This theater, and others, didn’t meet current building codes and was considered unsafe. The majestic structure came tumbling down in October of that year, but not without a fight. Karl Breckenridge said it best in his 2004 Homefinders story about the theater. “This fine edifice ... was since its opening in 1910 so seismically unsound that it took three days, two D-8 Caterpillar dozers and 30 pounds of dynamite to get the proscenium arch to fall when the building was razed.”

The Rialto Theater, which has been mentioned above, was built on West First Street, near Sierra Street in 1915. It was built on the site of the Hammersmith homestead, which dated from 1869. It was referred to as the “home of road shows, and a civic auditorium.” It could not compete with the grandeur of the Majestic, but it fulfilled a need for a smaller venue for certain events including fundraising shows. The theater was remodeled in 1926 and in the process, the acoustics were improved for motion pictures. It acquired an exterior facelift and a new name as well—the theater would be known from that time as the Granada. The theater suffered a fire in 1953, but was rebuilt in a more modern style,

## Reno Halls, Theaters and Movie Houses (continued)


unfortunate when compared with its former incarnation. The Granada closed in the early 1990s and fell to the wrecking ball in 1997, the last of the longtime downtown theaters to do so.

The 1930s saw a few more theaters open in response to Reno's growth due to the shortening of the divorce period. There was the Reno Theater on Center Street, and the State Theater, which became the Roxie in 1933. The Reno Theater was the last of the downtown movie houses to have a sound system installed, in April of 1930. The Tower Theater, on South Virginia between Ryland and Pine Streets, made its debut in the early 1940s and was popular as an accompaniment to the bowling alley housed in the same building. The Tower, as well as other downtown theaters, had matinées where they would allow children to trade milk bottle caps for admission tickets.

While other theaters began as playhouses and transitioned to motion picture houses, there was one constant in Reno's dramatic life—the Reno Little Theater (RLT). Beginning as an organization in 1935, the local thespians finally found their home in 1941, when they were able to purchase Dania Hall, a small red brick structure at 690 North Sierra Street. The group's first production in their new home was *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, in October of 1941.

The little brick playhouse and its stalwart members have the distinction of being the oldest continually operating performing arts theater in Nevada. In 1996, in order to expand northward,

Circus Circus Hotel managed to get the RLT "condemned, ousted and the building demolished," in the words of author Beth Miramon. Undaunted, RLT is still going strong, and in the decade since losing the Sierra Street theater, has borrowed space from friends: the Elks Club, Wooster High and Hug High. After a 73-year history, RLT expects to build a new home on Pueblo at Wells Avenue by 2009.

The theaters of Reno today are quite a far cry from those of its past. While some have tried to incorporate some art deco and other historic design elements to the exteriors, the interiors, while comfortable and acoustically superior, are interchangeable and soulless. They are called by place names these days, i.e., The Summit Sierra, the Park Lane (of course future theatergoers will not recognize this as a place name), and the Riverside. It's hard to imagine such monikers arousing the same excitement as the impressive names of theaters past; there is certainly not much that is grand or majestic about them. And they don't accept bottle caps. 

Information for this article came from newspaper articles in the *Reno Crescent*, *Nevada State Journal*, and *Reno Evening Gazette*, 1870-1974; *Tough Little Town on the Truckee* by John Townley; *Reno's Axle—Historic Fourth Street* by Beth Miramon.

Debbie Hinman is a HRPS Board Member, a HRPS Tour Guide and a member of HRPS Editorial Staff.

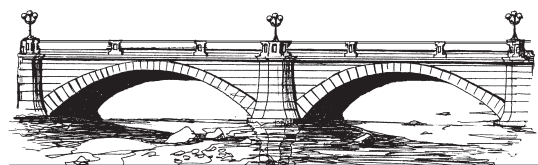
## Theater Timeline

- **1868** – Alhambra Theater/hall/First and Virginia Streets.
- **1868** – Peters' Pioneer Hall and Philadelphia Brewery (on Virginia near Second) Spring 1871.
- **1871** – Dyer's Theater (Center and Plaza) January 1877.
- **1875** – McGinley's Reno Opera House (Virginia near Commercial).
- **1877** – Smith's Academy of Music (on same site as Dyer's – burned 1879).
- **1878** – Reno's Pavilion – Center and First streets.
- **1879** – Hammond and Wilson's theater, site of later Overland Hotel, called Nevada Theater).
- **1887** – McKissick Opera House (Plaza and Sierra) converted to hotel 1908).
- **1896** – Wheelman's Hall; had theater. Burned 1909.
- **1904** – Grand Theater, vaudeville and motion pictures. 1926 closes.
- **1904** – Vitagraph Theater (Center Street).
- **1904** – La Petite Theater (2nd Street, near Farmers and Merchants National Bank).
- **1907** – Hippodrome, tent on banks of Truckee, went broke in October 1907.
- **1907** – Mason Family Theater. No mention past early 1908.
- **1909** – Wigwam Theater (2nd and Sierra), 1942 – replaced by Nevada Theater, 1948 – Crest replaces Nevada.
- **1910** – Majestic Theater (1st and Center) Closed and demolished 1974.
- **1915** – Rialto opens. Became Granada Theater in 1926. 1974 – divided into two theaters, closed 1990s.
- **1916** – T&D Enterprise took over Majestic, Grand and Rialto.
- **1929** – Majestic, Granada and Wigwam Theaters bought by Fox.
- **1930** – Reno Theater goes "talkie."
- **1930** – State Theater becomes Roxie Theater (North Virginia Street).
- **1933** – Roxie Theater bought by T&D Enterprises.
- **1935** – Reno Little Theater – 2008.
- **1941** – Tower – (Ryland and South Virginia Streets).

## High Noon at the Nevada Historical Society

The 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*, with a special guest speaker and director/producer Gwen Clancy on hand to present and discuss each film.

Date	Topic	Guest Speaker
25 August.....	Mining in Nevada.....	John Gomes
22 September .....	Behind the T-Shirt Curtain .....	Ron James
27 October .....	Building on the Past.....	Mella Harmon
24 November .....	D is for Dance .....	Martina Young



# Historic Reno PRESERVATION SOCIETY

## September 2008 Fall HRPS' Walking Tours

Historic Reno Preservation Society will present nine historic walking tours during the month of September. This will be our final series of walks for 2008. Walking Tours are \$10 per person for non-members, free for HRPS' members. Tours generally last about 2 hours. No dogs, 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,  
September 2, 2008  
6 p.m.

**MANSIONS ON THE BLUFF** - View high-style architecture in Reno's most significant political neighborhood. Meet at the McCarran House, 401 Court Street. Tour Guides, Ed Wishart and Tracy Soliday.

Saturday,  
September 6, 2008  
10 a.m.

**UNR HISTORIC DISTRICT** - Visit Morrill Hall, Mackay School of Mines, the Keck Museum, and learn the history of this beautiful campus. Meet at Honor Court, 9th and Center Street. Tour Guide, Jack Hursh.

Tuesday,  
September 9, 2008  
6 p.m.

**WELLS AVENUE NEIGHBORHOOD** - Take a stroll through a working-class neighborhood along the path of the Wells Avenue streetcar, across from the V&T tracks, past the homes of the "Wells Avenue Gang." Meet at Southside School, Sinclair & Liberty Streets. Tour Guide, Mark Taxer.

Saturday,  
September 13, 2008  
10 a.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.

Tuesday,  
September 16, 2008  
6 p.m.

**TRUCKEE RIVER CORRIDOR** - Discover Reno's beginnings with a walk along the Truckee River through "Little Italy," noting historic churches, parks, hotels and 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,  
September 20, 2008  
10 a.m.

**LAKE ADDITION** - Meander past divorce-trade dwellings and Victorian architecture, including a stop at the Lake Mansion. Meet at the Nevada Museum of Art, 160 West Liberty Street. Tour Guide, Debbie Hinman.

Tuesday,  
September 23, 2008  
6 p.m.

**MONROE STREET NEIGHBORHOOD** - Stroll along Monroe and Joaquin Miller streets, savoring the history and architecture of this lovely residential area south of the Newlands Neighborhood. You will see the Hart House, the Patrick Ranch House, Greystone Castle and other distinctive homes. Tour guides, Elsie Newman and Anne Simone.

Saturday,  
September 27, 2008  
10 a.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.

Sunday,  
September 28, 2008  
10 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.

## Early Reno Fire Stations

by Jon Wagner

Fire was a frequent, dreaded visitor to Reno in its earliest days. Comprised of hastily-constructed wooden shacks and with no masonry buildings to speak of, the town was prime tinder for the showers of burning embers that regularly erupted from the charred mouths of stovepipes. These conditions were exacerbated by the arid climate and frequent high winds. When ninety-nine buildings in the downtown core were burned to the ground in October of 1873, it still took two years before an organized fire department was created to respond to this constant threat.

Reno Engine Co. # 1 was established Nov. 10, 1875. J. L. McFarlin was chosen unanimously as foreman. McFarlin offered a vacant lot between the *Nevada State Journal* building and his blacksmith shop as a firehouse site. Construction on the new firehouse began in April 1876. The firehouse was 32 feet long by 18 feet wide, two stories tall, surmounted by a cupola and bell. The upper floor was used by the firemen for meetings and the ground floor housed the steamer and hose carts.

In 1879, the firehouse was moved to a site on the Plaza (later to become Plaza Street) owned by the Central Pacific Railroad (see top photo). In June 1888, an addition was built onto the engine



*Reno Engine House located on the Plaza, 1879-1900, ca. 1879.*

*Photo Courtesy Nevada Historical Society.*

house to be used as a sleeping room. At the same time, a building was completed on the south side of the Truckee River to house a hose cart. In December of 1888, T. K. Hymer, who operated the Truckee Stables in Reno, was hired at \$5 per occurrence to provide a horse to haul a steamer to fires. In March 1891, the Board of Trustees purchased a team of black horses and the engine house was enlarged to accommodate stables for them. By 1899, the engine house was in such disrepair that the Central Pacific Railroad wrote the city fathers, complaining how bad it made Reno look to passengers arriving on the trains.

The city council decided Reno needed a larger, more modern firehouse. So instead of investing any money in the old firehouse on the Plaza, in October 1899, construction was started on the foundation of a new firehouse on the southeast corner of Commercial Row and West Street. On January 30, 1900, the old engine house was vacated and crews moved into the new station. The new station was built of brick and consisted of two stories, two apparatus bays and a bell tower. In August 1904, an addition to

the fire station was completed. The two-story addition consisted of a third bay (for the new ladder truck) and a training tower on which the firemen could practice ladder operations (see bottom photo). When the two smaller stations were built in 1917, this station became known as the Central Fire Station.

In the time leading up to 1908, the area of Reno south of the Truckee River was growing. On October 10, 1908, a new fire station on the south side of the river, at Center and Ryland Streets, was accepted from the contractor. It was to be occupied within sixty days. This station was also built of brick and consisted of two stories, two bays and a training tower. This station was called the South Side Station (see top photo page 8).

By 1915, the Reno Fire Department was investigating the feasibility of purchasing a motorized fire apparatus. From the 1890s until 1915, the apparatus of the Reno FD had been pulled by horses and the fire stations were designed to accommodate them, with stalls and hay lofts.

A motorized fire apparatus was much less expensive to operate than horses. In his annual report to the Reno City Council for 1917, Fire Chief R. B. Hawcroft stated the cost of maintaining a horse was \$21 per month compared to the cost of maintaining the Reno FD's new motorized apparatus at \$8.84 each per month. It is sad to note that Fire Chief R. B. Hawcroft, who was largely responsible for the Reno FD's transition from "horse power" to gasoline power was killed in a motor vehicle accident in 1928 while responding to a fire.

The motorized apparatus also lent itself to smaller, decentralized fire stations. In 1917, the Reno FD placed into service its first motorized fire apparatus; two Seagrave chemical engines. Coinciding with the advent of the motorized fire apparatus: the Reno FD opened two new bungalow-style single-story, single-bay fire stations. One was located on east Fourth St. in the center of what was then Reno's booming commercial/industrial

*Continued on page 8*



*Reno Fire Department Central Fire Station, 1900-1975. Southeast corner of Commercial Row and West St., ca. 1908.*

*Photo courtesy Nevada Historical Society.*

## Early Reno Fire Stations (continued)

district. This station was built of brick and was designed to fit in with the industrial character of the district. This station became known as the North Side Station (see middle photo).

The second new station was built at the corner of California Avenue and South Virginia Street, on the east side of Virginia Street. This station was built with wood siding and was designed to blend with the residential nature of the district. This station became known as the South Side Station (see bottom photo). These two bungalow-style fire stations used the same floor plans but were mirror images of each other. The North Side station had the apparatus bay on the right and the South Side station had the apparatus bay on the


1899, served the citizens of Reno until 1975 when a new Central Fire Station was built on the northeast corner of Second Street and Evans Avenue. The Second Street and Evans Avenue station was recently torn down to make way for the new baseball stadium. The North Side Station served until 1950 when a larger fire station was built at the corner of Fifth Street and Morrill Avenue. The original North Side Station building is still

standing and (as of early 2008) was occupied by Health Access Washoe County. The front has been extensively modified. The later South Side Station (California and Virginia) was torn down in the 1990s after the new station was built on Moana Lane. There was talk at the time of building an extension of California Avenue through to Center Street, which would have gone right through the fire station site.

Public Safety has always been a priority of local government. The importance of fire stations in that mission has been seen from Reno's first fire station on the Plaza to its newest, Fire Station #19, in the Somersett area on the west side of town. For more information on the history of the Reno FD, visit our web site at: <http://www.iaff731.com/History/history.htm>.



*South Side Fire Station 1908-1917. Corner Center and Ryland streets, ca. 1908. Photo courtesy Reno Fire Department Illustrated, published 1908 and 1975.*

The information in this article primarily came from stories of the time published in the *Reno Evening Gazette* and the *Nevada State Journal*. 

The author of this article is Fire Suppression Captain Jon Wagner of the Reno FD and President of Reno Fire Antique and Classic Apparatus, Inc. Our current project is the restoration of the Reno FD's original motorized aerial ladder truck, a 1917 American LaFrance Type 17-6 85-foot tillered aerial ladder. For more information on this project visit our web site at: <http://www.iaff731.com/History/Apparatus/Motorized/1917%20ALF%20Aerial/1917%20Ladder%20Truck.htm>



*North Side Fire Station 1917-1950. East Fourth Street, ca. 1917. Photo Courtesy Real Photo Post Card, Reno FD Museum.*

left, as seen when facing the front of each station. Both these stations had porches on the front of the buildings facing the main street.

When the station at California and Virginia opened, the larger station at Center and Ryland streets was no longer needed. The station was sold to the Reno School Board and used as an annex to the South Side School. It is interesting to note that when the City was considering what to do with this building, neighbors protested the proposed sale to the school board for fear it would lower their property values. Later it was used as a City of Reno Recreation building.

The old Central Fire Station, built in




*The new South Side Station 1917-1990. Corner of California Avenue and South Virginia Street, ca 1917. Photo courtesy Real Photo Post Card, Reno FD Museum.*

## The Nevada Historical Society Presents *After Dark: Films from the Vault*

7:00 pm Showing, Free General Admission Seating

1650 N. Virginia Street, Reno, NV

- 16 September.....*Under Nevada Skies* (Roy Rogers, 1946)  
 21 October.....*Buck Benny Rides Again* (Jack Benny, 1940)  
 18 November.....*The Idaho Kid* (Rex Bell, 1936)  
 16 December.....*Hoopla* (Clara Bow, 1933)

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. 

## New HRPS' Website Is Up and Running

We encourage all to check out HRPS' newly redesigned website [www.historicreno.org](http://www.historicreno.org). The site is your source for all HRPS' upcoming events and walks. We'll be adding new features so stay tuned. Rosie Cevasco is our new webmaster and she has done a great job organizing the site. HRPS would also like to thank past volunteer webmaster Fritz Grupe and web host Michael Wishart for all their time and work. Thanks one and all. 

## Events at the Lake Mansion

**B**uilt in 1877 and the home of VSA arts of Nevada, the Lake Mansion is one of the oldest buildings in Reno and listed on both the State and National Registers of Historic Places. HRPS' board meetings are held once a month in the Lake Mansion dining room. Several HRPS' members volunteered at the mansion for a number of years when it was on the grounds of the Reno Sparks Convention Center and now volunteered at its location on the corner of Court Street and Arlington Avenue. Information: 826-6100, [www.vsanevada.org](http://www.vsanevada.org), [www.lakemansion.com](http://www.lakemansion.com).



HRPS' members Cindy Ainsworth and Debbie Hinman are the wine pourers and "answerwomen" for Lake Mansion and Reno history questions.

### "Holiday Art Mart" at Reno's Historic Lake Mansion

November 13-22.


Join 25 northern Nevada artists at "Reno's First Address" to celebrate the holiday season with quality arts and crafts for sale while supporting VSA arts of Nevada. VSA arts is the non-profit arts organization, who conducts over 3,000 arts workshops each year while operating the Lake Mansion, Free admission. Location: 250 Court Street at Arlington Avenue, Reno. Hours: Opening reception November 13 from 5:30-7:30

pm, November 15 and 22 from 11 am - 4 pm with free arts activities for children, Monday - Friday 11 am - 4 pm.

Information: [www.vsanevada.org](http://www.vsanevada.org), 775-826-6100.

### The Lake Mansion Jingles with Art and History

November 22, 11 am-4pm.

Families with children of all ages celebrate the holidays, art and history during this annual free event at the historic Lake Mansion with "art creation stations" for children to "make and take" their own masterpiece home, photos with Santa, art and crafts for sale, tours of the mansion, and descendants of families who lived in the mansion will be on hand to answer questions. Free admission. Information: [www.vsanevada.org](http://www.vsanevada.org), 775-826-6100. 

Mary Ellen Horan  
VSA arts of Nevada at the Lake Mansion, since 1986, a non-profit organization providing arts opportunities for ALL Nevadans.

250 Court Street (at Arlington Avenue)  
Reno, NV 89501

### River Walk Merchants Wine Walk features the Lake Mansion

Upcoming dates: September 20, October 18,  
November 15, December 20.

Every third Saturday from 2-5 pm, if you start the River Walk Merchant's Wine Walk at the Lake Mansion, VSA art receives \$5 of the \$20 purchase to assist with programs and maintenance. At the Lake Mansion enjoy a one-of-a-kind souvenir wine glass you keep, snacks, music, tours, unique artwork for sale, and a map to the 20 plus "eat, shop, drink, enjoy" participating merchants, each featuring a taste of wine. Most months

## From Your HRPS' President

July's Artown walks were a huge success this year! I want to thank all our current members for supporting us, our new members for joining us, and the wonderful homeowners who invited us onto their properties and into their homes. Participants on Bricks & Stones were invited into two historic Humboldt Street homes, and those on the Little Italy tour were greeted by four different homeowners, who shared their stories and their own little pieces of history with the group. This interaction with homeowners richly enhances the walking tour experience and is greatly appreciated by HRPS.

See the story below about Hawkins House, which soon will hold a HRPS' office upstairs.

Our annual party slated for Wednesday, September 24th, is shaping up to be one of our most fun events ever, with beautiful Bartley Ranch Park as our venue. I hope to see all of you there in your western finery!

— Felvia Belaustegui, HRPS' President

## HRPS' Fall Social Wednesday, September 24

Howdy Ya'll! Please mark September 24, 2008, 6:00 pm on your calendars for HRPS' Fall Social, as we celebrate our 11th year and Nevada's Ranching Heritage with a Nevada-style BBQ at Bartley Ranch.

Appetizers, cocktails, and tours will be given of the outbuildings including Huffaker School House, with dinner being served in the Western Heritage Interpretive Center.

There will be a silent auction again along with a good ol' raffle this year. Western attire is welcome, so dust off your boots, jeans, and hats and get 'em on! It's gonna be a great time!

Dinner tickets are \$50 per person, with raffle tickets \$5 each or 5 for \$20. Seats are limited so do the "boot scoot'n boogie" and get your reservations in before September 15!! Contact Joan Dyer, (775) 329-8744 for tickets.



Hawkins House, ca 2003.  
Photo courtesy Carol Coleman.

**Editor's Note:** The article on page 9, *FootPrints* Vol. 11 No. 3 contained a number of errors. We repeat portions of the text with italicized corrections. Thanks to Darla Potter and Glee Willis for pointing out the errors.

We are pleased to announce that HRPS has acquired an office upstairs at the Hawkins House, which will hold HRPS' accumulation of ten years of items such as archival materials like *FootPrints*, important papers and books and in the future, research materials. Access to materials will be dependent on volunteer staffing.

The "Hawkins House," as it is still called by local Renoites, was built in 1911 and is tucked away in the corner where Court

## Hawkins House, Again

Street ends and Elm Court begins. The Hawkins house 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 family was considered one of the first families of Nevada, and worked as lawyers in the area 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 1894 from Vanderbilt University with an LL.B. degree and practiced law in Tennessee for five years. With his wife Myrtle Ziemer and four children, Robert, Elen, Carson and Elizabeth, the family moved to Reno in 1910. A fifth child, Prince Archer Hawkins, was born December 28, 1918, in Reno.

On June 10, 1910, Prince Albert Hawkins joined the law firm founded by Azroe 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.

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, a benefactor of the University of Nevada. Clarence's father, John Mackay, was owner of the famous Virginia City mines bearing his name, and the founder of Commercial Pacific Cable Company which was bought by International Telephone & Telegraph Corporation in 1928.

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.

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

## Membership Report—New Members paid to July 1, 2009

Cathy Brewster  
Tony Brinkman & Laura Nall  
Cathie Bryant  
Ken & Janet Carnes  
Rosie Cvasco  
Bill & Trish Conkie  
Karen Correll  
Donovan & Jeannie Davis  
Ellen & Daniel Delatorre  
Eva Demosthenes  
Diane & Myron Denson  
Tina Dils & Tom Keating  
Jeannette Drummond  
Griff & Kathy Durman  
Katie & Larry Dwyer

Phillip & Jean Earl  
Bob & Betty Frenkel  
Marie Fromherz  
Kay Grady  
Lucy Guillies  
Sandra Hall  
Toni & Bob Hamilton  
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Lorraine Petersen & Neil Carlson  
Craig Questa  
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Tammy M Riggs  
Martha E Romero  
Jennifer & Sharron Saltz & Johnny Arguiano

Deborah Schumacher  
Barrie Schuster  
Joel & Virginia Smith  
Clinton Smith  
Connie Smith  
Jerry Smith  
Coe Swobe  
David R Vill  
Mark Vincent & Tina Acordacoitia  
Floyd & Judy Whiting  
Ron & Geneva Williams  
Reg & Shelley Willison  
Cindy Wolf  
Donna & Mark Young

As of July 1, 2008, HRPS converted its membership to a fiscal year cycle. All memberships will run from July 1 through June 30 of the following year. Have you renewed your membership? Check the website [www.historicreno.org](http://www.historicreno.org) for a membership form.

## Membership Report—Renewed through July 1, 2009

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Darleen R. Azizisefat  
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Mark Backus  
Linda Badzioch  
Carrol Baird  
Alicia Barber  
Bill & Dorothy Barnard  
Olga Barry  
Phillis & Bruce Bassett  
Kim Becker  
Felvia & Richard Belaustegui  
Dana Bennett  
Dave & Lois Bianchi  
Jan Bishop  
Jacquiline Black  
James Blakely  
Allen Blume  
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Jane Bowden  
Karl Breckenridge  
Anna Bridgman  
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Brook Larry &  
Betty Brown  
Trudy & Peter Brussard  
Holly Buchanan  
Dan Burgess  
Treat & Patty Cafferata  
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George & Linda Canavan  
Eslie E Cann  
RJ & Lynn Carothers  
Art & Joyce Carson  
Andra Carter  
Wanda Casazza  
Gloria & John Castillo  
Tom & Phyllis Cates  
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Susan Chern  
Craig & Sharon Chidester  
Tyler, Jackie & Monty Clay  
Delores & Press Clewe

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Norman Howard  
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## **FALL PROGRAMS, 2008**

**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, September 24, 6:00 pm.** HRPS' Fall Social, celebrating HRPS' 11th year with a theme of Nevada's Ranching Heritage. Join us for a Nevada-style BBQ, tours at Bartley Ranch, a silent auction and dinner served in the Western Heritage Interpretive Center. Dinner tickets are \$50 per person, raffle tickets are \$5 each or 5 for \$20. Contact Joan Dyer, 775-329-8744 for tickets.

**Wednesday, October 22, 7:00 pm.** Tom King of the University of Nevada Oral History Department will lead us through the archives of the Oral History Department and speak on the importance of the Oral History Program.

**Wednesday, November 19, 7:00 pm.** Jim Bonar, President, Nevada-Sierra Chapter of The Lincoln Highway Association will present a slide show of a collection of photos from 1913-1920 on the Lincoln Highway across the U.S. with special focus on the journey across Nevada.

**Saturday, December 13, 12:00 noon to 4:00 pm.** Nevada Historical Society presents History for the Holidays. Artists will be selling their wares, there will be seasonal music, refreshments, book signers, kids crafts and discounts in the museum store.

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