

# Historic Reno PRESERVATION SOCIETY

# FootPrints

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

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## The 2008 HRC Award Goes to a Grand Old House

*by Debbie Hinman*

*As a resident of the next block, I have watched with great interest the ongoing restoration of 1303 Mark Twain. The friendly couple would always wave from their scaffolding as I drove by, and I was thrilled on their behalf when they accepted the HRC award last spring. But the day I drove by recently to see Laurie McLanahan in her front yard wielding a jackhammer, attempting to break apart a sunken rock her husband Steve later described as the size of a Volkswagen, I knew I had to meet them and hear their story.*

This past May, the Historical Resources Commission presented their 2008 Residential Preservation Award to Steve and Laurie McLanahan for the restoration of their home at 1303 Mark Twain Avenue. This home, built in 1939-1940, had been neglected in its latter years, but due to the couple's industriousness and dedication, it will once again be the showplace it must have been in its early years.

A lovely Georgian-style Colonial Revival with tall elegant windows and a towering front-facing brick fireplace, the home stands on .181 acres, on the southwest corner of Mark Twain Avenue and Brown Street. Mark Twain is a long street running quite a few blocks, but it is oddly cut in half at Monroe Street. Number 1303 is in the last block of Mark Twain, on the portion of the street south of Monroe, between Brown and Mount Rose streets. It was one of the first homes built in what was then known as the Manor Gardens subdivision.

Unlike many of Reno's earlier homes, quite a bit is known about the home's provenance. Built for the Wilmer J. Isbell family, the permit was issued on January 21, 1940, in the amount of \$12,000. The builder was Walker J. Boudwin Construction, a

well-known name in residential construction in Reno at the time. Boudwin eventually settled on the same block.

The architect was Henry Lyman Wright of San Diego. Wright began his career as a draftsman in the office of T. C. Kistner while still in college and became a partner in 1941; the firm then became known as Kistner, Wright & Wright, Architects

and Engineers. The firm primarily designed commercial buildings and military installations during World War II. But as Henry Wright's sister Florence was married to Wilmer Isbell, when the Isbells decided to build a new home, it is likely he designed the Mark Twain house as a favor to her.

Wilmer Isbell was a member of the well-known local Isbell family. The family, consisting of father John and his four sons (who customarily used their initials in business dealings): Clement (C. V.), Wilmer (W. J.), Guy (G. V.), and Roy (R. S.), began a partnership known as Isbell Construction in the early 1900s in San Diego, California. The company moved to Reno

in the latter part of the 1920s, and was incorporated in Carson City in March, 1931. As the oldest son, C. V. was president with Wilmer as vice president, Roy as secretary and Guy as treasurer.

The company greatly influenced the business of open pit mining, utilizing trucks and shovels to move dirt from the mines rather than rail cars. This allowed pits to be built on steeper slopes, allowing for deeper pits. An Isbell pit remains today in a new incarnation as the lake at the driving range of the Grand Sierra Resort. Wilmer Isbell's 1974 obituary credits Isbell Construction with building the first road west from Verdi to the California state line. This road was to become a



*1303 Mark Twain, the home of Steve and Laurie McLanahan, who received the 2008 Historical Resources Commission Award for their restoration of the home. Photo courtesy of Debbie Hinman.*

## The 2008 HRC Award (continued)

*Continued from page 1*

main segment of the transcontinental highway, superseding the old Dog Valley Grade route.

The Isbells were an amazing family. While the Isbell Construction company was working on that section of the transcontinental highway, the family, parents and three small children, lived in tents along the way. There was one tent for sleeping, and one for cooking.

By the time the Isbells completed their new home in early 1940, their children (a son and two daughters) were grown, and the impressive home made a perfect site for daughter Virginia's wedding reception in June of 1940. Florence Isbell created a beautiful rose garden behind the home, with brick walkways throughout, remnants of which were uncovered during the remodeling process. On the south side of the garden, they planted a sycamore tree, which towers above the home today. The elder Isbells remained in this home for nearly thirty years. In 1951, the kitchen was enlarged to accommodate a dining area. At some time in the mid-1960s, the kitchen cabinets, appliances and counters were updated, as were the bathrooms.

The home was sold in the late 1960s and for the next twenty years, it was occupied by several different families. In the 1980s, further changes were made to

the home. The attached garage was converted to a family room, and a separate two-car garage facing Brown Street was built behind the house.

In 1987, the home was sold to John Dreyfus, son of Wall Street financier and head of the Dreyfus Medical Foundation, Jack J. Dreyfus Jr. The senior Dreyfus had purchased the George Whittell estate at Lake Tahoe in 1970. In 1972, he sold nearly 11,000 acres of lakefront property to the U. S. Forest Service, retaining the Whittell residence (now the Thunderbird Lodge) and some additional acreage at Zephyr Cove.

According to the McLanahans, John Dreyfus only occupied the home for about six months over the next fifteen years. Little or no maintenance was done on the house during this time. The exterior trim and stucco finish were deteriorating, and neighbors viewed the neglect with regret. The house and garage were filled with his possessions such as odds and ends of furniture, clothes and even six vintage exercise bicycles. Much of this memorabilia was left in the house following the McLanahans' purchase of the property.



*An old photo of the home at the time the Isbells lived at 1303 Mark Twain. Photo given to the McLanahans by the Isbell family.*

not so sure about Steve. Laurie describes standing on the sidewalk outside the Mark Twain house looking up and knowing she had found the perfect house. She said that she did not even need to see the interior—she knew she had to have it. Once Steve saw the house, he knew he had a major project in store for him. Aside from the deteriorating exterior, there was standing water in the basement and the clumsily converted family room—complete with shag carpeting and an iron fence and gate—had served as a dog pen.

The sale was completed in November of 2002 and the couple began work, though mainly just on weekends. It was slow going, due to endless problems with contractors. They remained in their Spanish Springs home until the house was livable. By the following July, they put their current home on the market and it sold the first day. So they moved in with Steve's parents to continue work on the Mark Twain house. The woodwork in the entryway was in such poor repair that the various woodworkers who were asked for repair estimates would initially say it would be very expensive, then would decline the job. Steve eventually decided to take it on himself, pulling the entire entry from the front of the house and laying the assembly in the front yard. He was fortunate to find Jim at Custom Manufacturing in Sparks who duplicated the pieces for him, so



*A 1940s photo showing Wilmer and Florence Isbell with daughters, Virginia and Dorothy, posing in the backyard of their Mark Twain home. Photo given to the McLanahans by the Isbell family. Photo courtesy of the McLanahans.*

Prior to buying the home, the McLanahans lived in Spanish Springs. When Laurie suggested to Steve that they move back to the Old Southwest, Steve finally agreed. Laurie then spent about nine months looking for a house in the area. One morning, Laurie's mother, a realtor, told her she had found a house for sale that she thought Laurie might like, though she was



## The 2008 HRC Award (continued)

Steve was able to completely recreate the original entry—only the dentils are original, but the restoration is so skillfully executed, it is impossible to tell it has been replicated. The home's exterior stucco finish was badly in need of repair. Steve and Laurie re-lathed the entire home themselves, drilling holes and installing some 6,500 anchor screws into the masonry; the couple proudly lays claim to being one of the few local families who owns their own two-story scaffolding. Steve had over 500 feet of the interior three-bead fluted molding reproduced, so that it matched throughout the home. He also had staircase balusters turned to duplicate the originals. The renovation was somewhat slowed when Laurie found out she was expecting a baby in 2003, but she continued to assist with the lighter tasks. The couple finally moved into their new home some fifteen months after they first laid eyes on it.

The home has three bedrooms upstairs, with two of the bedrooms having two original walk-in closets each and the third having one—an unusual innovation for 1940. The McLanahans have remodeled the two upstairs bathrooms, moving a wall and eliminating a bathtub. Downstairs is a large, elegant living room, a beautiful formal dining room, a powder room, the family room (no longer in use as




*The restored formal dining room. The McLanahans believe the wainscoting and crown molding were added in a mid-1960s remodel.*

*Photo courtesy of Laurie McLanahan.*

a dog pen and skillfully remodeled to eliminate its "garage" roots), an office, which the couple refers to as "Wilmer's Office" and a large kitchen, which the McLanahans have completely remodeled. They removed the soffit ceiling, moved a support beam and installed recessed lighting, and a huge center island. Last summer they added

a beautiful swimming pool in the backyard for their daughter, Ally.

Though Laurie and Steve love their home and are happy with what they have accomplished, they admit that it was a far more overwhelming task than they could have anticipated. They both joke that they were overly influenced by watching too much HGTV. Steve says that it was hard because he felt torn between working on the house and spending time with his baby daughter. The couple also cites the lack of true craftsmen in the area, and the difficulties they had with many of the contractors they encountered. Would they do it again? "No, never," they both agree. Time will tell. 

Information for this article came from various *Reno Gazette-Journal* and *Nevada State Journal* stories on the Isbell family; a University of Nevada, Reno Special Collections document, "A Guide to the Records of the Isbell Construction Company, Collection No. 94-44;" several pages of biographical information on Henry Lyman Wright, F. A. I. A., and conversations with Steve and Laurie McLanahan.

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



*The living room of the restored Isbell / McLanahan residence.*  
*Photo courtesy of Laurie McLanahan.*



*The McLanahans in front of their restored home: Steve, holding daughter, Ally and Laurie.*  
*Photo courtesy of Debbie Hinman.*

## Mount Rose Hot Springs

by Kim Henrick

A sad and lonely stone cabin stands defiantly in the shadow of the new Summit Sierra Mall in south Reno. This old relic, on the southwest corner of the intersection of Mount Rose Highway and U.S. 395, is outdated and overshadowed by the shiny new shopping mall. The cabin is a reminder of the Great Depression years when men were willing to do almost anything to survive; when they were able to see potential in the starkest of places.

What sort of man stakes his future on a piece of land near a small mountain range once described as "Rough Mountain Land Unfit for Civilization"? Those were the notes on an 1868 plat map describing the area where part of the Virginia Foothills (in south Reno) stand today. Those same notes conceivably could have been written on many early maps of Nevada, given its dry and inhospitable landscape. Some early settlers, however, looked below the barren, desert crust for their future. On a plat map filed in 1884 with the U. S. Surveyor General of Nevada, C. C. Powning, the note describes a more useful land: "Mineral Land Gold and Silver."

Fifty years later, smart men again would look below the ground to chase a dream. The hot, bubbling mineral water waiting to be tapped in the south Reno area definitely interested the entrepreneurial spirit of Otto Herz, a well driller, and his two sons, Richard and Harold, who were both in their early twenties at the time. Around 1936, the three men left the comforts of a nice home at 69 Washington Street in Reno, where Otto had lived since 1912, and began a difficult but hopeful phase of their lives building their new geothermal business. It would be situated about a half mile north of the once popular, but much older Reno Hot Springs operation, which was shown on the 1884 plat map mentioned above.

Mount Rose Hot Springs would be a small resort, a restful place where customers could spend the night and soak in the healing mineral waters in the small rented cabins. According to Harold's daughter, Susan Herz-Callahan, Mount Rose Hot Springs (also called Herz Hot Springs) began as a single cabin. Her grandfather Otto and his two sons lived in a tent until the first and largest cabin was completed. They then moved into that first cabin and

Other old photos, possibly from the late 1930s, show the four finished cabins in a row, about fifty feet apart, facing Mount Rose Highway, with the standing stone cabin the third from the right. The stone foundation of the fourth cabin, on the far left, is still intact.

Besides some living space in each of the rental cabins, there was a set of steps that led down to a small concrete area. That is where the hot water was piped into the cabins. The business also needed fresh

water, so the fellows laid water pipe 2,000 feet to the northwest and tapped into a fresh-water well owned by their neighbor Louis Damonte Sr. That fresh-water wellhead can still be seen today in a field north of the South Valleys Sports Complex. According to Sue, her grandfather, father and uncle were forever repairing that water pipe. The pipe ran through several gullies to get to the Damonte property. Between that fact and the extreme weather in the area, the pipe required constant attention. Sue has kept a small piece of the water pipe as a reminder of her grandfather Otto, who reportedly sold off much of the pipe in a piece-part

fashion after he stopped running the Mount Rose Hot Springs business. It is not known exactly when the hot springs closed down, but some family members believe it might have been in 1943.

The war intruded into the family business and a *Reno Evening Gazette* (REG) article dated October 25, 1941, announced that Sue's father, Harold Herz, was drafted into the service. He and his brother Richard both went into the military and that seems to be the end of their involvement with the hot springs business. Harold fell in love with an English girl he met in London and they married on July 4, 1944. Harold and Irene moved back to the U. S. and moved into a stone house that Harold built, but this one was made of more common



*Recent photo of the original wellhead south of the stone cabin.  
Photo courtesy of Sue Herz-Callahan.*

also ran a bar from there to supplement their income while building the other structures. Three more small cabins followed, two frame structures and one built with colorful metamorphic rock found on their property near the stone cabin that still stands today. (Cabins made of native rock are frequently referred to as "stone cabins.")

One old family photograph shows a powerful plume of hot water and steam coming from what Sue believes is the original geothermal wellhead at the hot springs. Another photo that Sue took recently shows the same wellhead in the foreground of the photograph with the stone cabin behind. If the view could be enlarged, the huge Summit Sierra Mall to the north would loom over the cabin.



## Mount Rose Hot Springs (continued)

local field stones, on the north side of the Mount Rose Highway right where the Summit Sierra Mall sits today. It was in this stone house that Sue and her brother Harold (called Stephen) were born. The three Herz men remained close even after the war. Harold and Richard (with their families) along with their father Otto lived for years near one another in their three houses in this new location. Sue's grandmother Rose (Otto's wife) had passed away in August 1935 before the Mount Rose Hot Springs project began.

While the Herz boys were at war, Otto Herz apparently remained busy with the hot springs, at least enough to display a popular artifact of Reno history. According to an *REG* article dated January 9, 1943, Otto owned a photograph of M. C. Lake standing "amid sagebrush and rocks with an Indian leader" in front of his inn and his toll bridge on the Truckee River (dubbed Lake's Crossing around 1863). The photograph of Myron Lake, known by many as the father of Reno, is well known to Reno history buffs. The article says Otto displayed the photograph in "a special place recessed in the wall to fit the picture which is on display at the Hot Springs." Otto acquired the photo from his father Richard, who was the "R" in R. Herz and Brother jewelry store, a longtime, popular establishment in Reno from 1885 until 2007.

On the Washoe County Assessor's website, there is a recent satellite photo of the land around the Mount Rose junction. It shows the roof of the little



*Plume of hot mineral water coming from the original wellhead.  
Family photo courtesy of Sue Herz-Callahan.*

stone cabin and the large shopping center to the north. Scattered around the large shopping mall parking lot, would be the sites of the three Herz family homes built after the war. According to Sue, the family owned approximately fourteen acres where the Mount Rose Hot Springs were and approximately 34 acres where the shopping mall sits. Those two properties were sold in 1993 by the Herz family to the State of Nevada. Since the sale, there were reports of future commercial development in the

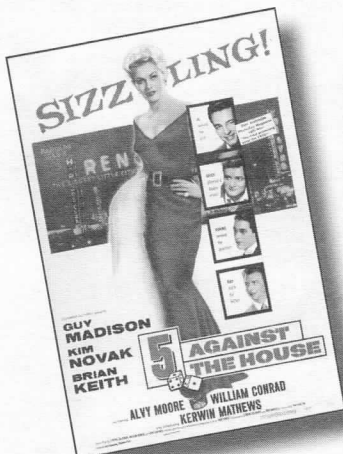
area by Stations Casinos Inc. Reno Land Holdings Company, LLC, is shown on the assessor's map as the current owner of eleven acres, which includes the land with the little stone cabin on it. Other than being in the top fifteen of the "Top Real Property Taxpayers," of the Washoe County Assessment Roll of 2008, no other information about the company could be found.

If you enter the new Summit Sierra Mall from the south side (off the Mount Rose Highway), you will be driving on Herz Boulevard. Follow that road behind the buildings and it turns into "Herz Lane"—small but constant reminders of the presence of an old Reno family trying to make the best of a rugged land during a difficult time. After World War II, Harold went into the insurance business and became our state's first Allstate Insurance agent and Richard eventually became the director of the Nevada Department of Motor Vehicles. Otto Herz died in 1958. 

Information for this article came from interviews with Susan Herz-Callahan; local newspaper articles, especially a *Reno Gazette-Journal* article published on April 4, 2007 by Peggy Santoro; the Washoe County Assessor's website; and deeds and survey maps from the Washoe County Recorder's office.


Kim Henrick is a HRPS member and a member of the HRPS Editorial Staff.

## HRPS at the Movies!



**P**lan on attending our special showing of *5 Against the House* on Wednesday, May 20, 2009 at the Sands Hotel and Casino. Filmed in downtown Reno, this 1955 film is about four college friends who plan the perfect heist of Harolds Club. Other Reno locations in the movie include the University of Nevada, the train station and the old Harolds Club parking lot, which featured an interesting method of

retrieving cars. Memorable actors in this film are Guy Madison, Kim Novak, Brian Keith, Alvy Moor and William Conrad. This is sure to be another fun movie evening. Admission, \$8.00. For details and reservations, call Cindy at 747-0340.

HRPS would like to thank Steve Savage of Great Basin Film Society and the Sands Hotel and Casino for making this event possible. 

## HRPS Walking Tours, 2008 Summary

by Ed Wishart, HRPS Walking Tour Director

HRPS conducted twenty-seven scheduled tours in 2008—nine tours for each of the months of May, July and September. This included two well-attended special events: the *Walls of Wrath Bus Tour* celebrating the 75th anniversary of FDR's New Deal programs in the area (54 attendees) and a *Literary Reno* tour celebrating writers from the "underbelly" of Reno (33 attendees). The latter was led by Sharon Honig-Bear and our very special Pat Klos. Total 2008 walking tour attendance, at 827, was down from the 2007 count of 892, but income was up. Thanks to the bus tour, we collected \$5801 in 2008 compared to \$5500 in 2007.

Some highlights for the year were: Two non-scheduled walks were given on April 19 when Sharon Honig-Bear led the *Beyond the Arches* walking tour for John Reid's TMCC history class in the morning followed by a catered lunch at Cafe Musée. Ed Wishart and Tracy Soliday took the group on the *Mansions on the Bluff* walk after lunch. There were fifteen students plus three teachers. This was done at no charge, as educational outreach is part of HRPS' mission.

Tracy Soliday's *Bricks and Stones* walk on July 1 held two special treats for the 44 walkers. Beth Perry invited everyone into her lovely stone home at 919 Humboldt and architect Kay Radzik invited us into her restoration in progress at 611 Humboldt. This was prearranged by

Tracy and was the culmination/treat of her walk. Kay has taken this house, originally built in Virginia City, picked it up and moved it to the back of the lot, built a new basement and moved it back. This interesting old house has had many additions and renovations over its 140-year life, and Kay is aware of most of them and she explained how she treated them. Our group visited just before sheet rock was installed in the basement.

The July 12 tour of the *Newlands Neighborhood* encountered a young man who had set up a lemonade stand on the route. It was John Hester's son. John is the planning director for Reno. He called Scott Gibson in advance to make sure it would be OK with him. It was a warm morning and more than half the people bought a cup of cold lemonade from the boy, most paying \$1 rather than the list price of 50 cents. Everyone found what he did to be charming and fun.

Cindy Ainsworth's *Roads and Rail—The Historic Fourth Street Corridor* walk on July 19 was fortunate to be able to visit the 1935 ca. IXL Laundry and Dry Cleaners building at 601 East Fourth Street. The building now houses Anchor Auctions and the tour visited during a Saturday morning auction.

Jeff Pilliod, owner of Anchor Auctions, welcomed the group by announcing that HRPS is a wonderful history organization doing great things. Auction participants broke into applause, which was a pleasant surprise for the walkers. When the auction resumed, the HRPS tour paused to watch and Jeff jokingly "sold" one of the auction items to the walkers! The IXL Building is still in excellent shape because of the various owners and business occupants who have taken pride in maintaining the



Tour Guide Cindy Ainsworth describes the history of 325 E. Fourth Street, the old NCO station, on a Historic Fourth Street Corridor Walking Tour. Photo courtesy of Kim Henrick.

property that has been continuously occupied. It is a fine example of an adaptively reused building.

Participants on Debbie Hinman's *El Reno* walk in July received a special treat when local realtor Dave Kahan arranged for the group to view the interiors of the El Reno apartment home located at 777 Mount Rose Street, and a vintage brick home next door. These homes, along with two more El Renos to the rear that face Lander Street, form a complex that gives a sense of how the apartment homes would have appeared in their original setting at 1307 South Virginia Street.

The *Powning Addition and Little Italy* walk was offered twice this year and the walkers were treated to a tour of 121 Vine Street, recently purchased by tour guide Jack Hursh. Jack treated the walkers to tours of this antique Carpenter Gothic house, which everyone loved. In addition, they visited Larry Pizorno's wine cellar and Dave Roscovits' antique garage and gas station at the corner of First and Winter streets.

The walking tour year was topped off with an appreciation dinner for the guides at the Santa Fe Hotel on October 23. In addition to the guides (14) and spouses, Pat Klos, Barbara Courtney and husband Ralph and Rosie Cevasco joined us as well. We had a fine time at the historic Basque hotel, a favorite venue over the years for many of us.



Tour Guide Debbie Hinman speaks to participants on the UNR Neighborhood Walk. Photo courtesy of Kim Henrick.



# The Role of the Chinese Laborers in Building the Central Pacific Railroad

by Lloyd Shanks, member of HRPS and the Nevada Railroad Museum

*It can be said that the building of the western portion of the Central Pacific Railroad was responsible for the founding of Reno (then Lake's Crossing). It is a fact that thousands of Chinese laborers were engaged in the construction of this railroad, and without their work this line over the Sierra Nevada may never have been successfully completed.*

In 1863, responding to an Act of Congress that awarded generous land grants to promote construction of a transcontinental railroad, the Central Pacific Railroad started work on the western half of the line from Sacramento, California. This rail line was destined to play a large part in the early growth of Reno. Because there were already a number of rail lines extending from the Atlantic coast as far west as Omaha, Nebraska, the Union Pacific started their line westward from that point.

In 1864, Central Pacific management estimated they would need over 5,000 workers to complete their line eastward, and at that time they only had 600 workers on their payroll. This was only fifteen years after the gold rush of 1849 and that event had resulted in a large influx of Chinese immigrants to California, which they referred to as "Gum Shan" (Gold Mountain). Since the railroad had already used the Chinese in construction of a line from Sacramento to Marysville, the use of a large number of Chinese laborers was suggested.

Doubts were raised about the ability of the Chinese to tackle the much more difficult task of constructing a right-of-way over the Sierra, which would require them to also do stone masonry. In his testimony before Congress, Charles Crocker of the Central Pacific asked, "Make masons out of Chinamen? Did they not build the Chinese wall, the biggest piece of masonry in the world?"

After the first Chinese were hired, they started work on the line eastward toward the Sierra. Even though the start of their route was over relatively flat

country, because of labor shortages and difficulties in financing, only fifty miles of track had been laid eastward from Sacramento in the first twenty-eight months after breaking ground. Because the Central Pacific route had to wind through the Sierra Nevada, they had the hardest task of railroad construction facing them.



*Chinese laborers working on the railroad. From Harper's Weekly Newspaper, 1867.*

The remaining work was difficult, to say the least. Over the next twenty-three miles, the terrain rose some 7,000 feet in elevation. In order to construct the numerous embankments that were required, the Chinese employed techniques learned from similar construction in their homeland. An ever greater task was the clearing of a right-of-way through a countryside studded with granite outcroppings and cliffs. This required drilling holes in the rock by hand with the use of a hammer and star drill, in preparation for blasting the rock loose with black powder.

Probably the first most difficult obstacle was a point near Colfax, which was a steep bluff high above the American River. This work was described in the book *Collis Potter Huntington* by Cerinda Evans as, "At a point on the line called 'Cape Horn,' the road was cut out of

almost perpendicular mountain side about fifteen hundred feet above the American River. To enable the Chinese to drill and blast out a foothold, they were lowered over the cliff in 'Bosun's Chairs' supported by ropes to do the preliminary cutting." There is quite a bit of controversy, based on a variety of published accounts, as to whether the workers were "held by ropes," "let down in buckets," or "baskets," or as stated on a Colfax Area Historical Society monument "were lowered ... in wicker bosun's chairs, 1332 feet above the canyon floor." No matter which account is correct, the task had to be a hair-raising feat that the Chinese workers rose to meet.

In *A Great and Shining Road: The Epic Story of the Transcontinental Railroad*, author John Hoyt Williams wrote, "In early September 1868, Strobridge (Central Pacific's construction superintendent) turned his Celestials (Chinese workers) loose on Cape Horn with their picks, drills, shovels, tiny wheelbarrows and blasting powder. The 'crumping' of explosives reverberated through the valley below as the Chinese—who were either not susceptible to acrophobia or possessed a singular wealth of fatalism—began to sculpt the mountain, great chunks of which were blasted or pried loose to tumble earthshakingly into the American River so far below."

The work continued in spite of bitterly cold winds and swirling snow on the ridge tops above the workers. However, the cut was finally completed before the worst of the winter weather had arrived and outside work was suspended for four months.

By the end of 1868, the Central Pacific employed at least 4,000 workers on the task of carving their way up the slopes of the Sierra Nevada. It was reported that between 75 and 90 percent of these workers were Chinese and the balance were described by the railroad as Irish.

In a statement made to the President of the United States, Central Pacific

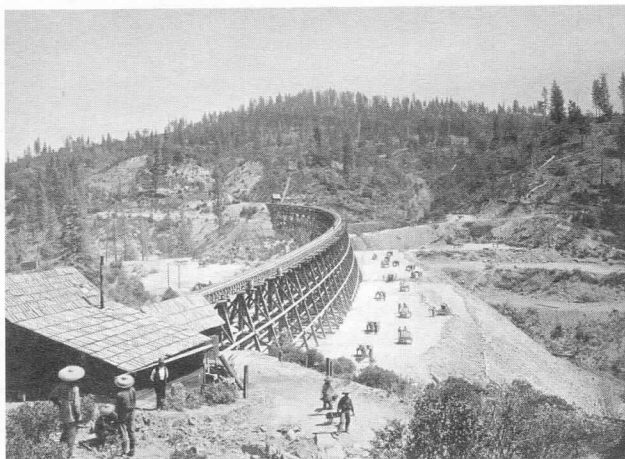
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## The Role of the Chinese (continued)

*Continued from page 7*

president Leland Stanford declared, "A large majority of the white laboring class on the Pacific Coast find more profitable and congenial employment in mining and agricultural pursuits, than in railroad work. The greater portion of the laborers employed by us are Chinese, who constitute a large element of the population of California. Without them it would be impossible to complete the western portion of this great national enterprise, within the time required by the Act of Congress."

The Irish workers were being paid \$30 per month plus board, and the Chinese \$31 per month, and they were expected to board themselves. The Chinese usually paid an American clerk a dollar a month apiece to assure they were charged no more than their fair share for supplies and provisions, namely rice, fish, dried oysters, fruit, and



*Chinese railroad workers transported dirt by the cartload to fill in this Secrettown Trestle in the Sierra. Courtesy of Union Pacific Historical Collections.*

<http://www.apa.si.edu/ongoldmountain/gallery2/gallery2.html>

seaweed. Living conditions were poor, and it was reported that the Chinese sheltered themselves from the winds by scooping out holes in the earth, alongside the rail lines, and erecting a rudimentary shelter of sticks covered with a piece of canvas.

In addition to blasting rock, the Chinese built rock abutments, dug tunnels, built snow sheds, filled low areas and helped lay track after the right-of-way was cleared. One major undertaking for the railroad was the construction of the 1,100 foot long, curved "Secret Town" trestle during the spring of 1865. Twelve years later, a large force of Chinese laborers was employed in filling in the ninety-foot-deep valley below the trestle with earth. This eliminated the risk of fire danger to the timber trestle and avoided the need to replace aging timbers.

According to Central Pacific records at the California Railroad Museum, there were at least 9,000 Chinese employed by the railroad over the course of the work on the line. Lives were lost, but no records were kept of how many laborers died.


At the time the work was completed, there had been cut-backs in the labor force, but when the Central Pacific line had nearly reached a meeting point with the Union Pacific, a mixed crew of Chinese and Irish laborers were still working for the line in Utah. On April

28, 1869, they set a record by laying ten miles of track in twelve hours (the length of the standard working day in the 1800s).

The two lines met on May 10, at Promontory Summit, and foreman Amos L. Bowsher, who sent the wire announcing the ceremony and the driving of the golden spike, later recalled, "It was certainly a cosmopolitan gathering, Irish and Chinese laborers, who had set records in track laying that have never since been equaled, joined with the cowboys, Mormons, miners and Indians in celebrating completion of the railroad."

Afterwards, in a speech in Sacramento, Central Pacific director, Judge Edwin Bryant Crocker, stated,


"I wish to call to your minds that the early completion of this railroad we have built have been in large measure due to that poor, despised class of laborers called the Chinese, to the fidelity and industry they have shown."

On April 29, 1999, the Honorable John T. Doolittle, State Representative for California, addressed the U.S. House of Representatives to pay tribute to the Chinese - American community by recognizing the contribution their ancestors made to the construction of the American transcontinental railroad. He stated, "Without the efforts of the Chinese workers in the building of America's railroads, our development and progress as a nation would have been delayed by years. Their toil in severe weather, cruel working conditions and for meager wages cannot be under appreciated." 

### Epilogue

(Nevada State Railroad Museum Exhibit, Summer 2004)

As many as 5,000 Chinese laborers worked on the transcontinental railroad in Nevada between 1868-1869. When the railroad was completed many Chinese immigrants returned to China or sought other work in the United States. Some of the immigrants stayed in Nevada and found work building smaller railroads or in the booming mining towns; in 1880, 5,416 Chinese immigrants lived in Nevada.

By 1910, however, only 927 people of Chinese descent resided in Nevada. Many national, state and local laws and regulations had made it difficult for Chinese people to immigrate to the United States or to continue to live and work in Nevada. The Chinese Americans that remained in Nevada continued to make valuable contributions to the state's economy and culture. 

Information, references and background information for this article were obtained from the Central Pacific Railroad Museum website, which the writer has simply organized into a narrative and then added his own conclusion regarding the impact of the building of the Central Pacific line past Reno. <http://cpr.org/Museum/Chinese.html>



## The HRPS Website is Coming Up Rosie

by Debbie Hinman

**H**ave you logged onto *historicro.org* recently? If not, you have a pleasant surprise in store for you. Under the direction of the talented new webmaster, Rosie Cevalco, our site has a new look, new functionality, and it better reflects the activities and spirit of our growing organization.

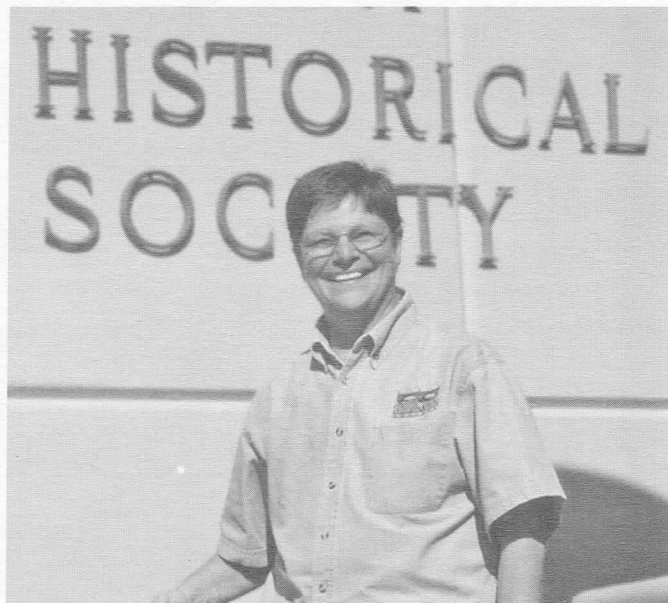
Who is this mystery woman who has devoted so much of her free time to giving the site a facelift? Many of you have met her already, as she also assists Ed Wishart with the walking tours, but Rosie tends to be a quiet presence, smiling and bringing up the rear, camera clicking steadily as she lovingly records our local history.

Like so many local residents, Rosie is a California transplant. She grew up in the Bay Area community of Martinez where, as a small child she appreciated the Victorian homes and other historic architecture of the city. Rosie graduated from the California State University, Hayward (now East Bay) in 1974 with a degree in Physical Education. Her initial plan was to teach, but soon realized that was not her ideal career. She held a number of diverse jobs, such as house painter and school bus driver, until she went to work for Blue Cross of California.

In 1978, Rosie decided to make the move to Reno. She was looking for a change and she was familiar with the area as her sister was living here. She was able to transfer to the Reno Blue Shield office, but left there when she obtained a job with the State of Nevada as a statistician. By the early 1980s, personal computers were starting to be used in the business world. An observant manager noticed that Rosie had a knack for computers, and began mentoring the young woman to take more of a role with them; Rosie moved to the State's Department of Data Processing. After a brief stint with the Public Service Commission (now the

Public Utilities Commission), Rosie left the State to work for a private company as a programmer.

One job that particularly stands out in Rosie's mind was assisting with the computer cabling for Virginia City's Storey County Courthouse. With her love of historic buildings, she was thrilled to crawl around in the attic and other hidden places. She also worked on a cabling project at the Dayton Justice Court, another historic building.



*Rosie Cevalco, HRPS member and new HRPS webmaster.  
Photo courtesy of Kim Henrick.*

Rosie went back to state service in 1998, this time for the Nevada Division of Mental Health and Developmental Services, where she remains today, working at the historic mental health facility on Galletti Way in Sparks. She is webmaster for her division and she has also created and hosts web sites for a variety of non-profit organizations through her web hosting and design business, Grumpfish Web Services.

In 1987, Rosie bought her own historic home in the Sierra Vista addition of Reno, on Arroyo Street. She is only the third owner of this property, which is a cute brick bungalow built around 1927-1928. Carefully tended rose bushes

adorn the front of the property—another of her passions.

Rosie offered her services to HRPS in a letter to the HRPS Board earlier this year. When the offer was made known to the current webmaster Fritz Grupe, he enthusiastically accepted the opportunity to pass the responsibility on to an experienced webmaster with fresh ideas and new expertise.

We owe Fritz Grupe a debt of gratitude for the many years he devoted to HRPS—he certainly brought HRPS into the computer age.

When asked why she offered to donate her services to HRPS for this ambitious undertaking, Rosie replied, "It is a complete and total labor of love, combining my favorite things—history, old houses and computers."

Please welcome Rosie to the organization and check out the website often—you will no doubt find new and exciting items each time you visit.

While the website has made great strides since its update, more advances are planned for the future. The virtual walking tour photos will be supplied with captions, giving details and locations of the properties. A selection of past *FootPrints* articles will also be added to the websites' *FootPrints* section. Rosie would also like to add a glossary of architectural terms and styles, with photo examples from local buildings. She is also investigating adding PayPal to the site, so that memberships can be paid online, and items such as tickets to our annual fundraiser party can be purchased. If you have suggestions for what you would like to see on the site, please let Rosie (email: [rosie@cevasco.us](mailto:rosie@cevasco.us)) or any member of the board know—this is your website!

[www.historicro.org](http://www.historicro.org)

## From Your HRPS President



Felvia  
Belaustegui,  
HRPS President.  
Photo by  
Debbie Hinman.

and brought a lot of new members into the organization.

Our annual fall social, held this year in September at Bartley Ranch, was well attended with 115 guests. Many people commented on how interesting and

**H**HRPS had another productive walking tour season, which concluded in September, 2008. Our final participant count was 827 for the three-month season! The well-publicized walks generated a great deal of interest

enjoyable the event was. Kudos to fall social committee chair Carrie Young and members Sharon Honig-Bear, Jack Hursh, Phyllis Cates, Cindy Ainsworth, Joan Dyer and Joan Collins for making this such a special event.

A brief update on the Powning's Addition Conservation District: The Historical Resources Commission (HRC) and HRPS are now working on toppers for the street signs, which will hopefully be designed by a local artist and will depict a bungalow, representing the most prevalent type of architecture found in the district. With the success of this conservation district, the Wells Avenue Historic Committee is also interested in a conservation district

nomination. I thank everyone for their interest and hard work in preservation, education and advocacy.

One proof that we are attracting interest and influencing the community could recently be found in the real estate section of the *Reno Gazette Journal*. A house-for-sale ad described a local home as being located in an historic area and noted that it is a stop on the HRPS walking tours. This shows that we definitely have a presence in the Reno area.

Have a safe and happy holiday season, and we hope to see you at the monthly meetings!

— Felvia Belaustegui, HRPS' President

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.

### 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  
☐ Renewing Member

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (W) \_\_\_\_\_ Best time to call: \_\_\_\_\_  
Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_ Employer: \_\_\_\_\_  
Fax \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Annual membership includes:** Footprints (HRPS Quarterly) • Free participation in walking tours

- ☐ Student \$15.00      ☐ Individual \$25.00      ☐ Family (Children 18 yrs and younger) \$40.00  
☐ Business Contribution \$50.00      ☐ Supporting \$100.00      ☐ HRPS Angel \$250.00

Additional donation: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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USE ONLY**

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

RV 04.07.08/FO-DCD

## Membership Report—New Members since July 1, 2008

Rich Beccy  
Brian & Sue Bullard  
Patrick Cantwell  
Tom & Lynn Chism  
Dennis Crouch  
Paul Dalool  
Tom & Terry Drendel

Bill & Penny Fairbanks  
Richard & Sandra Flanagan  
Grace Fujii  
Michelle Galloway  
C. C. Gertler  
Mary Ann Hawkins  
Sandra Hutchinson

Nita Jameson  
Wade & Denise Johnson  
Alex Kanwet  
Alice & Walt Keane  
Tom King  
Steve Koltermann  
L. J. & Linda Kuttan

Judith & George Leone  
Richard & Nancy Maser  
Gerlean Mosey  
David & Linda Pachnik  
Mike & Kelly Pachnik  
Katie Platz  
Marg Rockenbeck

Kristina B Ross  
Joe Saske  
Kristin Siddall  
David Silva  
Andre & Wendy Urruty  
Steve Van Denburgh  
Levi Watson

Mary Ann Wilson  
David & Terry Woodin  
Maureen Barrett Zimmerman



## HRPS *Meanwhile Back at the Ranch* Fall Social

### Thank You...

HRPS would like to thank the following donors for their contributions and for making this social one of the best:

Bliss Bungalow – an Inn  
Cable Car Creamery  
David Walley's Resort  
Douglas Co. Historical Society  
Holly Buchanan  
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KNPB Channel 5  
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Nevada Museum of Art  
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Joan Collins  
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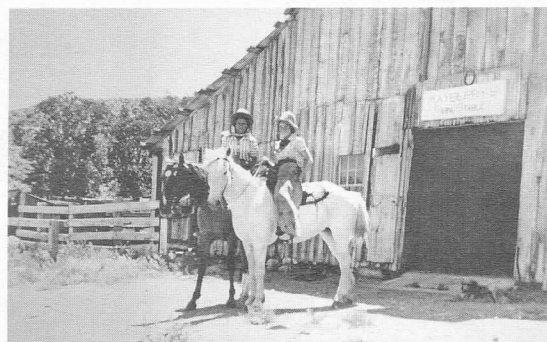
On Wednesday, September 24, 2008, 115 guests had a rip-roarin' time at HRPS *Meanwhile Back at the Ranch* fall social. We could not have asked for better September weather and Bartley Ranch Park was the perfect setting for our western-themed event. This year, the HRPS fall social celebrated Nevada's ranching heritage. Party-goers polished up their cowboy boots and wore their best duds for the big shindig.

Guests first moseyed up the hill to the historic old Huffaker School for appetizers, wine and lively bluegrass music provided by Shiloh. Built ca. 1867 and originally located south of town at Huffaker's, an old freight stage station and Virginia and Truckee Railroad stop, the little schoolhouse was first moved to the Neil Road Fish Hatchery. Fish food and equipment were stored in the time worn building. In 1992, after an extensive fund-raising effort, this historic landmark was moved to the Bartley Ranch Park. Loren Jahn, one of the principal restoration committee members, was on hand to answer questions at the HRPS reception. The highlight for guests, in particular the younger ones, was being able to ring the old school bell.

While adults enjoyed their appetizers, Isabel, a small cowgirl guest decked out in pink boots, was out rid'n the ponies down at the Bartley Ranch corrals. Some of us were jealous!

Outside, HRPS board member, Jack Hursh, gave tours of the Joe Ferretto ranch outbuildings. In 2004, the Truckee Meadows Remembers organization lobbied to have the little buildings moved to the park. The complete lineup includes a cookhouse, carriage house, bunkhouse, chicken coop with pigeon loft, and the tool shed. They are a wonderful addition to the park and were enjoyed by our party of cowpokes.

The Western Heritage Interpretive Center served as the setting for the tasty Rutherford's ranch barbeque and silent




*A couple of dudes at the Mayberry Ranch, circa 1935.  
Courtesy of Marian Capurro Durkee.*

auction and raffle. Betting was brisk for Jim Smith's framed print *Birdseye View of Reno*, along with the many other donated items. Funds from the successful auction and raffle will be used to fund our tours and events, the *FootPrints* publication, and to keep the door open on our new office that houses HRPS' archives. Congratulations to all those who won some terrific items!

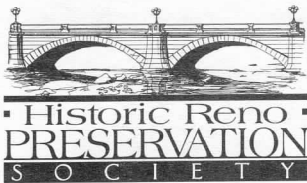
During the evening, guests viewed Jack Hursh's slide show of local barn and ranch imagery. Jack also narrated an enjoyable "from the family photo album" slide show featuring photos of the Capurro Home Ranch and the Mayberry Ranch. Family member Marian Capurro Durkee was HRPS guest for the evening. The Capurro Ranch was recognized as a centennial ranch in 2004 by the State of Nevada as being continuously operated by the same family for 100 years. The family at one time also owned the Mayberry Ranch. Many of the fun photos were from the era when it operated as a dude ranch.

HRPS would like to thank all the volunteers who made the social a success. A special thank you goes to Carrie Young and her social committee, Sharon Honig-Bear, Jack Hursh, Phyllis Cates, Joan Collins, Joan Dyer and Cindy Ainsworth. And thank you to everyone who stayed to help clean up the ranch house.

Happy Trails to all and we'll see you next year! 

## The Nevada Historical Society presents

African-American Vaudeville in the 1920s Nevada  
Wednesday, January 7, 2009 at 7:00 pm  
by Alex Albright, Associate Professor of English  
East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina



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## **WINTER PROGRAMS, 2009**

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

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

**Wednesday, January 28, 7:00 pm.** Mella Rothwell Harmon, Curator of History at the Nevada Historical Society presents “The Style Tells the Story,” a slide show on how architecture reflects broad social trends and local community values. “The Style Tells the Story” takes a look at Reno’s history through the lens of its architectural heritage.

**Wednesday, February 25, 7:00 pm.** Neal Cobb and Jerry Fenwick will present a slide show of Reno and Sparks history, comparing eras in a “Then and Now” slide show. They will also be signing copies of their new publication *Then and Now*.

**Wednesday, March 25, 7:00 pm.** Patty Cafferata, who has had a diverse career as a politician, attorney, historian and author, will discuss how to research a property using the Washoe County Recorder’s office. She will use an old property and trace its ownership, get copies of land records and documents, to show people how it is done.

**Wednesday, April 22, 7:00 pm.** The Andrews/Crissie Caughlin Ranch—Home to Reno’s Pioneering Families. Jennifer Bath, the present owner of the Caughlin Ranch House located on Mayberry Drive, will present the history of the ranch along with future plans for this historic property. Family members and Sheila Lonie, the author of *Crissie Caughlin Pioneer*, will be on hand.

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