

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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Powning: the Family, the Park and the Addition

by Debbie Hinman

Powning is a surname frequently heard by those who regularly attend the HRPS monthly meetings. In 2003, two HRPS members, Felvia Belaustegui and Cindy Ainsworth, undertook the overwhelming task of performing a survey of the sector of Reno known as Powning's Addition. The Winter 2004 issue of *FootPrints* introduced readers to Christopher Columbus (C. C.) Powning. That same year, HRPS published *A Walk Through Time*, a booklet conceived of by then HRPS President Patty Cafferata, to introduce local residents to this very early subdivision.

The Powning Family

C. C. Powning, for whom the Addition was named, was an important figure in early Reno. Orphaned and making his way from Wisconsin to Reno at the age of sixteen, most probably in the company of his grandmother and brother Thomas,

Christopher Columbus Powning, or C. C. as he was more commonly known, arrived in the fledgling town in 1868, the same year it became a stop on the Central Pacific Railroad and was officially named "Reno." This remarkable young man was at the helm of the *Nevada State Journal* from 1870 until 1891. He went on to become a state senator, owner of the Reno Water, Land and Light Company, and a land developer, all before his death at the age of 46.

But there was another Powning family residing just southeast and up a steep grade from Reno. Charles Gundry or C. G. Powning was born in Silver City, Nevada in 1879. This Powning held the position of Justice of the Peace in Verdi, Nevada, for 38 years and is the Powning from whom the present-day local family, including local dentist Greg V. Powning, is descended.



The State Building, constructed in 1926, with Powning Park to the right. Construction on the new Post Office Building, forward, dates the picture at approximately 1932. Photo courtesy of Jerry Fenwick.

Thanks to some meticulous research recently performed by former Reno resident Margaret E. Rockenbeck, the connection between the two families has been established. Although they were 27 years apart in age, C. C. and C. G. Powning were first cousins; their fathers were brothers who came from Cornwall in the British Isles. The brothers were born eight years apart. The elder brother, William, had three known children, of which C. C. was the middle child, and William's brother, George, fathered nine children, of which C. G. was the eighth child. There have been Pownings in northern Nevada and in Reno since its inception and descendants of these early pioneers continue to make this area home.

Powning Park

"The only breathing spot at present within the city limits is a small square opposite the court house, and to what extent it is appreciated by the public is demonstrated during the present heated season, when the benches

are occupied nearly all day and well into the night." Thus reads an Editorial Comment column from the August 16, 1906 *Nevada State Journal*. The park to which the comment refers was then called City Park, Reno's first public park, or square. It was located along South Virginia Street, across from the Riverside Hotel and the court house.

In late May of 1911, the City Council voted to re-name the park, due to "the rapid advance of progressiveness" and because the name City Park sounded "too much like a country village." The name they selected was "Powning Square," in honor of C. C. Powning who was described as "one of the most influential, public-spirited citizens in Washoe County." (See picture page 11.)

While "Powning Square" sounded quite elegant and cosmopolitan, by the time the State Building was under

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Powning: Family, Park and Addition (continued)

Continued from page 1

construction in 1926 for the Transcontinental Highway Exposition, it was being referred to in news stories as Powning Park. The State Building occupied the east end of the lot where the Pioneer Theater Auditorium stands today. Though the park size was reduced to make way for the State Building, it was still a lovely place, with mature trees, lawn and benches.

The State Building housed the Nevada Historical Society, the Washoe County Library and the Reno Chamber of Commerce, as well as a myriad of other offices throughout its history. It changed hands from the state to the city and, finally, to the county and stood on the site until it was razed in 1966 to make way for the new auditorium.

The land originally belonged to Myron Lake, considered by many to be the founding father of Reno. The deed for the land contained the following covenant: "... (Lake) hereby agrees that he will not sell, or lease, or otherwise dispose of the land in front of said lots above described, nor built on said land nor allow any other person or persons to do so, but keep the same open and public as a 'Public Plaza.'" This "Public Plaza" area actually comprised the westerly 120 feet of the three blocks now occupied by the Post Office, the Pioneer Center and the current Powning Park.

Plans were underway to build a new auditorium in 1965. The Pioneer Theater-Auditorium was completed in late 1967, and opened in January 1968.

The small patch of land that is today's tribute to C. C. Powning has its own history. In 1959, the Chamber of Commerce constructed a small A-frame building as a tourist hospitality and information center there. Upon construction, it became city property and was leased by the city to the Chamber of Commerce. There was an added stipulation, however, that the Chamber was to remove the A-frame upon termination of the lease and to restore the land as a park. By the early 1990s, the building was out of code and



*Christopher Columbus Powning
(1852–1898)*

in need of costly repairs. There was talk of moving the structure, but the cost was prohibitive—it was demolished and the small area of land was returned to its original stipulated use as public land.

Today what remains of Powning Square occupies a small area across State Street to the south. The park contains various war memorials, as well as an impressive statue of General Jesse Reno, our city's namesake. On Memorial Day, May 29, 2006 "the new" Powning Park was dedicated—138 years after the naming of the town. Though tiny, the park, now known as Powning Veterans Memorial Park, still provides a small amount of green space amid the concrete and asphalt of South Virginia Street, and serves as a namesake reminder of that first public park.



*Sign in Powning Veterans Memorial Park,
2009. Photo courtesy of Debbie Hinman.*

The Powning Addition

From the time the first city lots were auctioned off on May 9, 1868, Reno residential neighborhoods began to spring up, beginning in the city core and radiating outward. Most of these subdivisions, or "additions," as they were commonly known, bore the name of their developer. In June of 1888, Powning's Addition touted large lots, "perfect sewerage," wide alleys and claimed to be a "healthy location and safe from fire." The Addition's north/south boundaries were the Central Pacific railroad tracks to the river and the east/west boundaries were Arlington (then Chestnut) to Keystone Avenue.

The early architecture of Powning's Addition was largely of the Queen Anne style, a late Victorian design. This was mostly a working class neighborhood and the majority of the homes were of moderate size. According to *A Walk Through Time*, construction in the neighborhood slowed in the 1890s due to an economic depression. This lag in growth was only temporary and it wasn't long before other farsighted developers and entrepreneurs began investing in unimproved land throughout the city. Powning's Addition became an attractive location for them. One such developer was W. R. Gilbert.

In a paper on "Gilbert's Rearrangement of Powning's Addition," Cindy Ainsworth writes, "Reno experienced a significant building boom from 1900 through 1910 due primarily to the mining activity in the southern Nevada towns of Goldfield and Tonopah. The town developed into a transportation hub and delivered agricultural and manufactured goods to these southern mining areas. Many of the high profile mine owners' families lived in Reno along with the laborers responsible for the manufactured goods."

When new home construction resumed in Powning's Addition, a new style of home was in evidence—the Craftsman bungalow. This was a very popular and appropriate home style for Reno; the low profile and overhanging roof style, usually covering a wide front porch, was a practical home for the Reno climate. Most of these homes were constructed of brick supplied by

Powning: Family, Park and Addition (continued)

several local brickyards. Many of these brick bungalows in Powning's Addition were built or purchased by Reno's growing Italian community. A small garden provided necessities and many had basements where wine was regularly produced and stored.

In addition to the residential component of Powning's Addition, businesses sprang up there, primarily along Second Street, in response to the advent of the Lincoln Highway, just two blocks north.

Today Powning's Addition remains a diverse sector of the city with much of the commercial elements of the area changing almost daily, while a great number of the original homes remain, with their lawns and large shade trees. You can walk the blocks of Powning's Addition and still experience the flavor of an early Reno neighborhood.

The Conservation District

It is because of the history contained in Powning's Addition, amid the lovely setting of the Truckee River, and the architectural integrity of its homes that HRPS President Felvia Belaustegui and HRPS Administrator Cindy Ainsworth first embarked upon their neighborhood survey. Along with the necessary historic research into the origins of the area begun by Belaustegui back in the late 1990s while researching the neighborhood for her master's thesis, the pair painstakingly catalogued and photographed each significant property. At that time, they envisioned nominating Powning's Addition as a National Register Historic District. While many residents of the neighborhood supported this goal, others had concerns about the restrictive nature of Historic Register property. The survey, completed in 2008, is serving an important new purpose.

In 2006, the City of Reno began working in cooperation with the Historical Resources Commission (HRC) to establish city-wide preservation policies. The "Historic Plan" was developed through a lengthy public involvement process. This Historic Plan was approved



129 Bell St. in Powning's Addition, a good example of adaptive reuse of a historic Queen Anne home. Photo courtesy of Cindy Ainsworth

in 2008 by the Reno City Council and other governing commissions.


A part of the Historic Plan provides guidelines for establishing Conservation Districts, a new concept in Reno. Described as "a geographically definable area that conveys a distinct character that demonstrates its history and development patterns," a Conservation District provides a method for achieving preservation without the regulations of a traditional historic district.

In the words of the Historic Plan, "The establishment of Districts throughout the city increases public awareness, education, and visibility of Reno's historic resources and brings greater appreciation of the resources. These districts have the potential to create a greater sense of community and to create economic benefits for the area especially when linked with other areas and/or programs."

The most attractive feature of a Conservation District to property owners in the area is that it imposes no regulatory requirements other than those currently required through zoning. Yet the designation will enhance the cohesiveness of the community, particularly when the unique signage, lighting and street signs begin appearing throughout the District. With design assistance by Cindy Ainsworth, street signs are now in the process of

being created by the City of Reno and will bear the street name and the Powning Conservation District designation, along with a unique identifying graphic of a small Craftsman Bungalow, the most prevalent architecture of the Addition. As funds become available, entrance markers and corner monuments may also define the District.

Locals have long admired some of the more significant properties of Powning's Addition, such as the McKinley Arts & Culture Center (formerly McKinley Park Elementary School) and the Lear Theater (formerly the First Church of Christ, Scientist) but there are many smaller gems contained in the area that will now garner recognition with the creation of the Powning Conservation District.

For those of you unfamiliar with this neighborhood, take the time to stroll through some of its small streets, and pause to appreciate the unique and varied architecture and large trees. Use your mind's eye to see the industrious Italians creating their garden patches, and to hear the shouts of children playing in the schoolyard of McKinley Park. Listen very closely and you may hear the faint clip-clop of horse hooves as carriages move slowly down "the aristocratic Riverside Avenue Driveway," with occupants enjoying a Sunday ride through the new Addition. 

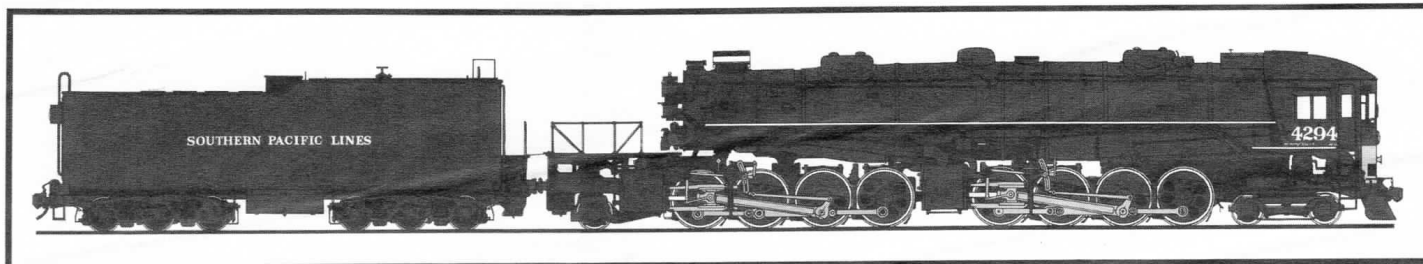
Information for this article came from: News articles from back issues of the *Reno Evening Gazette* and *Nevada State Journal*; a paper entitled "Powning Cousins" by Margaret E. Rockenbeck; the City of Reno Historic Plan; a City of Reno Inter-Office Memorandum entitled "Powning Park A-Frame," dated 3/25/1993; HRPS publication *A Walk Through Time*, 2004; a paper entitled "Gilbert's Rearrangement of Powning's Addition" by Cindy Ainsworth.

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

Southern Pacific's 4-8-8-2 Cab Forward Locomotive

by Lloyd Shanks, HRPS and National Auto Museum member

Photos from HRPS member Larry Marran's collection



SOUTHERN PACIFIC - CAB FORWARD

Beginning in the early 1900s and continuing into the mid-1950s, the residents of Reno were accustomed to seeing trains entering town pulled by a steam locomotive that looked like it was running backward. Actually, it was a uniquely designed "cab-forward" locomotive.

Reno's early growth was the direct result of its location on the main line of the Central Pacific Railroad, the western half of the nation's first transcontinental railroad. The historic route from Omaha, Nebraska to Sacramento, California ran west of Omaha on the Union Pacific. When the Central Pacific expanded their lines in California, it was renamed the Southern Pacific (SP). Sparks was an "SP division point," where train crews were changed and locomotives were serviced. Reno was important because it was the interchange point with the Virginia and Truckee Railroad, which supplied the booming mining operations in Virginia City and the capital in Carson City.

Added to the traffic of mining equipment and supplies that passed

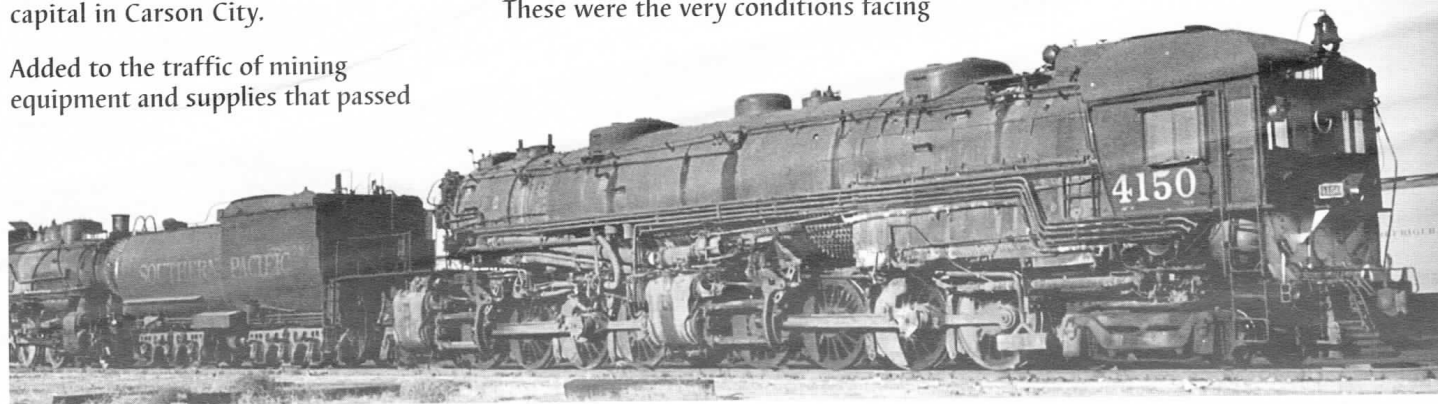
through Reno, was virtually all the redwood lumber favored for construction of many of Reno's historic homes. This lumber came from sawmills in northwestern California being served by the Northwestern Pacific Railroad (NWP). The NWP interchanged railcars with the SP at Schellville, on the NWP's Sonoma, California branch. The lumber arrived at Reno on flatcars, and could be either spotted at a lumber yard with a spur track or on one of the railroad's "team tracks" where unloading was done by hand onto wagons pulled by a team of horses.

Carload shipments from California destined for Reno had to traverse the Sierra over Donner Pass, a route with steep grades, numerous tunnels and wooden snow sheds. When trains passed through a long tunnel or shed, the noxious exhaust smoke and combustion gases caused breathing problems for locomotive crews, especially when the locomotives were operating at maximum effort. These were the very conditions facing

crews from Roseville, California to Reno, Nevada.

Prior to development of the cab-forward, multiple steam locomotives were required to tackle the twenty-five percent grades over Donner Pass. In order to eliminate strain on the cars in the front of the trains, "helper engines" were spaced about every thirty cars. This made very difficult breathing conditions for train crews and masks and compressed air cylinders were required when operating through the tunnels and snow sheds. What was needed was a single locomotive powerful enough to pull these trains with the crew located in front of the engine.

In 1910, Southern Pacific purchased a number of the largest steam locomotives available at the time and they operated these in reverse. These engines proved both slow and hard to maintain, so the railroad's chief engineers designed an even larger



Cab Forward Locomotive (continued)



steam locomotive with a closed cab located forward of the firebox and smoke stacks. This placed the crews in front of the smoke produced by the engine.

This unique locomotive was built for them by the Baldwin Locomotive Works and was classified as a "4-8-8-2 Articulated Consolidation." The 4-8-8-2 designation represents the total number of wheels under the locomotive and the placement thereof. The cab-forward had a two-axle "truck" with four small wheels directly under the cab, sixteen huge driving wheels under the boiler and a single-axle trailing truck with two small wheels at the rear of the engine. The new design was essentially a


reverse of the Union Pacific's huge "Yellowstone" 4-8-8-2 locomotive.

The new locomotive was a success and very popular with the train crews. Between 1928 and 1944, Baldwin built 195 of these exclusively for the Southern Pacific. Although these trains left Roseville and arrived in Reno pulled by a single cab-forward, helper engines were placed just ahead of the caboose in order to handle the steepest grade between Colfax and the summit at Norden.

The cab-forwards were generally used only for freight service over the Sierra. They saw heavy use during the Second World War and they were also used for troop trains between Ogden, Utah (the interchange with the Union

Pacific) and Camp Stoneman in Pittsburg, California.

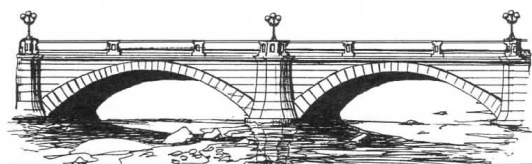
The combined weight of a cab-forward locomotive and tender was over a million pounds, and they literally shook the ground along the tracks when passing at full speed. Although they only had a top speed of fifty-six miles per hour, these engines put on an awesome display of power. These truly unique steam locomotives became obsolete when the Southern Pacific switched to diesel-electric locomotives in the mid-1950s.

A cab-forward is on display at the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento, since it represents the Southern Pacific's heritage. 

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS OF THE CAB-FORWARD BALDWIN AC DESIGN

Type: 4-8-8-2 Mallet System	Driver diameter: 63 inches
Motor: 4 single expansive cylinders	Cylinder size: 24 in. x 32 in.
Boiler working pressure: 241 - 250 psi	Tractive effort: 124,000 lbs.
Water Supply: 21,900 gallons	Fuel Oil Supply: 6,400 gallons
Total weight of engine: 657,900 lbs.	Speed: 56 miles per hour
Total weight of engine and tender: 1,051,200 lbs.	

REMINDER: All Membership Renewals Due July 1, 2009



Historic Reno PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Historic Preservation Month May 2009 Walking Tours

Tour cost is \$10 per person, free to HRPS members. Walks generally last from 1½ to 2 hours. No dogs, please. Reservations are required and space is limited. Please call 747-4478 for information and reservations or go to www.historicreno.org. HRPS is dedicated to preserving and promoting historic resources in the Truckee Meadows through education, advocacy and leadership.

Saturday, May 2
10:00 a.m. **NEWLANDS NEIGHBORHOOD** - Enjoy an architectural walk through one of Reno's oldest and most prestigious neighborhoods. Meet at My Favorite Muffin, 340 California Avenue. Tour guide: Scott Gibson.

Tuesday, May 5
6:00 p.m. **WELLS AVENUE NEIGHBORHOOD** - Take a stroll through a working class neighborhood along the path of the Wells Avenue streetcar, across the V&T tracks and past the homes of the "Thoma Street Gang." Meet at Southside School Annex, Sinclair & Liberty Streets. Tour guide: Mark Taxer.

Saturday, May 9
10:00 a.m. **MONROE STREET** - 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 homes. Meet at the corner of Monroe and Manor Drives. Tour guides: Elsie Newman, Anne Simone.

Tuesday, May 12
6:00 p.m. **UNIVERSITY HISTORIC DISTRICT (CAMPUS)** - Visit Morrill Hall, Mackay School of Mines and the Keck Museum to learn the history of this beautiful campus. Meet at Honor Court, 9th and Center Street. Tour Guide: Jack Hursh.

Saturday, May 16
10:00 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 Guides: Jim and Sue Smith.

Tuesday, May 19
6:00 p.m. **HISTORIC TRUCKEE RIVER WALK** - Take a relaxing stroll along the Truckee River that reveals eclectic architecture grounded by rich political histories and spiced with colorful anecdotes. Meet at McKinley Arts and Cultural Center, 925 Riverside Drive. Tour Guide: Joan Collins.

Saturday, May 23
10:00 a.m. **LITERARY RENO** - Take a Tour of Writing from the "Underbelly." There's more to Reno's literary history than "City of Trembling Leaves!" Reno continues to be a mythical magnet for 'outsider' writers and characters...the misfits, outcasts and seekers. Let your imagination roam as we travel downtown streets encountered by traditional writers like Will James. Robert Laxalt and Joanne deLongchamps, then walk the haunts of contemporary writers such as Bernie Schopen, Willy Vlautin and Susan Palwick. Meet at the Riverside Artist Lofts, 17 S. Virginia. Tour guides: Sharon Honig-Bear and Pat Klos.

Tuesday, May 26
4 p.m.-6 p.m. **NEW WALK! INSIDE DELONGCHAMPS' DOWNTOWN** - Go behind the scenes in some of downtown's most notable buildings designed by Reno's most celebrated architect, Frederic DeLongchamps. Visits to interiors of the historic courthouse, the Downtown Post Office and the Vachina Apartments on California Ave., along with several artist lofts at the Riverside are the tour's highlights. Meet at Washoe County Courthouse front steps. Tour guides: Sharon Honig-Bear and Anne Simone.

Saturday, May 30
10:00 a.m. **NEW WALK! WESTERN ADDITION** - Visit vestiges of one of Reno's earliest residential neighborhoods dating from the mid-1870s. Hear the stories of its early "movers and shakers," such as Fire Chief George Twaddle, businessman Frank Humphrey, and banker Charles Bender and view the varying architectural styles from the Carpenter Gothic Clifford House to the modest brick bungalows of the Smith-Petersen subdivision. Meet at the Northeast Corner of 5th and Washington by JJ's Pie Co. Tour guides: Cindy Ainsworth and Debbie Hinman.

“Literary Reno:” HRPS Members Immortalized in Documentary

By Debbie Hinman

While the term “Literary Reno” may seem like an oxymoron to the uninitiated, Reno has actually long been a popular setting for fiction and the area has produced a surprising number of well-known authors.

HRPS founder Pat Ferraro Klos, who spent many years as a high school English teacher, has long been interested in local fiction and has organized a number of projects to highlight both the literature and writers of Reno and the state of Nevada.

In 2003, HRPS partnered with the Friends of Washoe County Library organization to create a “living history” overview of Literary Reno. Pat worked with “Friends” liaison Sharon Honig-Bear, now a HRPS board member, to organize a walking tour and bus tour, highlighting some of the area’s most famous fictional works and authors. Participants were treated to Chautauqua-like performances from Mella Harmon, as assistant to Clare Booth Luce, and Michelle Basta, as Joanne deLongchamps, as well as readings from Robert Laxalt by Marcelino Ugalde and Walter Van Tilburg Clark by two readers: Neal Ferguson and Clark’s nephew, Jim Santini.

In January of 2007, Pat conducted a program for the HRPS monthly meeting entitled “Reading Reno.” A group of local “readers” read favorite selections of local literature to overwhelming approval from HRPS members and guests.

Spurred on by the popularity of these events, Pat again teamed with Sharon to develop a Literary Reno walking tour, which debuted in July of 2008. The two women, friends since they met on one of Pat’s original Reno historic walking tours, even before the advent of HRPS, selected modern works from popular but, in some cases, little-known local authors. They led participants through the streets of downtown Reno on a

warm summer evening, stopping at strategic locations to read from the sometimes gritty, but always colorful, novels. The two have very different literary tastes, which only added to the variety of the readings and diversity of points of view of the presented works.

One participant on this walking tour happened to be local filmmaker, Gwen Clancy. Gwen is well-known locally for

as a teaching tool for local high and middle school classrooms and for school and public library collections. It can be used as an outreach tool by the RSCVA and we already have interest in showing it publicly to community groups, civic organizations, conferences, etc.”

Half of the funding for the project came from the Nevada Department of Cultural Affairs, but matching

funds needed to be found.

Experienced grant writer Sharon went to work and presented the case for funding to the HRPS Board, who agreed to partial funding of the project. Sharon then applied for Community Pride grants from local Neighborhood Advisory Boards. The project received the remainder of the required funding from Ward 1 and “Old Northwest Reno” Ward 5.

HRPS members will have the opportunity to view the documentary at its public premiere at the HRPS Movie Night, Wednesday, May 20. It will be shown as a prelude to the featured film *Five Against the House*.



HRPS Tour Guides Sharon Honig-Bear (left) and Pat Ferraro Klos (right at microphone) on July, 2008 Literary Reno walking tour. Photo courtesy of Sarah Honig-Bear.


producing the *Exploring Nevada* film series in conjunction with the Nevada Department of Cultural Affairs. Gwen immediately saw the potential for a documentary featuring some of these literary selections by expanding the scope of Reno locales to historic sites throughout the city. Pat and Sharon agreed to participate in the project and the video went into production that fall.

“The documentary, *Literary Reno: Talking the Walk*, promotes tourism and an appreciation for locals about our history and culture,” Sharon explained, adding, “The show will run regularly on 15 PBS affiliates around Nevada and parts of California. The program will also be on the Nevada Department of Cultural Affairs website.”

When asked about its applications to education, Sharon responded, “It serves

“Literary Reno,” the walking tour, will be given on Saturday, May 23 at 10 a.m.

Sharon says she is very pleased with the way the film turned out. “Reno has never looked more beautiful than it does on this film,” she claims. “The weather was perfect and the fall colors, spectacular.”

HRPS is fortunate to have such dedicated and talented people as Pat Klos, Sharon Honig-Bear and Gwen Clancy among its membership. Their ideas and contributions are, in part, why our organization continues to grow and our walking tours and monthly meetings fill to capacity. We would like to thank our growing membership for its support and enthusiasm—we hope to see you “at the movies” in May! 

The History (or Lore) of the Monumental No. 6 Firehouse Bell

by Kim Henrick

The Fourth of July, 1876, was an exciting day on the Comstock. As the parade snaked through Virginia City in celebration of our country's 100th birthday, two young firemen at the Monumental Engine Company No. 6 Firehouse, excited by the whistles and bells of the noisy parade as it passed by, pulled so vigorously on the rope of their firehouse bell that they caused the bell to crack.

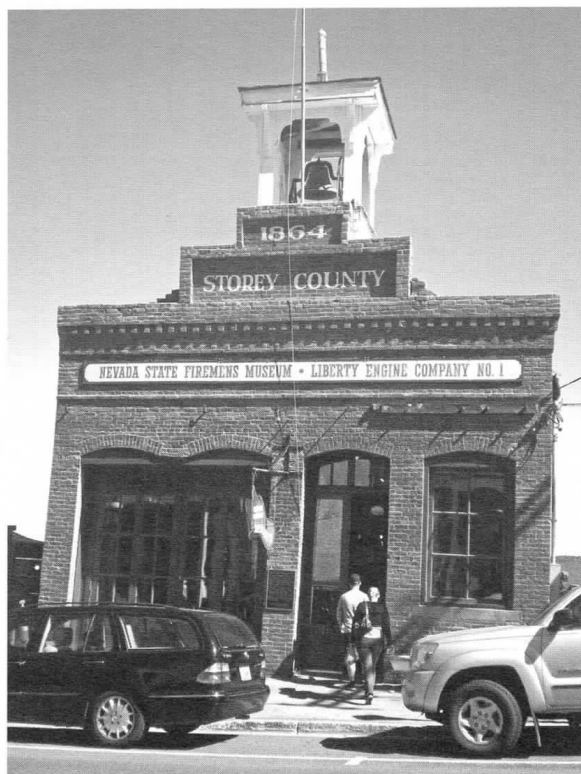
This was to be the simple opening to a short, straightforward story about a damaged historic Comstock firehouse bell, the casting of the replacement bell and the final home of the Monumental No. 6 bell at the Nevada Historical Society.

The inspiration for the article came from an article in the *Reno Evening Gazette (REG)* dated December 4, 1939. In the article, 82-year old Harry J. Gosse—longtime Comstock and Reno resident and manager/owner from 1896 until 1922 of the fabulous “chatauesque-style” Riverside Hotel in Reno (see *FootPrints V10, No. 3*)—reminisces about the early history of the bell. To complete my research, I visited the bell at the Comstock Firemen’s Museum in Virginia City (where the bell is on loan from the Nevada Historical Society), took some photographs of the bell and proceeded to write a one-page summary of Harry’s recollections.

Well, this article could just as easily have been titled, “Why I hate Ancestry.com™,” or “Recounting History and Knowing History Are Two Different Things.”

My sister is an amateur historian and while doing an online computer search in the Ancestry.com™ database, she came across another article in the *REG* dated May 29, 1914, concerning the Monumental No. 6 bell. The article, “Famous Old Fire Bell Is Unearthed,” tells how the day before, on May 28, the old tarnished and rusted Monumental No. 6 bell was found “underneath

a pile of rubbish and junk brought from Virginia City when Alex McCone removed his foundry and machine shop to Reno and established the Nevada Engineering Works....” According to the article, the apparently useless bell was brought to the attention of George Wingfield and he “laughingly proffered a silver dollar in payment,” to P. F. Bragg who was Mr. McCone’s successor.



Nevada State Firemen's Museum
Liberty Engine Company No. 1
Virginia City, Nevada
Photo courtesy Kim Henrick.

That same evening of May 28, at his Riverside Hotel, Harry Gosse heard of the bell’s purchase earlier that day by Mr. Wingfield and proceeded to tell some of his Riverside Hotel guests about his part in the bell’s history—how he “pulled the bell rope so long and loudly...” the bell “...was cracked and rendered worthless.”

Now let’s jump forward to Harry’s 82-year-old memories, in 1939, of the bell’s early history. After the bell was cracked, a new bell was needed for the

Virginia City firehouse so, according to Gosse, “...Mackay and Fair each sent a bar of bullion to be cast. John Kintie, if I recollect aright, was the brass molder at Tyrrell and Cummings’ foundry, later purchased by Mr. McCone, and to him was given the duty of casting the bell. When the melt began, a crowd gathered and silver and gold coins were showered into the pot. The exact worth of the bell intrinsically could be discovered only by a weight and assay test, but it will run into pretty high figures. As a relic of the old Comstock it is invaluable, and I cannot understand how it happened to get lost when the Monumental No. 6 house was dismantled.”

Well, Harry’s memory wasn’t too far off, really. He remembered that a “John Kintie” was given the responsibility for casting the new bell. Local historian Steven Frady, in his book *Red Shirts and Leather Helmets*, tells us a John Kennis “bossed the job of casting the new bell.” The names are very close and Harry shouldn’t be held too tightly to details of an event that happened 63 years earlier. And, possibly, the reporter didn’t hear the name right.

Oh yes, one other minor thing, Steven Frady also writes that the original Monumental No. 6 bell was damaged during a parade on New Year’s Eve of 1875, to ring in the centennial year. Harry recalled the parade on the Fourth of July, 1876, in celebration of the centennial date. Frady’s date appears to be the

correct one as the *Territorial Enterprise (TE)* reported on January 15, 1876, that a new Monumental No. 6 bell was recast the day before by John Kennis. So, Harry was off by seven months; is that such a big deal?

Now according to the earlier 1914 *REG* article, when George Wingfield was asked what he would “accept for the bell, he answered carelessly, ‘Oh, about \$150.’ But then the story of its casting was related to him and he raised the price to \$500.” No one should be

Monumental No. 6 Firehouse Bell (continued)

surprised that George would want to make a little money (or a lot of money, as the case may be) on the old bell. U. M. Slater, who gave the dinner party at the Riverside Hotel at which Harry Gosse entertained the guests with his bell story, encouraged Wingfield (as did the other Slater guests) to donate the bell to the Nevada Historical Society. To his credit, George "made a free tender of the valuable relic," and the reporter writes, "Captain Gosse will keep it in his possession until July 4, when it will be turned over with appropriate ceremonies as Mr. Wingfield's gift to the society."

Whoa. Wait just a minute. In Harry Gosse's recollections in 1939, when he was 82 years old, he made no mention of George Wingfield's part in the bell donation. In fact, the reporter relays Harry's story about the bell found at Alex McCone's Reno foundry like this: "There it was discovered by Gosse, who obtained possession of the bell after buying 'just a few drinks for the boys' " I was beginning to see *cracks* in Harry's story at this point. His claim to have cracked the bell back in 1876 was probably true but he never mentioned the bell being purchased by George Wingfield in 1914.

I thought at this point in my research I had better examine the plaque attached to the bell stand: "This fire bell from the Monumental Engine Company No. 6, Virginia City, Nevada, was said to have been recast from the metal of one hundred and fifty trade dollars and an earlier bell cracked during the 1875 Centennial Celebration. Gift of Harry Gosse." Clear as a bell (sorry)—there was Harry's name on the little plaque.

To put the ownership issue to rest, I contacted Sheryl Hayes-Zorn, the Nevada Historical Society's Registrar, to see what information was entered

on the donor card. Unfortunately, after many hours of searching, no donor card could be found for the bell.

A photo published in the *REG* on Nov. 8, 1937, shows people posing with the bell at the Nevada Historical Society. Sadly, the article says the bell was moulded by John Kinneart (the third



*Monumental Engine Company No. 6 Bell.
Photo courtesy of
Nevada Historical Society.*


spelling of this name that I found) and the bell was cast in 1877 (not 1875) for the "Monumental Engine Company, No. 61." (Company No. 61?)

At this point I'm pretty sure that *someone* thought Harry donated the bell, unless of course Harry personally had the plaque made, giving credit to himself for the donation.

As you can see, my research on this bell produced more questions than answers. Did Wingfield and Gosse have a falling

out, or did time, like the casting of a new bell, recast Harry's memories in a more favorable personal light for his precious Monumental No. 6 bell? Did Harry purchase the bell from Wingfield at some point and rightly donate the bell in his own name? When did Harry actually donate the bell to the NHS? Did Harry wait for Wingfield to die and then donate the bell knowing that George was beyond complaining?

The lesson of this article soon became less about an old firehouse bell and more about the research process used in revealing our past. In time I hope to answer all my questions about this old bell, but for now, since I promised again to deliver this article to the editor of *FootPrints*, I have tried to share with my fellow historical enthusiasts a glimpse of the dilemma of recounting a history that we can never fully know. In every *FootPrints* article our editorial staff works hard to produce interesting, well-researched articles, but we are always constrained by time, old memories (not ours but those of our subjects), loose reporting, old rivalries, lost records, cold weather, hot weather, and the sad fact that pay for newsletter writing is lousy. Oh, did I mention a crack-the-whip editor?

After researching this bell story, the only thing I am absolutely sure of is whenever a Harry and a George get together, there are bound to be some sort of shenanigans. I know, my father was a Harry and my uncle was a George. 

Sources for this article are mentioned in the article.

Kim Henrick is a volunteer at the Nevada Historical Society. She is a member of the HRPS Editorial Staff. She is also known for a great sense of humor.

REMINDER: All Membership Renewals Due July 1, 2009

From Your HRPS President

Winter is traditionally the season when things slow down and some plant and animal species are dormant, but there is nothing dormant about our HRPS Board this season! We had a very productive strategic planning session in February, and the Board subcommittees are hard at work on their various projects.

The Education Subcommittee, with members Jerry Fenwick, Barbara Courtney, Phyllis Cates and Felvia Belaustegui, have been busy with a wonderful project that will expose fourth-grade students to Reno's colorful local history. Jerry has made use of his extensive photo collection to create a DVD of some of Reno's finest historic buildings. He has also produced a script to accompany it and, with the assistance of his



*Felvia Belaustegui, HRPS President.
Photo by Debbie Hinman.*

co-members, the script has been fine-tuned to appeal to students and will hopefully awaken their interest in local history. The pilot program will take place at Peavine Elementary School in the near future. As an enhancement, HRPS will be funding the rental of buses,

following the in-class program, to take the students on a tour of the city, where they can see some of these historic sites for themselves. The committee would like to thank Principal Whitener for his willingness to work with us and his enthusiasm for the project.

The issue of the replacement of the Virginia Street Bridge is still ongoing, and I would like to encourage our members to become involved and allow us to have a say in the design of the new bridge. The public information meetings are held at the McKinley Arts & Culture Center on a regular basis. Meeting notices appear in the *Reno Gazette-Journal* and on the City of Reno website. Hope to see you there!

— Felvia Belaustegui, HRPS President

HRPS at the Movies, Wednesday May 20, 7:00 pm *5 Against the House*

Plan to attend our special showing of *5 Against the House* at 7:00 pm on Wednesday, May 20, 2009 at the Sands Regency Casino and Hotel. Filmed in downtown Reno, this b&w 1955 film is about four college friends who plan the perfect heist of Harolds Club. Other movie locations include the University of Nevada, the train station and the old Harolds Club parking lot which featured an interesting method of retrieving cars. Kim Novak, Brian Keith, William Conrad and Guy Madison star in the film.

According to the book, *Nevada Filmography, Nearly 600 Works Made in the State, 1897 Through 2000* by Gary DuVal, most of the movie was filmed in Reno except the casino robbery itself. Harolds Club could not afford to close for filming so the shooting moved to a Hollywood sound stage. The casino was duplicated right down to the covered wagon and rows of antique mining camp pianos and music boxes. Actors were sent to the Harolds Club school used to train casino personnel, to learn how to look and act professionally.

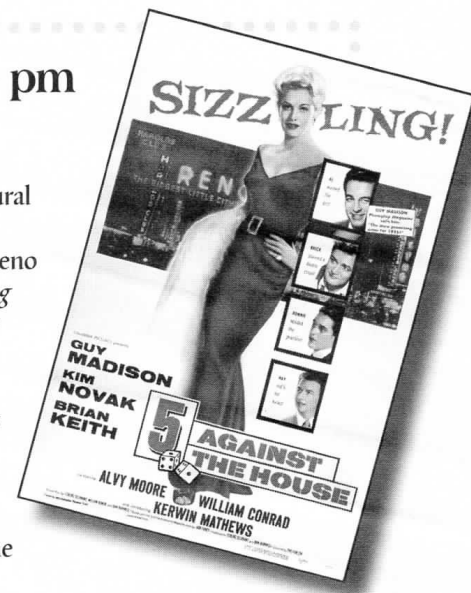
During HRPS at the Movies, we will be debuting a new half-hour documentary produced by Gwen Clancy for the

Nevada Department of Cultural Affairs with matching funds from HRPS and the City of Reno entitled *Literary Reno: Talking the Walk*. This documentary reveals how Reno has been portrayed in literature, connecting authors' writings to local buildings and sites. Tour guides Pat Ferraro Klos and Sharon Honig-Bear show a picturesque Reno...the antidote to *Reno 911!*

So, plan to join HRPS for a fun night at the movies. Doors open at 6:30 pm and the film will show at 7:00 pm at the Sands, 345 N. Arlington Avenue, Reno. 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 Regency Casino and Hotel for making this event possible.

— Cindy Ainsworth, HRPS Administrator



REMINDER: All Membership Renewals Due July 1, 2009

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 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) _____

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

- | | | |
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Additional donation: _____

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

**FOR OFFICE
USE ONLY**

PAID: ☐ Check ☐ Cash Amount: _____ Membership # _____ Renewal Date: _____

RV 04.07.08/FO-DCD



Powning Park, with its shade trees, is visible on the left of the picture as it runs north along South Virginia Street. The Riverside Hotel is at the very left of the picture. The State Building will replace the structure front and center in 1926. Photo courtesy of Jerry Fenwick.



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SPRING 2009 PROGRAMS

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. See page 6 for walking tour descriptions and meeting locations.

Saturday, May 2, 10:00 a.m. Newlands Neighborhood Walking Tour

Tuesday, May 5, 6:00 p.m. Wells Avenue Neighborhood Walking Tour

Saturday, May 9, 10:00 a.m. Monroe Street Walking Tour

Tuesday, May 12, 6:00 p.m. University Historic District Walking Tour

Saturday, May 16, 10:00 a.m. Upper Ralston/Northern Italy Walking Tour

Tuesday, May 19, 6:00 p.m. Historic Truckee River Walk

Wednesday, May 20, 7:00 p.m. HRPS at the Movies presents *5 Against the House*, a 1955 b&w film made in Reno about the perfect heist of Harolds Club. Also showing is the premier of *Literary Reno: Talking the Walk*, featuring Pat Ferraro Klos and Sharon Honig-Bear. Admission: \$8.00. (See articles page 7 and 10 for details.)

Saturday, May 23, 10:00 a.m. Literary Reno Walking Tour

Tuesday, May 26, 4:00 p.m. Inside Delongchamps Downtown Walking Tour

Saturday, May 30, 10:00 a.m. Western Addition Walking Tour

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