

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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543 Ridge Street Receives HRC Award The Ginsburg/Cassity Home

by Cindy Ainsworth

In May of 2009, the City of Reno Historical Resources Commission presented the Ginsburg/Cassity home at 543 Ridge Street with the Residential Award for "outstanding renovation, restoration and/or preservation of a single family home or multi-family residential building." You can see the home on HRPS Mansions on the Bluff and DeLongchamps Residential tours and can often catch proud owner Mike Cassity puttering about in the lovely yard.

The picturesque charm of the lovely brick home at 543 Ridge Street in the beautiful Rio Vista Heights subdivision beckons to all who drive or walk past it. Elegantly understated, it was built for the prominent Ginsburg family (see article page 3-4) in 1927-28. The Ginsburg family occupied the home from 1928 until the mid-1950s.

Other DeLongchamps' Tudor-style homes would grace this neighborhood populated by many of Reno's prominent business families. Edward Chism, founder of Chism Ice Cream, built his Tudor-style home down the street at 575 Ridge Street.

Through the years 543 Ridge Street was owned by many other well-known Reno families, such as Hans Lugin-Buehl and his wife Aimee, and attorney and state senator Peter Echeverria.

The Lugin-Buehls purchased the home from Anna Ginsburg in 1955 and appear to have lived there until the late 1970s. The couple owned a gift store located in the Riverside Hotel in the 50s and 60s, offering for sale, in the words of the 1955 local phone directory: "Appointments for gracious living, china, crystal, linens, silver." Perhaps they catered to the newlywed

client or the many wealthy divorcées staying at the Riverside.

The house was then rented for many years and eventually purchased by Peter Echeverria. His many achievements and stories could fill another issue of *FootPrints*. The Echeverria family trust donated the home to the University of Nevada's Basque Studies Department. The proceeds from the sale of the home benefited the Quasi Endowment Fund to further support

Basque studies—what a fitting tribute to Peter Echeverria. With the donation and endowment, it is also fitting to note that this historic home is contributing to the further study of Nevada.

It is an understatement to say that the quaint, Frederic DeLongchamps-designed Ridge Street Tudor Revival was in a "shabby chic" condition when Joannie and Mike Cassity purchased the home from the University in 2005. The home stood vacant for some time before it was placed for sale and was in a pretty sad state of disrepair.

Overgrown garden vines covered most of the house. The vines had worked their

way through the roof (which was pulling up) and were growing in the attic! Neighborhood raccoons found the home and basement a cozy place to live. Tiny footprints could be seen on all the window sills. A rusty bathroom tub had sunk at least four inches. Ugly window screens were bolted to the beautiful original windows. When Mike first saw the home he said it was "very scary." But this did not deter the Cassitys. On the contrary, they looked beyond these imperfections, which were mostly cosmetic, and embraced the challenge of working on the home to restore it to its former glory.



*The Ginsburg/Cassity Home at 543 Ridge Street, a classic DeLongchamps' Tudor Revival style home.
Photo courtesy of Cindy Ainsworth.*

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543 Ridge Street — Ginsburg/Cassity Home (continued)

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The Cassitys were living in California when the home came on the market, but their daughter, a Reno resident, kept an eye on the sale of the property. The Cassitys jumped at the opportunity to buy the home when escrow fell through on a previous buyer's offer.

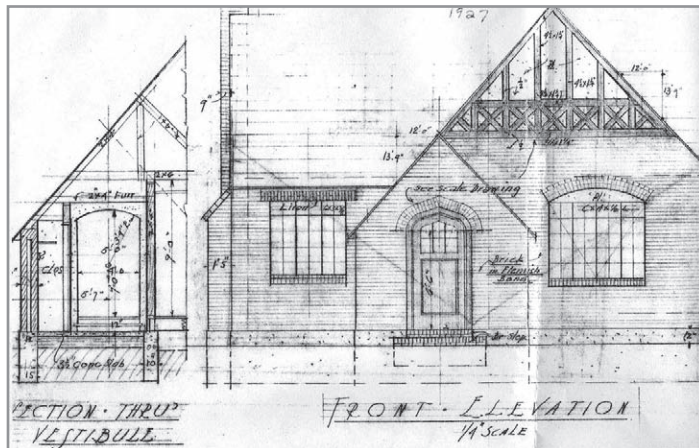
What impressed the Cassitys was the fact that the interior had not been gutted and modified the way many other older homes have been. It is believed that the interior layout has remained the same throughout the years. Beautiful arches grace the interior entry ways. This arch design is even echoed in the brick fireplace pattern. Delightful quarter circle windows on either side of the chimney appear to wink at you. The Cassitys have no intention of removing the original windows. However, the ugly window screens are gone, replaced with period-style shades. Often referring to the original DeLongchamps plans, they have made it a point to maintain the 1920s feel and originality of the home.

The Cassitys have lovingly worked on the home, doing much of the labor themselves. Mike has a woodshop in the basement (along with a wonderful wine cellar) and recently built book cases in the front living room that borrow details from original built-ins located elsewhere in the home. For the benefit of his wife Joannie, Mike also added the side window trellis that appears on the original DeLongchamps' drawings.

The Cassitys are thrilled to be a part of the Ridge Street neighborhood and have come to love Reno. Mike noted that they really wanted to participate in Reno's downtown redevelopment renaissance and feel that their rehabilitated home has contributed to that cause. HRPS thanks the Cassitys for their commitment to historic preservation and congratulates them on a job well done. 🏠

I would like to thank Mike and Joannie Cassity for sharing their story about this wonderful home. Other information for this article came from Anne Simone and Arline Laffery's extensive research on Frederic DeLongchamps and the 543 Ridge Street home; various Polk's Reno City Directories and Nevada Phone Books; Washoe County Assessor office information; DeLongchamps Architectural Archive, Special Collections, UNR; 2004 winter issue of the University of Nevada's *Silver and Blue*.

Cindy Ainsworth is a charter member and past president of HRPS. Currently she is the HRPS Administrator. She serves on the City of Reno Historical Resources Commission.



*Original architectural drawing of 543 Ridge Street
by Frederic DeLongchamps.
Courtesy of the Special Collections Department,
University of Nevada, Reno.*



*Joannie and Mike Cassity inside their Ridge Street home.
Photo courtesy of Cindy Ainsworth.*



*Anna and Harry Ginsburg and grandchildren. Standing, Mimi, sitting,
Janice, David and Roger. Photo courtesy of David Ginsburg.*

The Ginsburg Family Businesses

by Cindy Ainsworth

Harry Ginsburg was a successful jeweler and a community leader. For many years he took an active interest in civic affairs and was one of the organizers of Temple Emanu-El and an active member of B'nai B'rith. The newspapers noted through the years that many meetings of B'nai B'rith were hosted by Anna, at their 543 Ridge Street home.

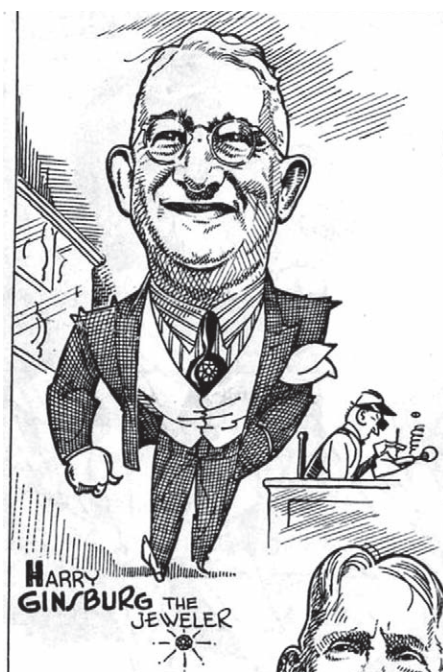
David Ginsburg, former HRPS board member and Harry Ginsburg's grandson, fondly remembers many large family Jewish holiday gatherings at the home. David commented that, with kids being kids, Harry would chase the grandkids out of the sitting room, complaining that he was trying to listen to the news on the radio.

Harry Ginsburg was born in 1882 in Kovna, Russia (now located in independent Lithuania) and was educated in Russian public schools. He married Anna Epp in 1903 and had three children, Leo, Sam and Ed. Interestingly, according to the 1949-50 *Who's Who in Nevada*, in 1904 Harry was a watchmaker to the Czar's family. The Ginsburgs immigrated to the United States in 1905, first living in Denver and then moving to San Rafael, California where, according to the *Reno Evening Gazette*, Harry established the largest jewelry store in the area.

In 1915, Harry and his family moved to Reno and took over the stock and lease of the Marymont Jewelry Store. An article stated that he "proposes to add many of the largest novelties in the jewelry line." His specialty was watch repair and manufacture of custom-designed jewelry.

That store was located at the corner of Virginia and Second streets and at the time was one of the largest jewelry stores in Reno. The store was originally established by Frank Golden, owner of the Golden Hotel, before the turn of the century. In 1918, Ginsburg moved the store to 133 North Virginia St. where it became one of the best-known jewelry firms in Nevada. Over the years, the store was expanded and Ginsburg added a custom jewelry design department. A 1923 ad stated that the store was "equal to any shop on the coast."

Many remember the Park Lane clock that stood in the center of the mall and became the symbol for the shopping center. The clock originally was located in front of the Ginsburg Jewelry Company at 133 North Virginia. Popular between the mid-nineteenth century and into the 1930s, these street symbols not only served to advertise businesses but were city timepieces since most people did not wear watches. At one point, there were two "dueling" Virginia Street jewelry store clocks. The Ginsburg clock stood directly across from the Ginsler-Lee Jewelers clock.



*Caricature of Harry Ginsburg from the Lew Hymer book Seen About Town.
Courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society.*

The clock was manufactured by the prominent clock-making company E. Howard Company. While the column and base were made of cast iron, the round head of the Howard clocks was made of wood covered with a thin layer of copper. Many of them are gone today because of wood rot. Originally, the clock was operated by pulleys, but at one point the mechanism was replaced with an electric motor by the well-known Seattle clock maker, Joseph Meyer Company. Many of their Seattle clocks are considered historic landmarks. When the mall closed, the

clock was donated to The City of Reno. Plans include relocating the clock to the downtown redevelopment area.

Harry Ginsburg died in 1954 and his son, Sam, who became a partner with his father in 1928, became the store's owner. Sam was an expert diamond merchant, often traveling the world searching for valuable precious stones to use in his custom designed jewelry. In an article dated 1971, he says, "I arrived in Honolulu from the Far East with \$160,000 worth of sapphires and rubies in my flight bag." At the time, he was the only Nevada member of the National Appraisers Association and was an authority on appraising the value of precious stones of all kinds.

Sam chose to retire and closed the store on December 31, 1971, but he continued to do appraisals and design custom-made jewelry. He stated in an article that he was looking forward to "doing what I want to do." The North Virginia Street building where the jewelry store and other small businesses were located was replaced by the Onslow Casino in the mid-1970s.

The two other Ginsburg sons were equally successful Reno businessmen. Leo founded the popular Home Furniture, Incorporated. Ed later joined as secretary/treasurer. The business was incorporated in 1932 and the original store was located at 119 North Virginia. The Home Furniture business steadily grew and soon the store was too small to adequately handle the ever expanding merchandise.

The opening of the new and modern Home Furniture store in 1941 was an important addition to the Sierra Street business district. Located at the northwest corner of Sierra and First (where the Parking Gallery is located today), the two story building, designed by Lehman Ferris and owned by the Yori Land and Livestock Company, was constructed of brick with terra cotta facing. The building was surrounded by thirteen display windows and twenty-three model rooms graced the interior. The building must have been an impressive sight.

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The Ginsburg Family Businesses (continued)

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The Home Furniture building saw its fair share of disasters. This building was first damaged in the 1957 Sierra Street gas explosion. David Ginsburg remembers all the windows on First Street blew out. The building also survived Reno's major floods in 1950 and in 1955.

Home Furniture was truly a family-run business. After college in 1957, a young David Ginsburg, Leo's son, joined the company and remained with the firm until it was sold in 1971. His dad made sure that he learned the furniture and home furnishing trade first-hand by starting him in the warehouse and then moving him to other departments, including the drapery department.

Twice a year, David would hit the road, often with his dad Leo, to do the furniture buying. This was a common practice among furniture and home furnishing stores. Most of the U.S. furniture manufacturers and factories were located in the southern states. Many of the furniture companies were named after the town they were located in. David would travel to such romantic locales as Bassett, Virginia, and Drexel and Thomasville, North Carolina. Home Furniture had the exclusive northern Nevada distribution rights to many of these fine furniture companies.

As the community expanded so did Home Furniture Inc. A Kiddies Store was located at First and Sierra and the Maple Shop



*People standing in line for the 1961 grand opening of the Home Furniture store at Sierra and Island streets.
Photo courtesy of David Ginsburg.*



1941 Reno Evening Gazette ad for the grand opening of the Home Furniture store at Sierra and First streets.

(maple furniture was the rage during the 1950s) was located on Island Avenue. The Sparks' Home Furniture Thrift Mart featured lower priced and unpainted furniture. The Sparks shop moved twice along B Street. The final Sparks location is now Terrible's Rail City.

But the ultimate home furnishing accomplishment for the Ginsburg family was the building located at Sierra and Island. The store combined the old location home furnishings with the Kiddies Store and Maple Shop. According to a 1960 *Reno*


Evening Gazette article, "This is the first store of its type west of the Rockies to be designed and constructed for a complete showing of home furnishings. The architects have designed with customer service in mind to grant easy access to all displays."

The 80,000 square foot, six-story building was designed by Ralph Berger, AIA, who had also supervised the construction of the new J. C. Penney store on Sierra. The first of its kind in northern Nevada, the construction used the lift slab pre-stressed concrete method. This, according to a

Reno Evening Gazette article, "featured the concrete pouring of floors and ceiling for the entire building at one time then jacking them into position by pneumatic hydraulic method." The concrete floors were then secured to the already constructed steel columns by shear bars.

This unique construction caused quite a stir in downtown Reno. Many "sidewalk superintendents" stopped daily to watch the lift slab process. Amazingly, this method only took 17 days to install six floor slabs and the bottom floor and roof slabs.

The opening of this store in 1961 must have been comparable to the opening of today's new malls. The store featured everything for your home furnishing needs: high-end furniture, draperies, linens, floor coverings, gifts, housewares and appliances. There was even a "hi-fi" shop featuring Roy Kroll's House of Records, "Reno's largest, most complete record shop."

Leo and Ed Ginsburg retired in 1971 and sold the business to their friends and California home furnishing store owners, Bob and Bill Breuner who wanted to enter the northern Nevada market. In 1975, the building was then occupied by Ardan Wholesale Incorporated. Sadly, this unique contemporary building was demolished to make way for the juvenile court building. 

I would like to thank David Ginsburg for sharing his family stories and photos. Other information for this article was obtained from Jerry Fenwick; *Reno Evening Gazette* and *Nevada State Journal* newspapers dating from 1915 to 1975; *Who's Who in Nevada, 1949-50*; Nevada Humanities' Online Nevada Encyclopedia (www.onlinenevada.org) article by Bruce Bledsoe on *Historic Street Clock of Reno*.

Cindy Ainsworth is a charter member and past president of HRPS. Currently she is the HRPS Administrator. She serves on the City of Reno Historical Resources Commission.

Geologic and Natural History Tours in the Reno Area

Published by the Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology (University of Nevada, Reno, 2005)

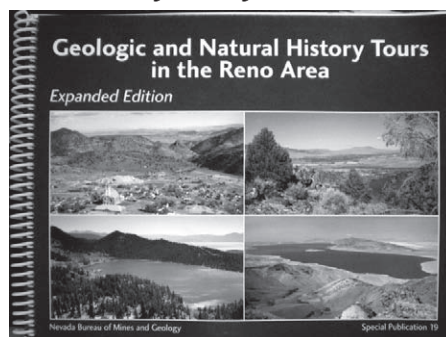
Review by Kim Henrick

There is more to the Reno area's history than old buildings and dead people. Sure, we are all fascinated by those who have gone before us and the structures that sheltered their private, business and social lives, but did you know that those buildings were built near fault lines and volcanic rock on Geiger Grade; under the peaks of the Virginia Range and Carson Range; above geology from "relatively young rocks of Mesozoic and Cenozoic age (from 248 million years ago to the present)"?

Do you know the history of the pine beetle and the damage it can do to the forests of Lake Tahoe? Where were apples grown in the area in the 1860s and 1870s? Knowing the histories of the Virginia and Truckee Railroad, the Pyramid Lake Paiutes, the Last Chance Ditch, and the V-Flumes used during the mining boom to carry timber from the Sierra Nevada to Virginia City can only enhance our understanding of the old buildings and dead people we all love to study.

The only academic-sounding part of this book is the title. Imagine, instead, the title "Reno Area's Fantastic Road Trips," and be ready for a terrific read. The book has a wide format bound with a spiral ring and is perfect for opening at any page and tossing on the car seat next to you as you follow the mile-marker guide through four significant areas nearby:


- Trip 1: Around the Truckee Meadows;
- Trip 2: Virginia City–Carson City–Washoe Valley–Steamboat Hot Springs;
- Trip 3: Reno, Lake Tahoe, Carson City;
- Trip 4: Reno Through the Truckee River Canyon to Pyramid Lake.



Each page is loaded with high-quality photographs (many in color), excellent sketches and well-researched historical and contemporary notes to help you identify important points of interest, whether it be the Steamboat Ditch, the Yellow Jacket Shaft in Virginia City, the American coot (a bird that frequents Washoe Lake and Virginia Lake), Chalk Bluff along West Fourth Street, or the site of an historic sawmill at Incline Village. Who doesn't want to impress their friends with knowledge about the geologic history of Slide Mountain and Mount Rose, our darlings of the Carson Range. Learn about the extensive mining history in the area and see spectacular photographs of our area's bird and plant

life—all through the engaging real time adventure of a road trip. And for those of you only interested in old buildings and dead people, there is plenty of that.

Many talented people were involved in the writing and publishing of this book, too many to mention here, but I want to mention that our own Jack Hursh, HRPS Program Director, designed this beautiful publication and he did not pay me to say this. Its clever and intuitive layout, the striking images and well-written text, and the book's tough road-trip feel, make the book a pleasure to hold. In fact, from now on I think I'm just going to just leave my copy in the car.

In addition to local book stores, this book can be purchased directly from the Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology with this information: *Geologic and Natural History Tours in the Reno Area (Expanded Edition)*, Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology Special Publication 19, \$24.95 plus shipping; phone (775) 682-8766; www.nbmng.unr.edu (click on Publications Sales). For walk-in purchases, please go to 2175 Raggio Parkway, Reno, Nevada, 89512. 

Kim Henrick is a HRPS member and a member of the HRPS Editorial Board. She is a volunteer at the Nevada Historical Society.

Mt. Rose Elementary Centennial Commemoration


HRPS member and Mt. Rose Elementary School parent Jenny Brekhuis is looking for individuals who are interested in working with her to plan for the celebration of the school's centennial.

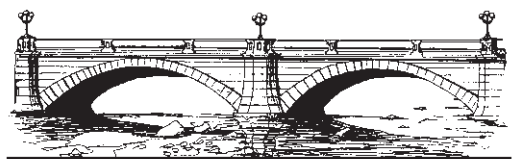
Mt. Rose Elementary is the region's oldest operating school and one of the "four Spanish

sister" schools (Orvis Ring, McKinley Park, Mary S. Doten, and Mt. Rose Elementary), built starting in 1909.

Mt. Rose principal Karen Wallis has given permission for an exhibit regarding the school's history to be installed in the glass cabinet in the school's entry hallway. We are looking for individuals who are willing to

lend school memorabilia for the exhibit including old report cards, materials with logos, notices, photos or other items. If enough materials are received, a rotating exhibit could be created during the celebration period.

Please contact Jenny Brekhuis at 828-7438 or jennybrekhuis@gmail.com. 



Historic Reno PRESERVATION SOCIETY

HRPS September 2009 Historic 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 visit www.historicreno.org or call 747-4478 for information and reservations.

PLEASE NOTE, TUESDAY EVENING TOURS WILL NOW START AT 5:30 PM.

Tuesday,
September 1
5:30 p.m.

DELONGCHAMPS RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE - This walk takes you on a neighborhood tour of many noteworthy homes, both large and small, designed by Reno's notable architect, Frederic DeLongchamps. Also, hear about his life and what made him so unique to this area. Meet at the Hardy House, 442 Flint Street. Tour Guides: Anne Simone and Sharon Honig-Bear.

Tuesday,
September 8
5:30 p.m.

MANSIONS ON THE BLUFF - A historic walk that looks at some of the most notable homes in Reno: Court, Ridge and upper California streets, home to three senators and the merchants that made early Reno The Biggest Little City. Meet at the McCarran House, 401 Court Street. Tour Guide: Ed Wishart.

Saturday,
September 12
10:00 a.m.

LAKE ADDITION - Meander past divorce-trade dwellings and Victorian architecture, through one of Reno's earliest additions. Includes a stop at the Lake Mansion. Meet at the Nevada Museum of Art, 160 West Liberty Street. Tour Guide: Debbie Hinman.

Tuesday,
September 15
5:30 p.m.

POWNING ADDITION AND LITTLE ITALY - Discover one of Reno's earliest and most delightful vernacular neighborhoods, predominantly settled by Northern Italian immigrants. This neighborhood is now the first City of Reno Conservation District. Meet at McKinley Arts & Culture Center, 925 Riverside Drive. Tour Guide: Felvia Belaustegui.

Saturday,
September 19
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,
September 22
5:30 p.m.

HISTORIC TRUCKEE RIVER WALK - A relaxing stroll along the Truckee River 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,
September 26
3:00-5:00 p.m.

NEW TOUR! PROHIBITION IN RENO - We've turned back the clocks to the 1920s and 30s. We'll walk streets and alleys and visit significant buildings, recalling Reno's saloons and reformers (the WCTU and Anti-Saloon League). We'll even visit an alleged speakeasy. Then join us for an optional post-tour Repeal of Prohibition celebration at the Amendment 21 Grill, 425 S. Virginia St. Tour starts at Amtrak's Reno Station, 135 East Commercial Row, Tour Guides: Debbie Hinman and Sharon Honig-Bear.

**Online Reservations for HRPS Walks Now Available
at www.historicreno.org**

Now, Emily's Journey

by Debbie Hinman

This story is a follow-up to the FootPrints article on Alice Ramsey, entitled "Alice's Journey," published in Volume 12, No. 3, Summer 2009. This is Emily's story, the intrepid young woman who undertook the re-enactment of Alice's journey on its 100-year anniversary. I had the opportunity to meet Emily and her crew during her stay in Reno and was very impressed by her pluck and spirit of adventure. Alice's descendants were cheering her on from their various homes around the country, but I wouldn't be surprised if Alice herself was doing the same, from a much more distant vantage point.

On June 9, 2009, it was a gray day in New York City with rain sheeting down upon the 1909 Maxwell and its female occupants, exactly as it had 100 years to the day and hour earlier. Well, nearly so—the Maxwell was five minutes late leaving 1930 Broadway this time around. And the female occupants were, instead of Alice Ramsey and her crew, driver Emily Anderson and her co-pilot and navigator Christie Catania.

Following the Maxwell in separate vehicles were a three-man film crew, headed by Emily's brother, filmmaker Bengt Anderson, the team mechanics, an Alice Ramsey re-enactor named Sally Barnett and Emily's parents Richard and Margaret. One other very important member of the Anderson crew was Emily's infant daughter, Kaisa. Unlike Alice Ramsey, Emily was able to have her child traveling with her, a much safer plan in today's world than in 1909.

Emily and her entourage followed Alice's original route across the country as closely as they could, staying off the interstate whenever possible. In addition to the non-scenic aspect, the Maxwell's top speed of about 35 miles-per-hour made freeway travel a dangerous proposition.

During her talk at Reno's National Automobile Museum on Monday evening, July 6, Emily told the crowd, "One of our

biggest challenges was that, unlike Alice, we had to deal with the modern-day cars. One of the things that I think most people don't realize is the Maxwell can't stop on a dime." Also, unlike modern convertibles, in the Maxwell the occupants are sitting up high with no windshield, so the draft created by large passing vehicles was a substantial hazard. "We end up being the windshield ourselves, with our faces and our bodies," laughed Emily. She did relate the one instance in Ohio where the Maxwell crew actually got to pass another vehicle on the road—it was a piece of farm equipment and the women passed



Emily Anderson (behind the wheel) and Christie Catania on Lake Tahoe's Pioneer Trail, on the last leg of their cross-country journey. Photo courtesy of Cindy Ainsworth.

it in high spirits, waving, whooping and hollering to the driver. "He was actually going slower than we were!" Emily exclaimed, to gales of laughter from the Reno audience.

Of course, driving across the country on lesser-traveled roads at 35 miles per hour gave Emily time to reflect on the nature of the changes that have impacted "small town America." During her talk, Emily told of how they would be driving through the quaint, historic downtown sections of older midwestern towns looking for a small Mom & Pop-type diner in which to grab a snack or cup of coffee. Though the historic buildings might be there, nine

times out of ten, they would be 'For Sale' or 'Out of Business.' "That's been a really sad thing to see," Emily regretfully told the audience. "To me it has really opened my eyes to how important it is to preserve our history, take care of our small towns and maybe not shop at Wal-Mart all the time."

For the first half of the trip, the Maxwell experienced frequent mechanical troubles; one piston rod broke three times. Because of the repeated problem with babbitt, which is a metal alloy used for bearings and such, the Maxwell acquired its name (Babbitt, pronounced with a French accent or Babbs for short) by which it would

be known for the remainder of its journey. But aside from losing first gear in Nebraska and traveling on the rest of the way without it, the second half of the trip went a lot more smoothly with respect to mechanical difficulties.

The day's travel to Omaha was the longest day of their journey, Emily related. They had traveled 260 miles that day, seeing not much but mile upon mile of cornfields. The Maxwell had been running really well for a few days, Emily told the crowd. With about two miles to go into Omaha, it was necessary for the crew to leave the two-lane highway and merge onto the fast-moving, five-lane interstate. Just as they began to merge,

Emily said, they heard a loud backfire and the engine died. Frantically Emily tried to move over to the shoulder, with the interstate traffic cruising by Babbs at warp speed. Rich Anderson came running up to the Maxwell, questioning Emily, "Was it the same noise again?" "No, this was a different noise," Emily and Christie agreed. This marked the only time the Maxwell had run out of gas.

Emily termed it a "serious treat" when the Maxwell encountered "The Loneliest Road," Nevada's infamous Highway 50. "This is what the Maxwell was made for," she laughed. She admitted to the

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Now, Emily's Journey (continued)

Continued from page 7

crowd that she had expected it to be endless miles of tedious, unchanging scenery, rather like the midwest cornfields, but says she and Christie were awed by the beauty and variety of the landscape. They encountered local journalists who, along with the townspeople, were friendly and welcoming and steered them to historic sites, such as the world-famous Nevada "Shoe Tree." In spite of the fact that it was early July, when climbing a pass




Reno's Channel 2 interviews Richard Anderson, Emily's father, and the man whose idea it was to re-enact Alice's journey on its centennial. Building the 1909 Maxwell DA from both original and manufactured parts was his six-year hobby. Photo courtesy of Cindy Ainsworth.

outside of Austin, Babbs had her first encounter with hail. Emily's first concern was for the Maxwell—"The car, oh the beautiful car!" she exclaimed to Christie. Christie, being of a more practical turn of mind responded, "Forget the car, what about US?"

The group spent the Fourth of July weekend in Reno, watching the Nugget's fireworks from the back deck of HRPS members Glee Willis and John Ton's home. After dining out for the past month, they were very appreciative of the wonderful home-cooked barbecue fare served at the Willis/Ton home. Emily, looking very tanned and relaxed, cuddled Kaisa and admitted to feeling a little "bittersweet" about the approaching end to her adventure. "I do need to get home to my dying garden, though," she admitted.

After nearly 3,000 miles and exactly one month, after being plagued by any number of mechanical difficulties, bees, bugs, rocks, rain and hail, the Maxwell with Emily behind the wheel and Christie in the co-pilot's seat rolled across the Golden Gate Bridge and onto Crissy Field in San Francisco, at noon on July 9. A celebratory barbecue was held in the team's honor, with Babbs being the centerpiece of the celebration.

There could be no better postscript to the adventure than Rich's observation in his final blog: "Thankfully, everyone is safe, well, and through to the other end of this once-in-a-lifetime experience. Time will tell how it has changed our lives, surely it has in many ways." 

Information for this article came from conversations with Emily Anderson and her team, the Team Blog on aliceramsey.org, and Emily's talk delivered at the National Automobile Museum, July 6, 2009.

Debbie Hinman is a HRPS Board Member, HRPS Tour Guide and on the HRPS Editorial Board.

If you want to learn more about Emily's journey, check out the Anderson's website at aliceramsey.org. The day-by-day team blog is there, as well as wonderful photographs chronicling the entire journey. And watch for Bengt Anderson's video documentary of his family's experience, currently in production.



Babbs (the car) and Sally Barnett pose in front of the famous "Shoe Tree" near Middlegate, Nevada. Photo courtesy of aliceramsey.org.


HRPS Annual Fall Social October 21, 2009

Dust off your dusters and polish up your driving goggles as HRPS takes you on an historic motoring evening Wednesday night, October 21, at the National Automobile Museum. Join us in Gallery 4 for cocktails and auction item viewing and bidding at 6 p.m.

You'll also have an opportunity to visit the museum's Alice Ramsey display. Dinner, catered by the Siena, will be served at 7 p.m., followed by a very special guest

speaker in keeping with our "Alice's Drive" theme.

Tickets are \$60 and can be obtained by sending a check to Felvia Belaustegui, 3015 Heatheridge Lane, Reno, NV 89509.

If you have auction items to donate, particularly those with an automotive theme, please contact Carrie Young at 624-1076 or via email at cyoung@unr.edu. 

Wagon Tracks Across the Truckee Meadows

by Lloyd Shanks

Author's Note: On my first hike through the area south of my home in Hidden Valley, I discovered what was surely a trail left by wagon trains as pictured in books I had read about the emigrant wagon trains and their trails across the United States. Finding the history of this wagon track in southeast Reno is the topic of this article.

Between 1846, when the Bear Flag Revolt cleared the way for the further expansion of settlements in California, and 1860, a virtual flood of emigrants from the eastern and midwestern United States traveled across the country in wagon trains on their way to new lives in the Golden State.

The wagon trains that cut trails through the Truckee Meadows on their way to the steep Donner Pass route reached a peak in the gold rush of 1849, when, in September, emigrant trains were reported coming over that route at a rate of "100 trains a day." In *The California Trail*, author George R. Stewart estimated the number of emigrants that year to be at least 7,000. According to Stewart, "after 1850 the Truckee route was little used with most wagons crossing the desert to the Carson River and over the less steep Carson Pass."

One path that the emigrants are reported to have followed through the Truckee Meadows is still marked by a deep swale in the desert soil on undeveloped property on the eastern side of Reno. On the dirt road leading south of the community of Hidden Valley, just north of the intersection of the paved road at the eastern base of

Rattlesnake Mountain, is a fenced off area protecting a portion of a deep wagon trail heading from the north end of the valley towards the southwest. This site is marked by a bullet-riddled signpost indicating it is a portion of an emigrant wagon train path. This claim has been disputed by those who maintain that the emigrant wagon trains followed the Truckee River and continued in a westerly direction across the meadows, and the marked trail is only a portion of a road used by ranch wagons many years after the last wagon train passed.

As indicated in the pictures on pages 9 and 10, this deep path is much like the wagon ruts still existing in many parts of the country stretching from St. Joseph, Missouri to Nevada. Those ruts were carved by the steel tires of countless wagons and, in some places, were so deep that a man could sit on one edge of them and his feet would not reach the bottom. It would take a huge number of trips in a light ranch wagon to make a path as deep as the trail made by the wagons pulled by the ox teams most often used by the emigrants.

As the wagon trains followed the Truckee River east of the northernmost hills of the Carson Range, it was necessary for them to cross the river numerous times. T. H. Jefferson's map number IV of the Map of the Emigrant Road from Independence, Missouri to San Francisco, California in the publication *Overland in 1846 - Diaries and Letters of the California-Oregon Trail* by Dale Morgan, indicates that, at that time, there were numerous oxbows on the Truckee River between Truckee Meadows and Pyramid Lake. In his book *Ordeal by Hunger*, George R. Stewart claims "They had to ford the river more than once to the mile." In *Fearful Journey*, Harold Curran includes the following entry from a diary kept by Andrew Child in 1850, describing how to avoid many fords:

"It has been usual to ford the river twenty or thirty times within as many miles to avoid the walls of rock. The fords are all very bad,

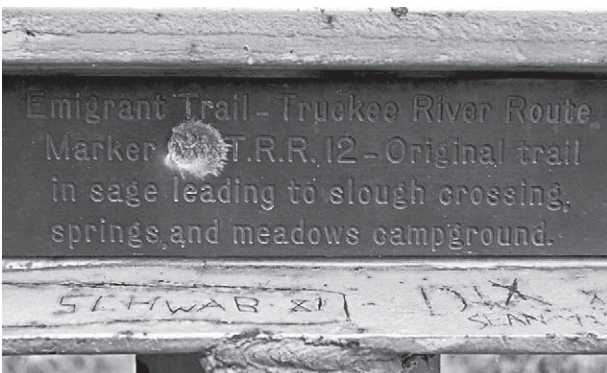


Heading south towards Rattlesnake Mountain shows the depth of the trail. Photo courtesy Larry Marran.

the river being a rapid stream and its bottom covered with large rocks. By following the mountain road, all these fords but eight (8) may be avoided."

The wagon train in which Heinrich Lienhard traveled, that preceded the ill-fated Donner Party train in 1846, was on the south side of the river and chose to enter the Truckee Meadows by the "mountain road" that led to a ravine between the two mountains south of the river. In his diary, parts of which are published in *From St. Louis to California*, Heinrich Lienhard stated that as they proceeded down the "steep hill" at this point it was a "sleigh ride." Most of the emigrant wagons did not have brakes, and the rear wheels would simply be blocked with timber or chained in place and the wagon would then skid down a steep grade. It is possible that the Donner Party also followed this steep path.

Whether all or most of the wagon trains could have crossed the Truckee Meadows by paralleling the Truckee River is also a matter of controversy, depending on whether the area east of the present site of the Reno airport now occupied by the



A weathered and bullet-riddled sign marks the wagon tracks near Hidden Valley. Photo courtesy Larry Marran.

Continued on page 10

Wagon Tracks (continued)

Continued from page 9

UNR grazing lands and Rosewood Lakes golf course was a “swamp” (now called a wetlands) or a “meadow” during the mid 1800s. This area is bounded on the north by the Truckee River, which still periodically floods it, and Steamboat Creek on the east (labeled “Cold Creek” on Jefferson’s map).

The following are excerpts from descriptions in emigrant diaries contained in *Fearful Crossing* by Harold Curran, which indicate that Steamboat Creek and the area just to the west of it was either very difficult, or judged to be impossible, to cross:

“Soon after entering the valley we took a trail leaving the road to right & supposing to be a ‘Cutoff’ as the road wound around a belt of marsh which crosses the valley at right angles to the river. We followed this trail around the base of the hills & soon found ourselves going off quite in (a) contrary direction to the course of the road & the marsh on our right was entirely uncrossable a perfect quagmire.” – *Elizabeth Perkins (1849)*

“We have crossed a slough, the crossing of which was fixed and bridged by our Captain & party ahead. Before this was done, it is said it was almost impassable, each having to be cordelled across. We passed over it safely & encamped in this lovely valley, with blue grass to the horses’ knees.” – *Vincent Geiger (1849)*

In his crossing of the Truckee Meadows, while traveling eastbound from California, well known diarist James Clyman described his passage around the ‘slough’ Steamboat Creek as follows:

“We came to a deep muddy brook running through a handsome prairie (sic) valley went up the brook about 3 miles before we found a crossing passed down along side of steep volcanic mountain, shewing (sic) immense quantities of rough slag and other vitrified matter.”

It is the opinion of this writer that the degree to which Steamboat Creek and the marsh to the west of it was crossable



A bend near the top of the cut through the Virginia Range leading down to Hidden Valley. Photo courtesy Larry Marran.


depended entirely on the amount of snow and rainfall the previous winter. In *From Oregon and California in 1848*, author J. Quinn Thornton reported that Mr. J. F. Reed, of the Donner Party, measured the depth of the snow at the top of Donner Pass using a rope at a point where a spring caused an opening in the snow and found it to be 65 feet deep. Certainly when that tremendous amount of snow melted in the spring of 1847, the runoff into the Truckee River was no doubt bound to have caused flooding of a great deal of Truckee Meadows. In 1849, the amount of spring runoff must have also been high to raise a crop of blue grass in the valley as high as a horses’ knees, as claimed by Vincent Geiger.

In *The Donner Party Chronicles* by Frank Mullen Jr., it is reported that Walt Mulcahy, “a well-respected Nevada history buff claims to have found artifacts marked with George Donner’s name on them” near the foot of Rattlesnake Mountain.

This writer believes that a number of emigrant trains followed the track described by Heinrich Leinhard down into Hidden Valley, turned south at Steamboat Creek and went as far as Rattlesnake Mountain

before heading in a northwesterly direction towards the Truckee River.

This is further supported by a water.nv.gov website describing the chronology of the Truckee River, <http://water.nv.gov/WaterPlanning/truckee/truckee2.cfm>. In 1844, an emigrant party from Council Bluffs, Iowa, first used the direct route to California via the Humboldt River. Guided by a Paiute Indian named Truckee, they turned west to Wadsworth, and along the Truckee River to Donner Lake. The Donner Party followed this same route in 1846. Once gold was discovered in California in 1848, this route was used extensively. In the mid-1800s, the eastern third of the Truckee Meadows consisted of marshy lowlands generally covered in thick grasses, bulrushes, and cattails. At Vista, a rock dike, commonly called the Vista reef, partly impeded the Truckee River’s exit into the lower Truckee River canyon, creating an obstruction which further inundated this area during spring flooding. Fortunately, most early travelers arrived at this point in late summer or early fall, therefore avoiding hazardous high-water flood conditions. The Truckee River’s course through the Truckee Meadows was bordered by expanses of low, boggy fields and marshlands. Early travelers generally went south along the eastern range of hills now called the Virginia Range, and cut through Hidden Valley towards Huffaker Hills. They then turned west and skirted Rattlesnake Mountain on its north side, generally pausing there to refresh themselves at Donner Springs, as the Donner Party had done several years prior.

It is this writer’s opinion that the wagon tracks near Hidden Valley are too deep to have been carved by only a few emigrant trains or by ranch wagons. Because of the changing conditions in the Truckee Meadows described above, wagon trains may have been forced south into what is now the Hidden Valley area. Everything I have read tells me that the wagon tracks near Hidden Valley are from the time period 1844 to 1850. 

Lloyd Shanks is a member of HRPS and the National Auto Museum.

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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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RV 04.07.08/FO-DCD

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.

From Your HRPS President

We have some very good news on the Powning Conservation District! The City of Reno is now installing the POWNING CONSERVATION DISTRICT street sign toppers on the street signs in the area. This is a major step in recognizing the importance of the neighborhood. This district, adjacent to downtown Reno, will also demonstrate to visitors that Reno is very aware of the importance of our heritage.



City worker Simon McClellan installs sign toppers in the Powning Conservation District. Photos by Cindy Ainsworth.

This season's HRPS walking tours have been highly successful, with participation exceeding that of previous years. The open house and tour of the Crissie Caughlin Ranch property was a tremendous success and very well attended. Thanks to Cindy Ainsworth for her excellent talk on the history of the ranch.

The final round of 2009 walking tours will begin on September 1st and continue through the 26th.

The annual fall social will be held on October 21, 2009, at the National Automobile Museum with the Siena Hotel catering the event. The theme for the event will be "Alice's Drive," in celebration of the 100-year anniversary of Alice Ramsey's cross-country automobile journey.

I regret to announce that our Board Secretary, Joan Collins, has resigned due to a career change. We owe Joan a tremendous vote of thanks. She has done an exceptionally pro-

fessional job with our Board minutes. We will miss her presence at the Board meetings but Joan will remain involved with HRPS as a walking tour guide. Sharon Honig-Bear has volunteered her services as Board Secretary, for which we are very grateful.

Our education program, which features a video of Jerry Fenwick's photo collection, followed by a bus tour to the sites the following day, will continue in the up-coming school year. The program is for Reno fourth grades and possibly one middle school class. The pilot program presented at two schools in May 2009 was highly successful. The students were very enthusiastic about the photos and the bus tour.

I thank all of you for your support and encouragement. HRPS is indeed grateful.

— Felvia Belaustegui, HRPS President
HRPS President and HRC Commissioner



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FALL 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.

Wednesday, September 23, Nevada History in Maps: A presentation discussing the 4000 maps on the UNR historic map web site <http://www.delamare.unr.edu/maps/digitalcollections/nvmaps/>. Would you like to see the exact location, on an 1886 map, of the Dyer Bros. General Grocery store in Austin, NV? Or the location of the Ladies Aid Hall in Goldfield in 1905? Or how the Nevada highway maps evolved? ALL will be revealed on September 23rd! Presented by Linda Newman, Geoscience and Map Librarian, Emerita and creator of the Nevada in Maps web site.

Wednesday, October 21, Annual Fall Social. The social will be held at The National Automobile Museum with the Siena Hotel catering the event. See page 8 for details.

Wednesday, November 18, Basque Aspen Art of the Sierra Nevada, Jean and Phillip Earl. A century and more ago sheepherders, largely Basque in origin, filled the summer hours carving images on aspen trees. Most were names and dates, but others carved animals and birds, memories from the homeland, and some carved their ideas of female companionship. Over time the aspens put the finishing touches on these images, growing and stretching the lines of the carvings, maintaining a living record of this history. A new book, *Basque Aspen Art of the Sierra Nevada* by Jean and Phillip I. Earl, coming soon from Baobab Press.

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