

Historic Reno PRESERVATION SOCIETY

FootPrints

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

vol. 13 no. 1 ❖ Winter 2010

What in the Name of God? A Look Back at the 1918 Flu Pandemic

by Kim Henrick

A sadder analogy may never have been drawn between two devastating events—World War I and the 1918 flu pandemic—one waged by mankind, soldiers with faces and uniforms, agendas and tactics, and the other, a silent and invisible force riding mankind's breath to all corners of the earth. It is hard to know which was more frightening, the enemy that could be seen and engaged, or the illusive and often lethal threat lurking just beyond the senses.

The 1918 influenza virus, an avian flu classified as H1N1, appeared like a tsunami, hitting the world in three crashing waves: the first in the spring of 1918, the second and most severe wave arriving in the fall of that year, and the final in the first half of 1919. The armistice was declared on November 11, 1918, and it was hoped that both the war and the flu had run their courses. Ann Hagedorn writes in *Savage Peace*, that President Woodrow Wilson gave a speech on the Fourth of July, 1919, which concluded, "This is the most tremendous Fourth of July that men ever imagined, for we have opened its franchises to all the world." He did not mention the other reason for celebration: "the flu epidemic was effectively over." Hagedorn claims that between "September of 1918 and June of 1919—the second and third waves of the pandemic—the best estimate of deaths from flu and pneumonia, both civilian and military, had been 675,000 Americans." This figure is more than six times the number of American military deaths from the war. Worldwide, estimates of influenza deaths have ranged from 20 million to 100 million.

John M. Barry, in *The Great Influenza*, published in 2004, says: "In 1918, the world's population was 1.8 billion, less than

one-third today's. Yet the 1918 influenza virus killed a likely 50 million and possibly as many as 100 million." Calling the epidemic "the first great collision between nature and modern science," Barry reports these sobering statistics: "It killed more people in a year than the Black Death of the Middle Ages killed in a century; it killed more people in twenty-four weeks than AIDS has killed in twenty-four years." On a positive note, Barry pays tribute to the brilliant pioneering scientists such as William Henry Welch, Simon Flexner and William H. Park, who among others, led medical science out of its Dark-Age mentality in dealing with these invisible terrors.



"Mrs. A. L. Hart & Mamie" written on back of photo.
1918 Nevada photo, town unknown.
Photo courtesy of Phillip I. Earl.

Often called the Spanish Flu, or Spanish Lady, it most likely did not start in Spain, and was anything but a lady, but was called such because Spain, being a neutral country in the war, did not censor the alarming reports of the flu's rampage like many warring countries did. As for its origins, no one knows for certain. Many believe it first appeared on a military base in Kansas in March 1918, and quickly spread with the troops on trains and ships to other areas of the United States and Europe. Other evidence shows there were signs of this extreme virus elsewhere in the world before March 1918. Many still believe the virus started in China, ground zero for many influenza outbreaks. No one seems to know *for sure* how it started, where it started, when it started, or why

that particular influenza strain was as virulent as it was. Early theories were far-ranging, from the germ Pfeiffer's bacillus, to a plot by Germany to spread the flu to her enemies.

As for remedies, Phillip I. Earl, local historian and former Curator of the Nevada Historical Society, notes in his extensive research

Continued on page 2

A Look Back at the 1918 Flu Pandemic (continued)

Continued from page 1

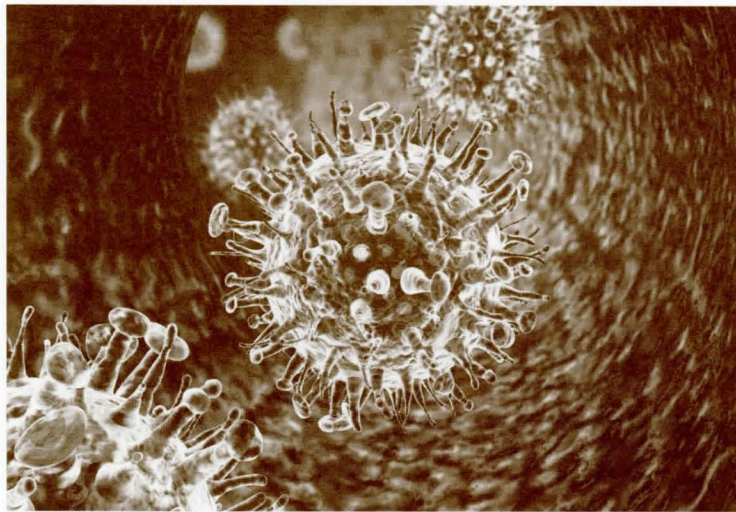
on the 1918 flu that some popular and creative local remedies of the day were “red pepper sandwiches,” “carrying a potato in each pocket,” and “sprinkling sulfur in one’s shoes.” Unfortunately, facemasks in the early twentieth century were very ineffective.

In *The Devil’s Flu*, Pete Davies describes viruses this way: “Viruses are microscopically tiny parasites. For a rough idea of scale, if you’re reading this book in your living room, imagine that a bacterium is the size of that room. Now hold up a squash ball—and that’s how big a virus is.” Of the virus’ job he says, “In essence, it’s a destructive form of molecular burglary: flu gets into the building, cracks the safe, takes what it wants, and wrecks the place on its way out.” Imagine the influenza virus as a tiny puffer fish, with spikes of glycoproteins on its surface. For the influenza A viruses, there are sixteen subtypes of the haemagglutinin (HA) protein (H1-H16) and nine subtypes of the neuraminidase (NA) protein (N1-N9). The particular combination of these proteins on a virus gives it its name, such as H1N1 or H3N2. The HA protein is involved with attaching the virus to a host cell and the NA protein releases the virus’ virions (or progeny, basically).

The trouble starts when an influenza virus, residing quietly and asymptotically in a water bird, for example, jumps species to a human and in its attempt to settle in and flourish, makes its new host terribly ill. How these viruses move from species to species and why certain virus strains are much more virulent than others is a complex story for another time. In the “Influenza Report” published online at www.influenzareport.com, the grand assessment is, “Infectious diseases are the result of a conflict of interest between

macro organisms and microorganisms. We are not alone on earth.”

The 1918 flu virus, an airborne virus spread through the human cough, resulted in the first pandemic of the twentieth century and was a ruthless respiratory invader. Basically, the victim’s lungs would fill with fluid, the blood would run like a dark sludge, the skin would turn black (in some cases), and the patient would drown.



*Photo of influenza-like virus passing through a vascular system.
Photo by Bjorn Meyer, from iStockphoto.com.*

It was reported in the State of Nevada Biennial Report of the State Board of Health for 1918, that the first case of the flu in Nevada was diagnosed in Reno on October 1, 1918, and then within days in Las Vegas, Elko and Carson City. The report admitted that the Spanish Influenza was not a reportable disease at that time, so it was impossible to calculate accurately the total number of afflicted persons, but for the year 1918 there were 3,914 epidemic influenza cases reported in the state that resulted in 65 deaths. The same table shows that 565 cases of pneumonia were reported that resulted in 565 deaths. Obviously, the secondary bacterial infection of pneumonia was a death sentence in 1918. In 1918, Nevada was the smallest state and had only around 75,000 residents. That year, Washoe County reported that out of

560 reported epidemic influenza cases, seven resulted in death, but of the 120 people who went on to catch pneumonia, all 120 people died. There are several reasons for the huge disparities in the death estimates. One was the clouding of numbers by the nearly-always fatal secondary infection from pneumonia. Also, the flu may have exacerbated heart conditions, old age ailments, or other diseases, and often the reported cause of death was the initial condition and not the flu. There was no reporting structure in place for epidemic influenza, so many millions worldwide died unnoticed by statisticians. And understandably, record keeping was a low priority task.

“What in the name of God” was a familiar refrain in the United States during the epidemic, according to the wonderful five-part video “The 1918 Flu Pandemic,” shown on internet website www.youtube.com. People were terrified of this evil phantom and the Nevada State Board of Health reported in 1919 that, “No matter what the cause of the disease or the course

of treatment pursued, there can be no question or doubt but that ‘fear’ so reduced the powers of resistance that many became easy victims, and ‘fear’ should have been entered in the death certificate as the remote cause of death.” Fear, riding the skirts of the flu, first hit the Reno area on the first day of October 1918, nearly six months after it had wreaked havoc on the east coast.

The flu in Reno ran its course from the first of October through December. No reliable numbers could be found for the total number of deaths caused by the flu during that time. Washoe County reported seven deaths from influenza in 1918, so Reno’s number would be fewer than that, but possibly close. All of these numbers are ridiculously low and many more deaths were caused by pneumonia.

A Look Back at the 1918 Flu Pandemic (continued)

What is for certain, however, is that life changed dramatically for Reno residents.

Phil Earl summarized all of the local newspaper accounts about the pandemic and a few of his notes about the 1918 flu paint an anguished picture:

“October 4: U. S. Surgeon General Blue calls for the closing of all community churches, schools, theatres and public institutions where influenza strikes;

October 9: treatment is rest in bed, cold compress to forehead, eat wholesome foods;

October 11: University campus quarantined, military ball canceled;

October 12: thousands inspect trophy train last night, county jail to be fumigated with formaldehyde;

October 17: one new case, total of 16 now in Reno;

October 18: all schools in Reno to close at noon today, now 18 cases in Reno, chairs to be removed from saloons [this mandate was intended to discourage loitering];

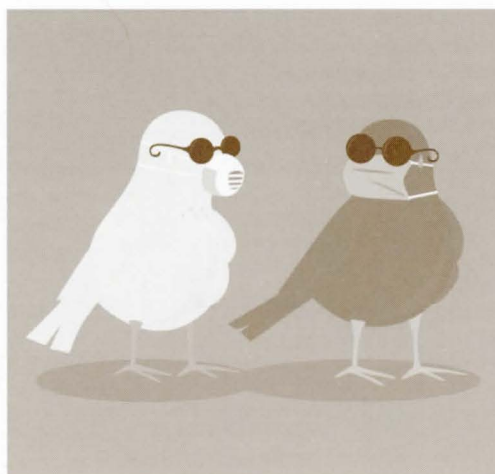
October 23: trains to be inspected, disinfect all cases of influenza;

October 25: 31 cases in Reno now, eight deaths by now (six [victims] brought in to Reno from elsewhere);

October 30: still not enough nurses and doctors.”

The human virus was not discovered until 1933, so it is no wonder that in 1918 the

world questioned what this scourge was and how to deal with it. There were actually two more pandemics in the twentieth century (1957 and 1968), but they were not nearly as deadly as the 1918 influenza. There was never a doubt that there would be more outbreaks in the future.




*Bird Flu,
Cartoon by Ceneri from iStockphoto.com.*

Here we are in 2010 watching a new and novel H1N1 influenza virus spread across the globe with astounding speed. Like the 1918 influenza, this latest outbreak was classified early on as a “pandemic,” but that was based more on its rampant world-wide reach than on the severity of the illness it causes. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s website states that the current virus (formerly called Swine Flu) is more complicated than originally thought; it has “two genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in pigs in Europe and Asia, and avian genes,

and human genes.” Scientists call this a “quadruple reassortant” virus.

What we do know is that the 1918 flu was very fond of train and ship travel, but no more so than this novel H1N1 virus likes to travel by air. In a world of more than six billion people, closer to each other than ever, the ramifications are chilling. Complicating the efforts to deal with the new influenza pandemic, is the dependable *seasonal* flu, which regularly takes from 15,000 to 40,000 American lives each year. Of course, today we have antibiotics (for bacterial infections) and vaccines and anti-viral medicines, but will we have enough of the right cocktail at the right moment to effectively fight the next “viral tsunami”?

Humor, wit and irony, as always, interjects itself into life’s most serious dramas (see the Bird Flu cartoon) and basic common sense must dictate to us now as in 1918: do not let fear weaken your resolve, wash your hands frequently, stay at home if you are ill, and cough into a tissue or your sleeve. Visit the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s website www.cdc.gov for up-to-date information on the effectiveness of facemasks and other preventative measures. 

All reference sources were mentioned in the article and I would like to thank Phil Earl for sharing his in-depth research on the 1918 influenza.


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

FootPrints Correction

We have a correction to make to the Summer 2009 Vol. 12 no. 3 *FootPrints* article “Nevada’s Early Mental Health History: The Buildings.”

Kim Henrick reported that the “Stone House,” which sits today on the state hospital’s property at Glendale Avenue and Galletti Way, was built in 1890. This date came from a state survey published in 1950. (Another incorrect date of 1882 is

listed currently on the state’s public works website.) After recently discovering some primary source materials (original state agency biennial reports) at the Nevada State Library and Archives and some period newspapers, it appears that the Stone House wasn’t completed until around 1904.

Sorry for the error. 

Reno Baseball Memories, History and Lore

by Tim Mueller

Editor's Note: Author Tim Mueller will be the speaker at HRPS February 24, 2010, meeting at Mt. Rose Elementary School. See page 12 for details.

Baseball has always fascinated me. Even at the age of seven, when we moved to Reno from southern California, I was looking for a baseball game—I knew baseball was the greatest sport ever invented. Over the course of the last ten years, I wrote *Homeruns & Jackpots: Baseball in Nevada*. It is a collection of stories of baseball history from Bud Beasley to the two Ty Cobbs to Moana Stadium. Below you will find excerpts from the book.

When my family moved to Reno in 1975, it was a different place than it is today. There was no Grand Sierra Resort, Highway 395 stopped at Oddie Boulevard, and there was no Meadowood Mall. Reno did not have many venues to watch baseball. The only place that you could go to watch either professional or college baseball was Moana Stadium, which was a small park with a hard-to-read scoreboard. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the time I spent there shagging foul balls and homerun balls and learning about the game.

Bud Beasley was an amazing person. I knew that he had taught at Reno High School for many years, but I learned that he also played baseball and coached the Reno High School baseball team. He told me a story about when the Stead Air Base

needed to get rid of some extra uniforms and equipment. Beasley did not have a large enough school budget to purchase what he needed and the air base staff did not feel that they could just give him the discards (much of which was still brand new and boxed), so they dumped them off on the side of the road while Beasley followed behind them in a truck and picked them up.

Bud was fond of Threkel Park, where the semi-pro Reno Garage teams played. Beasley described it this way, "Although Moana Stadium was the first ballpark in Reno, Threkel's was much better. He [Threkel] had a chicken and turkey pen in right field (just over the fence), about 350 feet down the line. Every once in a while when a ball was hit down there you would hear a little noise come out of the pen." Life was different then....

Robert "Buzz" Knudson played for two seasons on the Reno Silver Sox in 1948 and 1949. He loved playing in Reno but soon decided that he wanted to start his career outside of baseball. I am very glad that he did because over the next 40 years, he worked on some of Hollywood's biggest and best motion pictures. He began working for the RCA Sound Company in 1952 and ended up retiring with the Todd AO Company in 1990. Along the way he collected Oscars for his sound mixing work on *Cabaret* (1972), *The Exorcist* (1973) and *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial* (1982). Knudson's studio was also hired by actor Robert Redford to help record the last 15 minutes of the famous baseball movie *The Natural*. Buzz remembered that, "Redford went goofy when he learned that Buzz had played pro ball."

Did you know that Reno had two Ty Cobbs? One was the famous 'Georgia Peach,' the often speedy and somewhat fiery Hall-of-Fame baseball player who called Glenbrook, Nevada home for a




Threkel Park, 1940.

Photo courtesy Nevada Historical Society.

number of years. He would often make the trek off the mountain and spend some of his acquired wealth at the Riverside Hotel and Casino in Reno. This Ty Cobb would often be confused with Nevada's Ty Cobb, the sportswriter of the *Nevada State Journal*. The two would eventually meet when sportswriter Ty Cobb returned some mail he had received intended for baseball player Ty Cobb.

I found minor league baseball to be an intimate affair, one in which fans could get autographs and have fun easily. I never had a bad time at the ballpark—you are able to get so close to the action, the players and the coaches. I would typically "scout" the other team for their top players. I would mark the ones I wanted to ask for autographs and make it a point to ask. More often than not they would be happy to sign an autograph. I also made it a practice to make a note on my score sheet when a player broke his bat, and I would ask the player for the bat. My request was usually granted. I have kept those bats to this day—not for their monetary worth but for nostalgia.

In writing *Homeruns & Jackpots*, I tried to be as accurate as possible and I looked under as many stones as I could. I traveled as much as possible to search out the right source and I was able to talk with a number of major leaguers in Oakland, Tucson and Minneapolis. It was a fun journey!! I hope you enjoy the book.

To order a copy of *Homeruns & Jackpots* please send an email to Tim Mueller at tim_mueller@sbcglobal.net or call him at 775-721-3387. 



Reno Silver Sox Baseball Team.
Photo courtesy Nevada Historical Society.

HRPS Celebrates Alice and Emily

by Debbie Hinman

Alice would have been proud. On Wednesday, October 21, 2009, HRPS held their annual Fall Social and fundraiser at the National Automobile Museum. This year's theme was "Alice's Drive," as June 2009 marked the 100th anniversary of Alice Ramsey's cross-country automobile journey in a 1909 Maxwell.

Some attendees came in early 20th-century garb, enhancing the party atmosphere. An open bar and tasty assortment of hors d'oeuvres set the tone for the evening, as guests entered Gallery 4 of the museum.

Just down "the street" from the gallery, the timely Alice Ramsey exhibit provided the opportunity for HRPS partygoers to view historic artifacts and familiarize themselves with Alice's achievement, prior to the excellent dinner catered by the Siena.

guide Glee Willis delivered a wonderful presentation on the adventures of both women. The program began with a short DVD created by Emily's filmmaker brother, Bengt Anderson. The film

included photographs from Alice's original drive, with some background on how Emily came to recreate the experience. Next, Glee showed slides from Emily's journey and read from her journal, providing colorful detail of this ambitious undertaking.

Glee's husband, John Ton, spoke about the mural he created several years ago to commemorate Alice Ramsey and her crew. The colorful, skillfully executed work of art adorns the east side of a small brick building on West Liberty Street, near South Sierra Street, formerly the Our Daily Grind Coffee Shop.



Attendees (from the top clockwise):
HRPS Board members:
Debbie Hinman and
Jerry Fenwick standing,
Rosie Cevasco and Sharon
Honig-Bear seated; Glee
Willis at the podium;
John and Corrine Matley
in front of the Thomas
Flyer; Ed Wishart
and Sharon Honig-
Bear; John Ton and
Jack Hursh at the
hors d'oeuvres; an
elegantly costumed
guest peruses
auction items.
Photos courtesy of
Cindy Ainsworth.



Also this year, Emily Anderson of Seattle, Washington recreated the journey in an identical 1909 Maxwell DA, remaining as true to the original route as possible.

Since Emily was unable to speak at the dinner because of a conflicting engagement, HRPS member and tour



As always, the silent auction was a great success, earning \$1900 for the organization. Thanks to all who provided auction items and those who supported HRPS by attending this fun event!

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

HRPS Walking Tour Season 2009

by Debbie Hinman

There are a few constants in Reno: the city continues to grow and flourish, the Truckee continues to sparkle and dance through the downtown sector, and on each Tuesday evening and Saturday morning in May, July and September the streets continue to be filled with faithful and interested walkers, accompanying HRPS tour guides through varied local neighborhoods.

This year, 929 people participated in our walks. Comments, as always, were positive and enthusiastic, both for the old standard tours and the new tours. New to the tour roster this year were the "Western Addition Walk," the "Inside DeLongchamps Walk," the "Reno in the Prohibition Era Walk," as well as two specialty events.

The "Western Addition Walk," co-written and delivered by Cindy Ainsworth and Debbie Hinman, encompasses Fifth and Sixth streets, in the area of Ralston and Washington streets. This neighborhood was chosen as a very early and important subdivision; homes in this area include two large, beautiful, and architecturally-significant structures—the Humphrey and Twaddle houses. Facing each other across Fifth Street at Ralston, both were home to early Reno movers and shakers, and both are shining examples of adaptive reuse. Other significant properties include the Nystrom House (possibly Reno's oldest remaining residence) and others such as the C. S. Martin House and the Francovich House. Local resident Lisa Poglianich shared her extensive research on the Smith-Petersen subdivision, a vestige of which remains on the west end of West Sixth Street. The current owners of the Humphrey House, the Northern Nevada Hopes organization, graciously invited the tour group in and served refreshments in the lovely dining room. The owners of the Cake and Flower Shoppe also provided their delicious cookies to walkers as they strolled through their 102-year-old location.

The "Inside DeLongchamps Walk" was conceived of, written and delivered by Sharon Honig-Bear and Anne Simone. This tour was part of the Artown July Walking Tours. (HRPS already had a DeLongchamps tour, but because of the number of structures, time would not permit visits to the interiors of the public buildings.) Sharon and Anne felt that there was much more to be seen and experienced by visiting the interiors of such iconic structures as the Washoe County Court House, the Riverside Artist Lofts, and the Arte Italia, formerly the Hardy House. Says Sharon, "It was a unique opportunity to see behind the scenes, and in particular, to view the unique character of the artists' lofts, to which one would normally not have access."



The Humphrey House on Fifth Street, part of the Western Addition Walk. Photo courtesy of Debbie Hinman.

The third new walk this season was the "Prohibition Era in Reno Walk," a collaboration between Sharon Honig-Bear and Debbie Hinman. Although the timing was less than ideal for this offering (coinciding with the monthly Pub Crawl and Street Vibrations!), hardy walkers braved 96-degree heat, roaring street bikes and throngs of celebrating motorcycle fans to visit the train station, Douglas Alley, an actual speakeasy location from the 1920s and the Century Club. They heard tales of "prohi" busts, gangster activity, and such organizations as the Women's Christian Temperance Union and The Order of

Camels. Following the walk, participants were invited to join the tour guides at Reno's Amendment 21 bar, for a "Repeal of Prohibition 77 Years Later" celebratory drink. Manager Mike Malody welcomed the group, graciously cordoning off a section of his establishment for the HRPS group. Malody provided free glasses so that tour participants could partake of the Pub Crawl along the way, an ironic twist to a Prohibition walk.

Two additional HRPS offerings this year included a tour of the UNR Mackay Mines building and reception at the Keck Museum, and an open house at the new location of the Garden Shop Nursery, at the Caughlin Ranch property on Mayberry Drive. These wonderful events added

variety to the tour offerings and were well attended. Coordinator of the Caughlin Ranch event, Cindy Ainsworth, reported, "200-plus people attended this launch of the Garden Shop at its historic new location, and were thrilled to see the interior of the old ranch house."

On the evening of November 4, the HRPS Board of Directors hosted a dinner at Louie's Basque Corner to honor the organization's hardworking tour guides. Guides partook of picon punches and tasty Basque fare, "basquing" in the appreciation of Felvia Belaustegui and the HRPS Board, for creating another excellent and successful tour season. Tour Director Ed Wishart and his assistant Rosie Cevasco were also honored for the effort they put into coordinating the tours and ensuring the sign-up process ran smoothly.

HRPS would like to thank all of its wonderful tour guides, who work to spread the message that Reno is a vital city with a rich heritage. We also want to thank those who opened their doors to us, and our tour participants, who, we hope, came away with a new appreciation for their city.

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

Black Springs: A Colorful History

by Debbie Hinman

From the daily Nevada State Journal, April 4, 1889:

A Young Sheep Herder Kills Himself.

Fred Campbell, a Canadian 27 years of age, shot and killed himself at Black Springs, near Peavine, yesterday morning at 2 o'clock. He used an old Colt's revolver, and the ball pierced his left breast, near the heart, and went completely through his body.

One of the things that makes studying Nevada history so interesting is to have preconceived notions set awry by newly uncovered facts. The above clipping confirms the fact that Black Springs was an existing locality in the nineteenth century. I had always assumed that the communities in the North Valleys had sprung up once Reno was established, and began its spread in outward directions.

Early Settlements

Settlements in the area around Peavine Mountain actually predate Reno. As early as 1859, when Charles Fuller was building a ramshackle toll bridge across the Truckee amid sagebrush and rocks, the Peavine Ranch was settled; this was the oldest ranch in the valley beneath Peavine Peak's towering presence. In 1862, a man named Fielding Lemmon purchased the ranch, and the name of the area changed. On an 1867 Peavine Mines map, the area was designated Lemmon's Valley.

There were various mining claims in this area on the eastern slope of Peavine Mountain. So named because of the sweet pea vines that grew around the springs, the area was mostly prospected by men who lived nearby. In 1866, the first accounts of gold in the streambeds were reported. This was the heyday of the Comstock, and local prospectors had dreams of uncovering similar riches in their own backyards.

In 1872, prospector and promoter John Poe, reputed to be a shirttail relative of Edgar Allen Poe, arrived in the Peavine area, making a modest silver discovery in Horse Canyon. Other prospectors

had worked the area for years with little success; aside from Kirman & Company's, and then Solomon Lingle's placer gold discoveries, Peavine was largely considered a copper center. No one suspected silver under the black outcroppings on the side of the peak. Poe was successful and his town, at first called Peavine City, then Poeville and even occasionally Podunk, grew to a population of 500, with stage and freight service, three hotels including the grand Golden Eagle, stores and a smelter. In

the spring water ran down dark rock outcroppings, making it appear black.

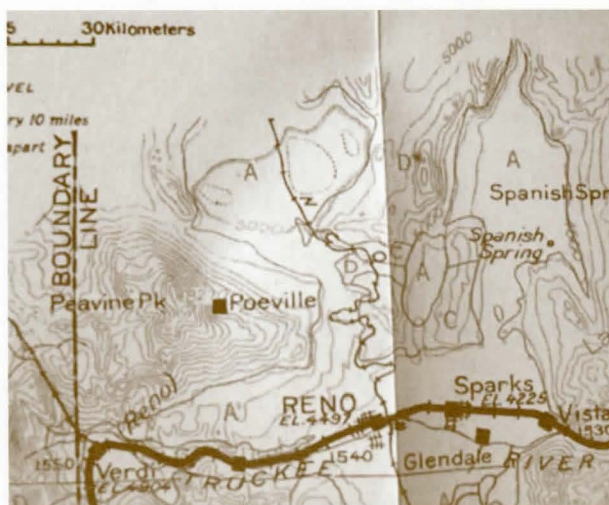
There are few references to Black Springs, with the exception of the article about the shepherd in 1889, until the 1920s. One can assume that it was a largely a trading post and a rural area, populated by livestock and those who raised them. Black Springs was located six miles north of Reno on the Purdy Road, which later became Highway 395. Today, Black Springs (technically Grand View Terrace, as it was renamed in 1990) is a small community

near the Highway 395 exit to Lemmon Valley.

One of the first settlers in Black Springs was a woman named Hannah Bathurst. Born in Chicago in 1881, she had moved to the Reno-Sparks area as a young woman, with her husband William, and Willa, her daughter from a previous marriage. In 1923, she began advertising leghorn pullets (small, young domestic hens) for sale from her Black Springs Ranch. By this time, she had divorced William, although he is occasionally mentioned as being in business with her throughout the next decade and lawsuits appear on a regular basis on both sides. By 1924, Hannah was shown as the owner of the Black Springs Service Station on the Purdy Road, selling Red Crown gasoline.

In September of 1924, Hannah had expanded her service station to include a restaurant with a dance floor. She advertised "Good music at all hours," featuring a three-piece orchestra playing on Saturday evenings and serving hot fried chicken sandwiches. Also that year, she featured card parties, with 500 played on Tuesdays and Progressive Euchre on Fridays with "good prizes." In 1925, the resort was advertised as "newly enlarged and remodeled." Specialty activities began to appear, such as Carnival Night in June and a Labor Day celebration in September, featuring a "four-day non-stop dance." Ladies were always admitted free. Hannah's advertising claimed "Nevada is the People's Playground and

Continued on page 8



Vintage map of Reno and Peavine Mountain. Black Springs is six miles northwest of Reno, just north of Poeville. Note towns of Reno, Sparks, Glendale and Vista along the Truckee River. Map from the collection of Debbie Hinman.

1876, residents raised funds and built a school. But when the mines closed in 1877, it took only three years for the town to disappear into dust, ruins and history.

Black Springs

The origin of the name Black Springs is unclear. One account says that the nearby spring was named for John Black, a partner of John Poe, who opened a trading post on an old stagecoach road, about a mile from the current day Black Springs. This is more likely the true origin, as an early map of the area shows a water source labeled Black's Spring, about a mile west of the present-day neighborhood. But another account says that the area was so named because

Black Springs: A Colorful History (continued)

Continued from page 7

Black Springs the People's Playhouse."

By 1926, Hannah was claiming "Snappy music and entertainment afternoon and evenings," and boasting "we dance till the dawn flames in the sky" and "when others are quitting, we are just beginning."

About this time, Hannah visited the Orphan's Home in Carson City and adopted four children, brothers and sisters, to care for, and who could help her with chores. The eldest boy, Leonard Blumstrom, reported in his Oral History, "I had my own horse, we milked cows, and we'd run all over the hills in Black Springs. We'd get bummer lambs in the spring and raise them. It was an enjoyable part of my life." When asked if Hannah was good to the children, Blumstrom replied, "Good to us, yes, really good to us." However, the Orphan's Home representatives on a follow-up visit apparently decided that the environment was not a fit one for children and returned the four to the Home.

Though plagued with troubles, including a lawsuit in 1926 and a robbery in 1927, Hannah continued to hold her dances and offer specialized events for her patrons. One ad announced a "midnight weenie roast" and another, in early November of 1928, a drawing for \$20 of free groceries and a turkey, as well as the option to listen to the election returns. In December, Hannah pled guilty to a dry-law charge and was sentenced to 30 days in jail and a fine of \$25. However, the jail time was then suspended and Hannah was given 60 days in which to pay the fine.

The dance hall, sometimes advertised as the Black Springs Resort, continued to serve locals into the Depression. During a severe snowstorm in 1933, Hannah put up stranded motorists at her establishment. In November of that year, however, Hannah was again beset by legal troubles and her dance hall was foreclosed upon.

Black Springs was still sparsely populated in the 1930s and land was inexpensive. A real estate ad in 1936 offered 40 acres for \$350.

Because Hannah owned large tracts of land in Black Springs that she acquired through homesteading, some with houses and apartments, she turned her hand to real estate throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Once again Hannah came to the aid of those in need—specifically returning veterans, to whom she offered



P97-56 #404: Black Springs houses 1964 or 1965. 203 Kennedy Dr.

Photo courtesy of UNR Special Collections.

free building lots. She was determined to see her community grow and become every bit as much a neighborhood as those within Reno city limits.

Hannah Bathurst died in November of 1959. Although she had been Black Springs' most visible resident for nearly forty years, there are no remnants of Hannah there today; gone are her service station and dance hall, and no street or building bears her name.

In the 1940s and 1950s, local house mover Dario Bevilacqua was relocating small houses to the undeveloped area. At that time, one could buy a house inexpensively or sometimes acquire them for free, for the cost to have them moved from the owner's property. According to an architectural survey of the area conducted by local archaeologist Lynn Furnis, there are 37 houses in Black Springs that are 40 years old or more, and some are quite a bit older than that. One longtime resident told Ms. Furnis

that his house was built with square nails, indicating pre-twentieth century construction. "Recycled houses" are the norm in this community; only a few houses from the 1950s were built on site.

In the 1950s, the little community began to take on a new identity entirely. According to an interview in the *Nevada State Journal*, real estate developer John E. Sweatt claimed he bought a few acres of land, had them surveyed and laid out in 100 x 130 foot lots, graded streets and was planning to sell five or six lots a year. Sweatt said, "A colored man contacted me and asked what I thought about selling to colored people. I thought it over; they're entitled to have their own land, their own homes. And that's the way it started." Some of these men were negro airmen who were stationed at Stead Air Force Base but wanted a home for their families. Sadly, racial prejudice was still thriving in Reno and Nevada at that time and many neighborhood Covenants, Codes and Restrictions (CC&Rs) contained language excluding selling to racial minorities.

However, the problem for many of these new owners of Black Springs land was that they could not get financing to build. Ollie Westbrook, a leading citizen of the area for many years, was one of the first to purchase land from Sweatt. In a poignant account of his struggles for a home, Westbrook tells of his visit to a lender, "With a flash of amusement in his eyes, he told me he could not loan money for building in that area because it was undeveloped and unincorporated." Fortunately, this did not deter Mr. Westbrook; he made an agreement with a building supplier and over time, built his own house.

But the land and dwelling were only part of the equation in these residents' quests for a better life. With the exception of three families who had wells, there was no water; residents with trucks brought in large containers for their use; others used bottles and small barrels. The spring

Black Springs: A Colorful History (continued)

from which the area took its name could not be used—it was providing water for Horizon Hills. Westbrook says that some of the residents tried to pool their resources to dig a well to serve the entire community, but it was not enough. About 1956, they approached Sweatt over the issue and though he was reluctant, he did fund, with contributions from the homeowners, his own water company. Called the Eugene Street Water Company, it served the community for the next decade and a half, though there were times the rudimentary system would break down and the community would again be dry.

Because of many factors, including its location outside of the city limits, the uncaring attitude of local government, the inability of the residents to contribute financially to area improvements, and the use of the area by some nearby residents as a dumping ground, Black Springs increasingly became an eyesore.

In March 1967, publicity brought the community to the forefront of local citizens' notice. In three installments running on consecutive days, *Nevada State Journal* staff reporter Cheri Cross wrote an in-depth article on the plight of Black Springs. The first installment began: "Old broken boards, bottles, cans and mattresses thrown helter-skelter from one end of the community to another. Charred remains of several homes. Holes in the street large enough to swallow a child. Uncapped fire hydrants and tangled water hoses. Automobiles long abandoned along the edges of the roads. A disaster area? Yes. But this 'disaster' was not created by a flood, or tornado, or any other act of God. This area is right in our own community—located a few miles north of Reno near old Highway 395."

The article highlighted accusations on both sides of the issue, but ultimately it was the catalyst that brought about change, along with concerned residents and the assistance of local organizations such as the League of Women Voters. On a tour of the area, the League was reportedly shocked and dismayed by the conditions, but in particular by the overflowing

cesspools. The League backed the residents in demanding that something be done to improve their living conditions.


In 1971, Washoe County was persuaded to set up a general improvement district that built the new water system with financial contributions from the Fleischmann Foundation, Washoe County and the Reno Kiwanis Club. A



*Helen Westbrook Community Center in Black Springs.
Photo courtesy of Cindy Ainsworth.*

new community center was built and streets were paved with a grant from the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, written by one of the driving forces in Black Springs, Helen Westbrook. A new fire station was constructed to replace the one that had been abandoned many years previous. Residents worked to clean up the area, as did 14- to 16-year-old teens hired by Helen to clear brush and debris. Many residents received funds from another HUD grant for a home rehabilitation program. The Westbrooks are gone now, but their influence lingers in this community; a street there bears their name, as does the Community Center.

Mae Carthen, who moved from Oklahoma to Black Springs with her husband and children in 1956, remembers John Sweatt fondly, particularly since he would sell to black people. As for the community's name change to Grand View Terrace in 1990—to Mae, the name of her home will always be Black Springs.

Today, Black Springs is a small, quiet, friendly community like many others throughout Nevada. It is racially mixed and made up of some of the original 1950s families as well as newer residents. There are trees, lawns and small gardens, and children play in the large park, land donated by the late George Probasco, on playground equipment obtained through Helen Westbrook's efforts. It has come a long way from the trading post at the foot of a mining district, an isolated stop on the way down the Purdy Road, and a neglected and blighted residential area. It is now the way Ollie Westbrook envisioned it: "...a better place, a more beautiful place, in which you would be proud to look upon and I am as proud to live within." 

This article would not have been possible without the assistance of two important sources and amazing women: Nevada Historical Society docent and dedicated researcher Arline Laferry, and local archaeologist Lynn Furnis. Arline contributed her massive quantity of newspaper clippings from both the *Nevada State Journal* and *Reno Evening Gazette* 1889-1972, copies of public records, and a segment from the oral history of Leonard Blumstrom. Lynn shared her copious research on Black Springs, done both as part of an architectural survey for Nevada Department of Transportation and as a labor of love to chronicle the history of this small community. Included in this research were historical information and transcripts of conversations with current residents and other important sources. Thank you both for inspiring me and helping me to tell a small part of the story. Other sources included documents from the Elmer Rusco collection, NHS files, and a conversation with longtime Black Springs resident, Mae Carthen.

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

Letter to *FootPrints* Editor

Editor's Note: David Hollecker is commenting on Lloyd Shanks' article: "Wagon Tracks" from FootPrints Vol. 12 No. 4.

[David] received a copy of *FootPrints* the other day and read with interest an article titled "Wagon Tracks" by Lloyd Shanks. I do not know Mr. Shanks. I do know that his article has some discrepancies. He says that the route of the emigrant wagons through the Truckee Meadows is disputed and controversial.

Present day trail historians do not have a doubt as to where the wagons crossed the Meadows. Those who prescribe to the wagon route south to Hidden Valley and then to Rattlesnake Mountain are those who subscribe to the findings of Walt Mulcahy. Mr. Mulcahy did his trail research and mapping in the 1960s. Today, thanks to digital technology and the unearthing of a considerable amount of emigrant trail information since the 1960s, we now know the route of the emigrants.

To start, the fenced area containing the wagon road, Mr. Shanks describes, is an old wagon road. According to Army survey maps of the 1860s, it is shown as the road to Virginia City, a road that branched off from the Humboldt Road (the old emigrant trail) that ran parallel to the river. It had joined with the Henness Pass Road near Hidden Valley.

By 1846, the year the Donner Party encamped in the Meadows, some 1500 emigrants had made the journey to California. From these emigrants, only six diaries have been found. Three of these diaries offer no useful information on the Truckee Meadows crossing.

One diary, written by James Mathers on October 1, 1846, describes in part,

"Traveled... to a wide valley covered with grass and thence across the same for 4 miles...thence over a sandy and stony ridge for 4 miles and encamped by the river (just west of Idlewild Park)."

T. H. Jefferson, who was traveling with Mathers drew a map of the river canyon, the Meadows and the Verdi area. The Jefferson map clearly shows the wagon route as paralleling the river. The Donner Party entered the Meadows three weeks after the Mather Party.

Few wagons traveled to California in 1847 and 1848; it is estimated some 400 emigrants traveled the trail in this time. From those emigrants, only two diaries have surfaced and neither has given any useful information on the crossing of the Meadows.

Mr. Shanks then quotes 1849 diary accounts from Harold Curran's 1982 *Fearful Crossing* book. The diary of Elisha Perkins (not Elizabeth) says,

"... took the trail leaving the road to the right and supposing it to be a 'cutoff' as the road wound around a belt of marsh which crosses the valley at nearly right angles to the river. We followed this trail around the base of the hills and soon found ourselves going off in quite a contrary direction to the course of the road and the marsh on our right was entirely uncrossable, a perfect quagmire."



The area near Hidden Valley marked with this trail marker indicating the trail is an emigrant trail has long been a "bone of contention" among local trail historians.

Mr. Curran finishes the quote with Perkins remarking on their camp site view of the mountains. One might assume that they were near or had reached the Rattlesnake Mountain 'camping' area. But here is what Curran left out of that quote following the word "quagmire",

"There was nothing to do but go back some 3 miles..."

The trail or 'cutoff' that Perkins followed was an Indian trail, not a wagon trail (he later concluded).

The statement about the late Walt Mulcahy finding Donner Party artifacts with George Donner's name on them is known to some trail enthusiasts. Question: where are they? What did he do with them? Has anyone actually seen these artifacts? To date, they

have never 'surfaced.'

The author has misread Lienhard's diary account of his entry into the Truckee Meadows. He stayed along the river. No emigrant road ever went over the Virginia Range from Lockwood into Hidden Valley. Some years ago when this theory was brought forth, several trail historians and I crawled all over the supposed pass area in the Virginia Range and could find no evidence of wagons going over the top. Why would they? It would have been an arduous journey to be sure.

One diarist in 1852, D. B. Andrews, described the "hill" that Lienhard had earlier talked about as being 20 rods [330 feet] up the steep hill and 30 rods [495 feet] down the hill - this hardly describes the Virginia Range but does describe a hill about a mile east of the sewer plant.

In conclusion:

- The fenced wagon road south of the Hidden Valley homes is a later wagon road to Virginia City. No emigrants ever used this road on their way to California.
- Wagon artifacts (sans Donner stuff) found in the Rattlesnake Mountain area is from wagons that traveled the later, nearby Henness Pass road that went to Virginia City.
- There is no diary or documented evidence from any wagon party which describes, or maps showing, the emigrant trail going to Rattlesnake or Sugar Loaf Mountains.
- The Donner Party members wrote nothing in their diaries about where they camped in the Truckee Meadows. Later interviews with Party survivors also did not indicate where they camped in the Meadows.

From David Hollecker.

David Hollecker is a member of Trails West, the Oregon-California Trails Association and the Reno Historical Resources Commission. He has spent more than 20 years helping to map emigrant trails and stage routes in Idaho, Nevada, California, New Mexico and Arizona.

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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.



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

From Your HRPS President

2010 school year was Hidden Valley Elementary's fourth grade. The program, held in October, featured a video-photo-collection show by Jerry Fenwick, and was followed the next day by a bus tour of the sites on the video. There were sixty-two students, two fourth grade teachers and several parents on the bus tour. The students were enthusiastic and engaging. For the first time, we had a tour of the downtown Courthouse. The students enjoyed watching HRPS member and local artist Loren Jahn put the finishing touches on the beautiful second-floor mural.

HRPS is now in the process of constructing, with the cooperation of the City of Reno, an eight-to-

ten-foot pillar to act as a boundary marker, commemorating the history of the Powning Conservation District. This area, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was known as "Little Italy." Loren Jahn has created an enchanting design for the pillar, which we hope the City of Reno will install at Bicentennial Park on Riverside Drive. The "Pillar of History" will be constructed of recycled river rock in a 1920s Craftsman style with a wrought iron top and a nameplate and dedication plaque. The pillar will be lit at the top by a reproduction of an historic globe lamp.

As always, I thank all our loyal members for their support of our endeavors.

— Felvia Belaustegui,
HRPS President and HRC
Commissioner

*Proposed "Pillar of History,"
designed by HRPS member
Loren Jahn, to be made of
recycled river rock in a
1920s Craftsman style.*



HRPS has had a very active fall, with seven walking tours in September and the annual dinner-fundraiser in October. The dinner was successful and the National Automobile Museum venue was delightful. The dining area was spacious and the Siena menu and table settings were elegant. I thank all of the board members who served on the committee, which was led by Carrie Young. The silent auction, as always, featured many interesting items, prompting an abundance of interest in bidding.

The first class to benefit from HRPS' education program this 2009-



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WINTER 2010 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, January 27: Mel Shields on “35 years of casino entertainment history in northern Nevada,” with anecdotes about entertainment stars that have performed in Reno over the last 35 years. Mel, a Washoe County teacher for 33 years, has also been an entertainment reviewer for *Variety*, *Daily Variety*, *Showtime* and the *Sacramento Bee*.

Wednesday, February 24: Tim Mueller, local author and avid baseball fan, shares his baseball knowledge with a slide show on the history of baseball in Nevada. Tim is author of the recently published book, *Homeruns and Jackpots: Baseball in Nevada*.

Wednesday, March 24: Kelly Rae will present a slide show illustrating her adaptive reuse projects: the Firehouse on Morrill Avenue and the V&T houses on Center Street. A music video of the Firehouse project will chronicle the building from 1950 to the completion of renovation.

Wednesday, April 28: Join Kim Henrick and Rosie Cevalasco as they share the interesting and under-appreciated history of our state's mental health system. Find out where patients were cared for before the first hospital was built in 1882 and what behaviors were indicative of insanity in the early 1900s, among many other facts.

Opinions expressed in *FootPrints* are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the editorial staff, the Historic Reno Preservation Society executive board or the general membership. *FootPrints* is a quarterly publication printed in Reno, Nevada. All rights reserved. ©2010 Historic Reno Preservation Society (HRPS).

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