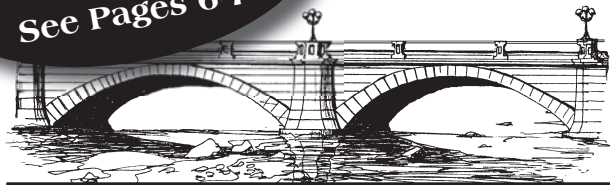


July 2010  
Walking Tours!  
See Pages 6-7



# Historic Reno PRESERVATION SOCIETY

# FootPrints

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

vol. 13 no. 3 ❖ Summer 2010

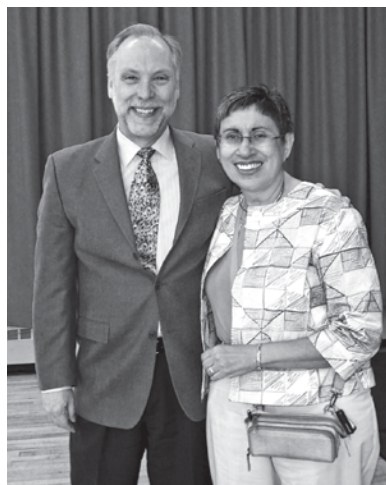
## The 2010 Historic Resources Commission Awards

by Cindy Ainsworth and Debbie Hinman

Historic preservation is alive and well in Reno, and those who have demonstrated a commitment to it were honored on Wednesday, May 12, by the Historic Resources Commission (HRC). The Commission presented its annual awards at City Hall for Distinguished Service, Lifetime Achievement, Historic Landmark, Residential Award, and the Advocate Award to deserving local residents.

The Distinguished Service, Lifetime Achievement Award went to recently-retired Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Planner and Archaeologist Alice Baldrice. Said HRC Chair Cindy Ainsworth, "Alice has done more for historic preservation in Nevada than any other single person." For more than 30 years, Alice has played a role in historic preservation planning statewide. She has been the coordinator for former Historic Preservation Week each spring, now celebrated the entire month of May.

Receiving the Historic Landmark Award was William Fuellenbach, Executive Director of Northern Nevada HOPES. The organization's offices occupy the Humphrey House at 467 Ralston Street. A true Reno landmark, the property was designed by notable local architect Fred Schadler and built in 1906 in the Mission Revival style for Frank Ellis Humphrey and his wife Clara Bender Humphrey. The style was an unusual one for Reno at that time, although several years later, four Mission Revival elementary schools were built; one of the schools, Mary S. Doten, was just a block away from the Humphrey residence. The home is a two-story stucco-clad building with a gabled roof and scrolled parapets projecting above the roof height on all four elevations of the structure. The stunning porch is flanked



Alice Baldrice, winner of the HRC Distinguished Service, Lifetime Achievement Award, with State Historic Preservation Officer Ron James.

by archways and paired columns at each corner. The architect skillfully manipulated design motifs to achieve interesting and varied composition.

Because the house is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, Nevada HOPES has been eligible to receive state and federal grants for repairs and rehabilitation. Organization leaders have done a beautiful job of preserving the integrity and originality of this unique home which serves the community by providing outpatient medical care, pharmacy services, social and supportive services for HIV-positive individuals in Northern Nevada.

The Residential Award is presented each year to an owner who has exemplified the spirit of historic preservation in lovingly restoring a single-family home or multi-family residential dwelling. This year's award was presented to Mercedes de la Garza and Scott Gibson, owners of 575 Ridge Street. The beautiful Period Revival home was designed by prominent architect Frederic DeLongchamps and built in 1929 for local businessman Edward Chism. The brick home is a lovely, two-story English Tudor in the historic Newlands Neighborhood. The couple has owned the home for several years, painstakingly restoring it to its original glory. They have refinished the pine floors, restored the upstairs bathroom, and replaced lighting fixtures with period-appropriate ones. Scott and Mercedes are particularly proud

of uncovering a beautiful English Arts and Crafts fireplace, buried under layers of plaster and paint.



Ed Bath, owner of the Garden Shop Nursery, received the HRC Advocate Award.

The Advocate award goes to an individual or group that has through education, deeds, or specific historic restoration(s) increased public awareness of historic preservation in the community. This year's winner could not be more deserving. Ed Bath, owner of the Garden Shop Nursery, purchased the historic Crissie Caughlin Ranch home in 2008 and began the arduous

## The 2010 HRC Awards (continued)

*Continued from page 1*

process of getting it entered into the City of Reno's Historic Register and obtaining the necessary permits to conduct his nursery business on the site. Ed and his wife Jennifer have set a fine example by combining a modern business with a historic site that serves and benefits the community. The Italianate ranch house has a very long and colorful history. Like many other Virginia City homes of that era, it was taken apart and moved from the dying town to Reno by William Caughlin. William had married Crissie Andrews in 1892 and the home was placed on the land she inherited from her family. The Baths graciously open the home for tours and fund-raising events.

In addition to these winners, Cindy Ainsworth presented awards to Donald Naquin, in appreciation of his ten years of service as HRC's city staff liaison, and HRC Board members whose terms have

recently ended: Felvia Belaustegui, Red Kittell, Neal Cobb and Sally Ramm. Their passion for Reno's history and service to the city have earned them the respect of all who value preservation.


Recipients were further honored as the guests of HRPS at a luncheon at the



*William Fuellenbach, Executive Director of Northern Nevada HOPES, received the HRC Landmark Award for thoughtful restoration of the Humphrey House.*

McKinley Arts & Culture Center, following the ceremony.

Attendees were able to peruse the Powning neighborhood history on entering McKinley, by viewing a display created by UNR history student Drew Gerthoffer. Voila Catering provided a light spring luncheon and the award winners were again congratulated by HRC Chair and HRPS Administrator Cindy Ainsworth.

We are very fortunate to have so many local people who care about Reno's history and dedicate themselves to restoring and preserving it. Reno is richer for their efforts. 

Cindy Ainsworth is Chair of Historic Resources Commission and HRPS Administrator. Debbie Hinman is a HRPS Tour Guide and a member of FootPrints Editorial Staff.

## From Your HRPS President, Felvia Belaustegui



*Felvia Belaustegui,  
HRPS President*

**A**s my third and final year as president of HRPS concludes, I have been fortunate to have exceptional support from our outstanding board, the tour guides, the editorial staff of *FootPrints* and all the other members

who contribute to our organization. Our monthly programs benefit the community by providing well-researched and entertaining topics. The HRPS website is another way we reach out to members and the public.

One of HRPS outstanding endeavors has been the fourth grade history program. Thanks to the participation of Barbara Courtney, Jerry Fenwick, Phyllis Cates and Terry Cynar, by the end of the 2009-2010 school year, we will have provided

nine schools and approximately 600 students with the program. We begin with a Nevada history slide show produced and narrated by Jerry Fenwick.

The next day the bus tour takes the students to some of the sites seen in the video. Many thanks to Randy Amestoy, on the Administrative team for the Washoe County Clerk's Office in the historic courthouse, who provides a remarkable educational and entertaining tour and history of both Washoe County and the Washoe County Court system.

Mary Ellen Horan, director of Very Special Arts, opens the Lake Mansion where the students eat lunch and get a tour of the house. The Amtrack Station is the next stop with a brief history of the development of the railroad and a visit to the restored Women's Christian Temperance Union fountain in the station. The students are delighted with the fountain and fascinated that it provided water fau-

cets for people as well as troughs for dogs and horses. The bus continues on to McKinley Arts and Cultural Center and the California building on Idlewild Drive. I am personally very impressed with the enthusiasm of the students for both the historical significance of the areas they visit and their interest in Reno's history. The teachers and parents are supportive and impressed with our efforts and they all express a desire that the program continue.

Lastly, I want to stress the importance of our mission, "Preserving Historic Resources of the Truckee Meadows through Education, Advocacy and Leadership." In this time of economic stress in both local and state agencies, HRPS continues to promote historic areas and education about historic preservation.

— Sincerely, Felvia Belaustegui

## A Short History of the Lincoln Highway

by The Lincoln Highway Association

In 1912, there were almost no good roads to speak of in the United States. The relatively few miles of improved roads were only around towns and cities. A road was “improved” if it was graded; one was lucky to have gravel or brick. Asphalt and concrete were yet to come. Most of the 2.5 million miles of roads were just dirt: bumpy and dusty in dry weather, impassable in wet weather. Worse yet, the roads didn’t really lead anywhere. They spread out aimlessly from the center of the settlement. To get from one settlement to another, it was much easier to take the train.

Carl Fisher recognized this situation, and an idea started to take hold. Fisher was a man of ideas. As soon as he thought of a project and got it started, he would grow restless and start on another one. His Indianapolis Motor Speedway was a success, especially after he paved it with brick and started the Indianapolis 500, and he would later turn a swamp into one of the greatest beach resorts—Miami Beach, Florida. However, in 1912, he dreamed of another grand idea: a highway spanning the continent, from coast to coast.

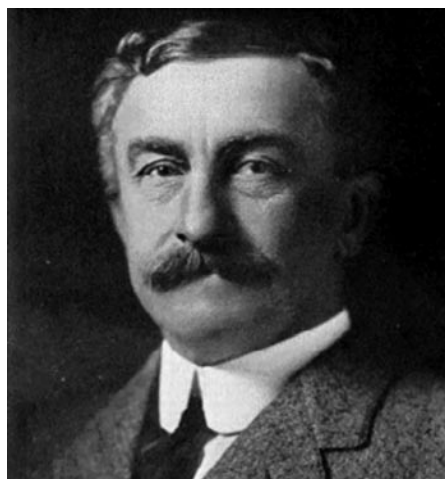
He called his idea the Coast-to-Coast Rock Highway. The graveled road would cost about ten million dollars, a low cost—even for 1912. He proposed that communities along the route would provide the equipment and in return would receive free materials and a place along America’s first transcontinental highway. The highway would be finished in time for the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition and would run from the exposition’s host, San Francisco, to New York City.

To fund this scheme, Fisher asked for cash donations from auto manufacturers and accessory companies of one percent of their revenues. The public could become members of the highway organization for five dollars.

Fisher knew that success of the ten-million dollar fund would depend on the support of Henry Ford. Unfortunately, even after many persuasive attempts by friends and close associates, Ford would not support the project. Ford reasoned the public would never learn to fund good roads if private industry did it for them. This put the fund in jeopardy; there would not be enough time or money to finish the highway by the exposition in 1915. However, now that the country had become so enthusiastic about the highway, Fisher could not



Carl Fisher (1874 - 1939)  
*An American entrepreneur in the automotive, auto racing and real estate development industries*



Henry Bourne Joy (1864 - 1936)  
*President of the Packard Motor Car Company, and a major developer of automotive activities as well as being a social activist.*

give up. Two men from the automobile industry who pledged money to Fisher’s idea would later play major roles in the highway’s development: Frank Seiberling, president of Goodyear, and Henry Joy, president of the Packard Motor Car Company.

Henry Joy came up with the idea of naming the highway after Abraham Lincoln. He wrote Fisher urging him to write a letter of protest to Congress, which was considering spending \$1.7 million on a marble memorial to Lincoln. Joy thought a good road across the country would be a better tribute to the president. The name Lincoln captured Fisher’s fancy; he realized it would give the highway great patriotic appeal. Fisher asked Joy if he wanted to be directly involved with the highway project. At first, Joy was hesitant, but soon he wholeheartedly supported the project and became the primary spokesman for the highway.

On July 1, 1913, the association decided to call the coast-to-coast highway the Lincoln Highway, and it was officially incorporated as the Lincoln Highway Association. Henry Joy was elected as president. Carl Fisher, who was elected vice-president, was not present. He had departed with the Indiana Automobile Manufacturers Association on a trip to the West Coast. The “Hoosier Tour” was intended, in part, to explore possible routes for the Lincoln Highway.

Fisher kept the route of the Lincoln Highway a secret as long as he could because he wanted the nation as a whole to support the highway, not just the states through which it would pass, and he didn’t know what the route was as no decision had been made. After the Hoosier Tour, the association decided they needed to settle on a route.

*Continued on page 4*

## A Short History of the Lincoln Highway (continued)



*The chosen route for the Lincoln Highway, a direct route from New York City to San Francisco, bypassed many scenic attractions and larger cities, and avoided narrow winding roadways and congestion.*

*Continued from page 3*

As far as Joy was concerned, a direct route was the most important factor. By bypassing many scenic attractions and larger cities along the way, narrow winding roadways and congestion could be avoided.

After weeks of deliberation, Henry Joy presented the route before the annual Conference of Governors in Colorado Springs. The highway started in Times Square in New York City. It passed through New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, and California, ending in Lincoln Park in San Francisco. The route did not deviate from a straight path in order to go through larger cities or national parks. It did not touch Kansas or Colorado. Joy's influence was clear.

The Lincoln Highway Association set up a system of "consuls" along the highway who acted as local ambassadors. They represented the highway in local affairs, assisted visitors, and let the headquarters know of matters concerning the highway.

However, in 1914, there wasn't much of a highway to be concerned about. No improvements had been made to the Lincoln Highway, and with

Ford's refusal to chip in and the growing disinterest of people left off the route, the ten-million-dollar fund that Fisher had set up had stalled at the halfway point. Joy decided to abandon the fund and instead redirect the association to a new goal: educating the country for the need of good roads made of *concrete*, with an improved Lincoln Highway as an example. It would oversee the construction of concrete "seedling miles" way out in the countryside to emphasize the superiority of concrete over unimproved dirt. As people would learn about concrete, they would press the government to construct good roads throughout their state.

In the deserts of Utah, west of Salt Lake city, a new route called the Goodyear Cutoff was surveyed and prepared for construction. However, Utah did not want this part of the Lincoln Highway finished. Utah wanted to improve the Arrowhead Route to Los Angeles so that travelers and their money would be kept in the state for hundreds of more miles.

The Utah state government promoted a route directly west of Salt Lake City to Wendover, Nevada as the route to San Francisco. This route crossed miles of salt desert, which was often submerged under water. To improve the Wendover road would take much more money than improving the Lincoln Highway.

In 1921, the federal government passed the Federal Highway Act of 1921. Like a similar act passed in 1916, it provided \$75 million of matching funds to the states for highway construction. However, unlike the 1916 act, the 1921 act required the states to identify seven percent of its total mileage as "primary," and only those roads would be eligible for federal funds.

In most states in which it ran, the Lincoln Highway was the obvious choice as a federal road, but there were a few exceptions—the biggest challenge was in Utah.

The Wendover route was still favored by Utah, and now it was part of another named highway, the Victory Highway. Like the Lincoln, its endpoints were New York and San Francisco, but it claimed the Wendover road and the route along the Humboldt River in Nevada, which pitted it directly against the Lincoln. It was virtually unknown in the east but was favored in Utah, Nevada, and northern California. Like their fellow Utah citizens, northern Californians favored the Victory for economic



*Utah wanted the Lincoln Highway to follow the Arrowhead Route to Los Angeles, thereby keeping travelers and their money in the state for hundreds of more miles.*



*Following the Federal Highway Act of 1921, the Victory Highway along the Humboldt River in Nevada was declared the federal road in Nevada.*

## A Short History of the Lincoln Highway (continued)

reasons: travelers along the Victory would almost certainly go to San Francisco. If travelers took the Lincoln through western Utah, they could easily drive southwest towards Los Angeles, as it was about as far away as San Francisco.

Despite numerous reports and heavy lobbying by the Lincoln Highway Association, the federal government selected the Wendover route as the federal road. Consequently, the Victory was also declared the federal road in Nevada. The Goodyear Cutoff, which was never finished by Utah's government, would remain unimproved.

In the ten years between 1915 and 1925, the United States went from having one named highway to having an unorganized and confusing system of named highways. They were primarily marked by painted colored bands on telephone poles. Sometimes, where several named highways shared a route, almost an entire pole would be striped in various colors. It was time for an organized national system of highways to be formed, a system of *numbered* highways.

The Lincoln Highway Association was all for a numbered highway system, as long as one number corresponded to the Lincoln Highway and the names stayed with the roads. It didn't want to see its highway chopped up into little numbered bits. In March 1925, the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) started planning a federal highway system. All named roads were ignored in their planning. That November, the secretary of agriculture approved AASHO's plan, which set up the now-familiar U.S. highway system.

Major east-west routes would be numbered in multiples of ten, from U.S. 10 across the north to U.S. 90 across the south. Major north-south routes would end in 1 or 5, from U.S. 1

between Maine and Florida to U.S. 101 between Washington and California. The Lincoln Highway was broken up into U.S. 1, U.S. 30 (including U.S. 30N and U.S. 30S), U.S. 530, U.S. 40, and U.S. 50. Nearly two-thirds of the Lincoln's length was designated U.S.



*By 1928, numbered highways were to replace all named highways. To travel the Lincoln Highway from east to west, one took U.S. 1 from N.Y.C. to Atlantic City, NJ, U.S. 30 west to Granger Junction, WY, U.S. 530 to Great Salt Lake City Utah, U.S. 40 across the top of Utah, U.S. 50 across Nevada, and U.S. 40 or 50 around Lake Tahoe to Sacramento, then U.S. 40 again across to San Francisco.*


30, which began in Atlantic City, New Jersey and ended in Astoria, Oregon. The AASHO also adopted a standard set of road signs and markers, and to avoid confusion, all markers of all named roads would have to be taken down.

Interest in the Lincoln Highway dropped considerably. The association ceased activity at the end of 1927. Its last major activity was to mark the highway not as a route from one destination to another, but as a memorial to Abraham Lincoln. On September 1, 1928, thousands of Boy Scouts fanned out along the highway. At an average of about one per mile, they installed small concrete markers with a small bust of Lincoln and the inscription: "This highway dedicated to Abraham Lincoln."

While the other named highways were quickly forgotten, the Lincoln Highway was not. A whole generation of Americans, exposed to the well-organized publicity of the Lincoln Highway Association, kept the Lincoln Highway alive long after its official significance was gone. It was the backdrop for an NBC radio show on Saturday mornings. Airing for two seasons in the 1940s, it had an audience of 8 million listeners.

By the late 1940s, the Lincoln Highway started to fade away. A new generation of Americans was born, one which had grown up with paved roads and a numbered highway system. Most Baby Boomers, and even more of their children, have never heard of the Lincoln Highway.

However, not everyone has forgotten. The Lincoln Highway Association was reactivated in 1992, dedicated to preserving the highway. With the help of the association, the Lincoln Highway will always stay alive.

Watch for an announcement about a bus tour of the Lincoln Highway through Reno and Sparks in the Fall 2010 issue of *FootPrints*. 



*To remember the Lincoln Highway, in 1928, the Lincoln Highway Association created small concrete markers with a small bust of Abraham Lincoln (above) on the top and a bold "L" below, which were to be placed a mile apart on the route of the Lincoln Highway by thousands of Boy Scouts.*



# HRPS and Artown July 2010 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](http://www.historicreno.org) or call 747-4478 for information and reservations. **Cut-off date for reservations is the day before the tour.**

**Saturday, July 3, 9:00 a.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 guides: Ed Wishart, Bill Isaef and Joan Collins.

**Sunday, July 4, 9:00 a.m.** BIKE TOUR THROUGH OLD RENO - A leisurely ride through the most historic parts of Reno. Meet at My Favorite Muffin, 340 California Avenue. HELMETS REQUIRED, NO EXCEPTIONS! Tour guide: Glee Willis.

**Tuesday, July 6, 6:00 p.m.** PROHIBITION IN RENO - We've turned back the clock 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.

**Saturday, July 10, 9:00 a.m.** PARSONS/MILLS ARCHITECTURE - Stroll one of Reno's most unique neighborhoods to view some designs of Reno architects Edward Parsons and Russell Mills, who sometimes collaborated on designs. Hear about the families who first lived in these homes. Meet at the corner of Marsh Avenue and LaRue. Tour guides: Anne Simone and Elsie Newman.

**Tuesday, July 13, 6:00 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, July 17, 9:00 a.m.** ROADS AND RAILS, HISTORIC FOURTH STREET CORRIDOR - Discover the historic origins of the Lincoln Highway and the Nevada, California and Oregon Railroad, stopping to appreciate the Barengo/NCO building, Flanigan warehouse, and other vestiges of the corridor's heyday. Meet at Louis Basque Corner, 301 E. 4th Street. Tour guide: Cindy Ainsworth.

## July 1 is Time to Renew Your HRPS Membership

**W**ow, how the days fly by! Once again it is time to renew your Historic Reno Preservation Society membership for 2010-2011. As most of you know your HRPS membership due date changed from "the month you joined" to all memberships due July 1. This change was made to lessen confusion over expiration dates and July was chosen over January because we found that most renewals and new memberships coincide with the start of HRPS July walking tours. I hope this change has made the renewal process easier for all.

You can grab a membership renewal form from HRPS website at <http://historicreno.org> and there is always a membership renewal form in *FootPrints*. We have included an envelope

printed with a renewal form in this issue of *FootPrints* for your mailing convenience.

If you haven't already had a chance to look at the July Walking Tours line-up, you'll be glad to see that there are some great new tours this year as well as HRPS's fascinating evening programs starting again in September! And, with your membership you receive a copy of *FootPrints* four times a year. All of these are free to you with your HRPS membership.

There is also a change to HRPS's Fall Social this year that you won't want to miss out on! Be sure to send in your membership this month.

— Carrie Young, Membership Director.

## HRPS and Artown July 2010 Historic Walking Tours (continued)

Tuesday,  
July 20,  
6:00 p.m.

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

Saturday,  
July 24,  
9:00 a.m.

BRICKS AND STONES - A walk in the Humboldt and Lander streets neighborhood. Discover the architectural treasure trove of this area, a mix of bungalows, Tudor, mission revival and cottage styles. Meet at My Favorite Muffin, 340 California Avenue. Tour guide: Bill Isaeff.

Saturday,  
July 24,  
10:00 a.m.

NEW TOUR - KID'S ARCHITECTURAL TOUR - This tour introduces children in first through third grades to architecture and the art of observation by challenging them to discover the historic detailing prevalent in Reno's downtown architecture. The goal is to create a new generation of informed citizens of the man-made environment and in turn, fans of historic Reno. Meet at 448 Ridge Street. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Tour cost is \$10 per person, \$5 for children, free to HRPS members and their children.

Sunday,  
July 25,  
9:00 a.m.

BIKE TOUR THROUGH OLD RENO - A leisurely ride through the most historic parts of Reno. Meet at My Favorite Muffin, 340 California Avenue. HELMETS REQUIRED, NO EXCEPTIONS! Tour guide: Glee Willis.

Tuesday,  
July 27,  
6:00 p.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.

Saturday,  
July 31,  
9:00 a.m.

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

### HRPS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

**Join HRPS or renew your membership and help HRPS preserve historic Reno!**

Please make checks payable to **Historic Reno Preservation Society**, and mail along with this application to:  
P.O. Box 14003, Reno, NV 89507

- ☐ New Member  
☐ Renewing Member

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

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

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

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

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

**FOR OFFICE  
USE ONLY**

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

RV 04.07.08/FO-DCD

# The Gray, Reid, Wright Company: A Nevada Institution

by Debbie Hinman

The story of the Gray, Reid, Wright Company is not only the story of a local institution; it is the story of three men whose entrepreneurial spirit created a business vision that lasted more than eight decades. Their store served several generations of northern Nevada residents and is to this day unequalled in the variety of wares it offered in its heyday and its relationship to the community. Although it has been 24 years since the store closed its doors for the last time, the name Gray Reid's, as it was known in its final incarnation, invokes nostalgic memories for all who visited the store.

## Joseph H. Gray, II

Co-founder of the store, Joseph Gray has the distinction of being the first white child born in the fledgling town of Truckee, California, in late 1868. In the early 1880s, the family relocated to Sacramento. Joseph worked for Hale Brothers, a dry goods firm there and married a California girl named Johanna in 1898. The couple moved to Reno around the turn of the century.

## Hosea E. Reid

Born in Ohio in 1863, Reid was raised on a farm and went to work at a mercantile store at the age of 18. In 1884, he came west to California and clerked in various cities around the state. He returned

to the Midwest and earned a dentistry degree at Northwestern University. He returned to California, practicing in San Francisco and Sacramento before heading for Nevada. Traveling by horseback, he practiced in such towns as Wadsworth, Lovelock, Winnemucca, Austin and Carlin. In July of 1901, Reid gave up dentistry, moved to Reno and went into business with Joseph Gray, incorporating as Gray, Reid & Co.

## Walter W. Wright

The eldest of the three partners, Wright was born in New Hampshire in 1855. He found his way westward, spending his entire work life in the dry goods industry. Wright understood the business from wholesale to retail. Prior to moving to Reno in 1903, he was manager of Hale Brothers & Company in Sacramento for seventeen years.

## The Store

The Reno of 1901 was a bustling, thriving small town of approximately 4,500 residents. The time was ripe for entrepreneurs to find ways to meet the demands of this growing population. Two such entrepreneurs, Joseph Gray and Hosea Reid, had recently made Reno their new home and together purchased a small dry goods store owned by a Mr. Emrich, who had been in dry goods in town since the 1880s.



*Thoma-Bigelow Building, built in 1903, housing Gray, Reid Wright on the first floor and basement. Construction of the 1905 Virginia Street Bridge is in the foreground. Photo courtesy of Neal Cobb.*

The new store, christened Gray, Reid & Company, was located in the Queen Building, at 237 N. Virginia Street. It opened on Tuesday, September 10 and achieved immediate notice by townspeople. A *Reno Evening Gazette* writer noted the following in his editorial of that day: "Passing down Virginia Street this morning my eye was attracted by the tasteful window dressing of Gray, Reid & Co." The reporter continues to rhapsodize over bows and ties, ladies' corsets, all manner of dress goods, table linens, blankets and ends with the entreaty, "If you don't believe it, go and see for yourself." And local residents must have done just that because by 1902, the owners found it necessary to enlarge the store.

A news article from early January of 1903, announced the addition of a third partner, a Mr. Walter Wright of Sacramento.

The second milestone for the store in 1903 was its move to a beautiful new building on October 17. In February of that year, it was announced that Judge Bigelow and Dr. Thoma had accepted a bid by C. E. Clough to erect a beautiful, three-story brick and stone building on the northwest corner of First and Virginia streets. The Grand Opening was a gala event for Reno. Five thousand people attended and were taken on store tours by employees. A six-piece orchestra serenaded guests in the afternoon and evening, and each adult was given a souvenir glass bearing the design of the Thoma-Bigelow Building.



*North Virginia Street about 1910. On the left, the Masonic Temple and Gray, Reid, Wright. The 1907 Federal Building and Post Office on the right. Note the trolley tracks down the street.*

*Photo courtesy of Jerry Fenwick.*

## The Gray, Reid, Wright Company (continued)

The year 1903 was a banner one for impressive brick structures in Reno. In addition to the Thoma-Bigelow building, also under construction were the Riverside Hotel and the beautiful, Fred Schadler-designed Elks Home on West First Street.

Gray, Reid, Wright Co.(GRW) continued to thrive, expanding into the state capital. In 1905, the partners purchased the S. B. Cohen store at 502 N. Carson Street, adjacent to the Arlington Hotel. By 1912, the company announced that they had purchased a lot on Maine Street in Fallon where they were planning to construct a beautiful new store to serve this young community. Although the Carson City store closed around 1918 and the building was destroyed around mid-century, the Fallon building is still standing, bearing a faded banner, a reminder of the building's first occupant. The building is an attraction on the Fallon Maine Street walking tour.

GRW occupied the Thoma-Bigelow location for the next 35 years, but there would be major changes in its leadership. Its newest partner, Walter Wright, died suddenly in 1908. Gray and Reid both remained active in the store and built impressive homes on the north side of Court Street. In 1928, Joseph Gray sold his interest in the store. Local businessman George Mapes purchased the Thoma-Bigelow building the same year and became vice president of GRW. The building thereafter became known as the Mapes Building.

In 1929, a new manager was brought in from San Francisco to reorganize the store. The man's name, coincidentally, was Raymond N. Grey. In his short tenure as store manager (Grey died unexpectedly in April of 1933), he did much to involve the store in the community life of Reno. Gray, Reid, Wright began sponsoring dances at Tony's El Patio Ballroom and Grey initiated the annual Easter Egg Hunt held at Idlewild Park. Upon Grey's death, Harry Golding, a store employee since 1910, took over management of the store.

The store's last partner, Dr. Hosea Reid, died in September of 1933, following a lengthy illness. Ownership of the store passed to his estate, administered by his wife, Louise. Mrs. Louise Reid, Harry Golding and Sam Mozingo would be the firm's directors for the next ten years.

The previously-mentioned Elks Home on West First Street sat back from the street on the banks of the Truckee River. A beautiful park area graced the front of the building. Visitors to the Home walked up a winding path edged by towering trees to a lovely, tall portico with impressive columns. In 1937, Sierra



*Front view of Grey, Reid, Wright Co. in the 1900s showing the wonderful display windows for which it was known.  
Photo courtesy of Neal Cobb.*

Construction Company, owned by Norman Biltz and Dr. Theodore Chase purchased this park area from the Elks. They negotiated to have the portico removed from the Elks building so that they could construct a two-story modern mercantile building with a full basement on the purchased land with a 90-foot frontage on West First and extending 75 feet on Sierra Street. A new entrance to the Elks Home was constructed facing Sierra Street.

In the summer of 1938, GRW's lease in the Mapes building expired and the F. W. Woolworth's Co., which had been occupying space on the east side of North Virginia Street, was slated to move in.

Store manager Harry Golding signed an agreement with Norman Biltz and the department store relocated once again, this time occupying the entire building adjacent to the Elks Home. The new store opened on July 11th with a preview celebration and for business on Tuesday morning, July 12. The basement housed the toy and household departments, the main floor the men's, cosmetics, dry goods and hosiery departments and the second floor featured ladies' ready-to-wear, infants, shoes, millinery and the beauty parlor. The store retained its cachet as Reno's premiere department store. Employees were carefully selected and tended to be loyal, making their employment there a career.

The year 1943 brought a landmark change in the store's ownership. For the first time, GRW passed out of the hands of the founding families when it was purchased by Mrs. Bertha Ronzone and her daughter and son-in-law, Amy and Al Adams. The Ronzone/Adams family were the owners of the largest independently-owned department store in southern Nevada, Ronzone's. The new owners were retaining their Las Vegas holdings and promised no changes in policy or personnel for the Reno operation, and were quoted as saying, "We shall do everything possible to continue the same high standards of merchandise, but wartime conditions and shortages of some things may delay some of our plans."

The Biltz building was sold in 1940 to Stack Securities, owned by Mrs. Elizabeth Stack and sons James and Robert of Beverly Hills. Mrs. Stack was the widow of James Langford Stack who had resided at his home on the Nevada side of Lake Tahoe for several years preceding his death. Son Robert would grow up to be a well-known actor. Mrs. Stack already owned a building on N. Virginia Street, which was known as the Stack Building. The structure housing GRW would also come to be known as the Stack Building.

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## The Gray, Reid, Wright Company (continued)

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In 1947, a young woman named Viola "Vi" Van Dyke moved to Reno and was hired by GRW as a window designer, beginning her 19-year career with the store. Later promoted to design director, Vi loved her job and found the owners supportive and willing to give her free rein in her designs. The store had always maintained attractive displays, but Vi's artistic touch brought them to a new level. She learned from the best; one of her fondest memories was being instructed in the art of silk-screening by well-known local artist Lyle Ball.

Vi related that the store leased office space from nearby buildings for some of its departments, such as for the window designers. In the 1950s, GRW had offices in the basement of the Elks Home directly behind it. Vi worked in the Elks building and accessed the main store via a tunnel that connected the two buildings. This tunnel was not the only underground structure in the area; irrigation ditches had run through the center of town in Reno's early days. These ditches, the Sullivan-Kelly and the Riverside Mill, had been filled in some areas, but merely covered over in others, as commercial buildings began to flourish in the area. They ran beneath the Elks Home and across Sierra Street, under the block of shops on the southwest corner, including Paterson's, Sunderland's, Tait's, Kaylene's and Nevada Shoe Repair.

The decade of the 1950s brought disaster not only to GRW but to many downtown businesses. In November of 1950, following a succession of warm rainstorms, the Truckee flooded its banks and water coursed down Reno streets. Placed between the river and West First Street, GRW was hit hard. Water filled the basement and rose to a depth of four feet on the main floor. On the evening of Monday, November 20, 28 employees became stranded in the building while working late to save store merchandise. The only direct casualty of the flood

was Frederick Cashman, a buyer for the store, who collapsed and died in the GRW basement, in a frantic effort to save merchandise. National Guard trucks rescued the trapped employees at 7:30 the next morning, after a terrifying night that included a Dodge sedan, carried by the floodwaters, smashing twice into the store, shattering a display window. The store reported \$250,000 in damages.



*Front page of the Reno Evening News the day following the explosion. To the right of the Sierra Street bridge are the Elks Home, closest to the bridge and Grey Reid in front of the Elks Home. Newspaper clipping courtesy of Jan Ryan.*

Just five short years later, history repeated itself and downtown Reno again found itself under siege by floodwaters. Once again GRW lost merchandise that they were unable to move out of the basement in time, but losses totaled far less and this time they had flood insurance.

In July 1956, store co-founder Joseph Gray died at the age of 87. He had remained active in business and with the Reno Lodge No. 57, B.P.O. Elks, until just a few years before his death.

Of all the disasters to befall downtown Reno and GRW, the most terrifying and damaging occurred on the afternoon of Tuesday, February 5, 1957, and the underground maze of ditches were to play a leading role in the catastrophe. The morning had begun with reports of a gas odor called in to Sierra Pacific Power Company and the fire department from business people working in the vicinity

of Sierra and West First streets. That morning, as Vi headed through GRW on the way to her office, she was assailed by gas fumes in the connecting tunnel. Reports grew throughout the morning. By about noon, however, fire personnel were beginning to evacuate those in the area as a precautionary measure.

As with later national disasters such as the assassination of President Kennedy and the attack on the World Trade Center, every person living in Reno at that time no doubt remembers exactly where they were and what they were doing at 1:03 p.m. when two massive explosions occurred followed by fires, leveling five buildings in the vicinity of West First and Sierra streets and causing severe damage to a sixth. Miraculously, only two people died that day, although 49 others were injured. It was later determined that a leak in a gas main had occurred, and pockets of gas had built up in the underground ditches. The first explosion hit under the block of shops on the west side of Sierra Street; the second, beneath the Elks Home.

The Stack Building fared better than its neighbors, but the Sierra Street display windows blew, and a fire beginning forty-five minutes later in the store caused enough damage as to render the structure unsafe. Vi and some of her co-workers had gone to lunch at the Holiday Hotel around noon that day. She recalls standing on the Lake Street bridge on her way back to the office, watching in horror as billowing gray smoke filled the air to the west.

The Adamses rallied quickly. On March 15, GRW reopened for business in a temporary location in the J. R. Bradley building at Plaza and North Virginia streets. The site was formerly a hardware store, but it served to keep the business open and running until the store could be rebuilt.

By May the *Nevada State Journal* reported "rumors" that Gray Reid's would not

## The Gray, Reid, Wright Company (continued)

be returning to its former location but would instead be moving to a new location on North Virginia Street, just north of Fifth Street.

Opening on November 7, 1957, the new store contained 30 percent more space than the First Street location with 40,000 feet of retail space and 6,000 feet of storage. There was a basement and two floors, accessed by escalators. The store now featured 45 departments, including an electronics shop selling televisions and stereo systems, a bookstore, Mirabelli's Records, Hans Lugenbuehl's wine shop, made to look as if you were entering a wine cask, and the Birdcage Restaurant. There was a full-service beauty salon, and a shoe repair shop. The quality and variety of merchandise would have made Joseph Gray, Hosea Reid and Walter Wright proud of their legacy.

In 1961, the building owner, Nevada Marts, purchased the store from the Adamases. They announced that there would be no change in personnel other than the general manager. Their tenure didn't last long, however. Just three years later, Nevada Marts sold the department store to Simons Hardware Company of California.

In 1966, for the second time in its history, a Gray Reid's store was opened in Carson City. Changes had occurred at the Reno store, and Vi made the decision to seek other employment. She was hired by Joseph Magnin, Inc. to head their display department. Financial

problems dogged the stores during this period; and on July 1, 1969, store landlord Nevada Marts, claiming default on the loan, closed the doors of both stores. They reopened within a week, but just seven months later, Gray Reid's declared bankruptcy. Building owner Nevada Marts again assumed control of the stores. For seven more years, the longtime local store served the Reno area at its North Virginia location, but times were changing and competition from the larger stores at Park Lane Mall claimed much of Gray Reid's former business.

In January of 1977, store president William Metzker announced a grand plan for the store. They would construct two additional stories on the present building and add 102 hotel rooms and a casino. The casino would be known as Camp 14 and have a logging camp theme. The south portion of the first floor would remain under the name Gray Reid's but would only sell women's clothing. The beauty salon would be retained and expanded in the basement of the building. Metzker described this plan as an "economic decision." By May, however, the plan had changed. Metzker announced that the Gray Reid store would be moving to the Old Town Mall in July, to occupy a 2-story, 20,000 square foot space.


Camp 14 was never realized; William Metzker and his brother John would receive a better offer that summer. They were approached by CIRCO Resorts, who for 10 years had operated the Circus Circus Hotel-Casino in Las Vegas, and who wished to utilize the structure and parking lot occupied by Gray Reid's. The Metzkers joined with Circus Circus and abandoned their plans for Camp 14.

The much-reduced Gray Reid's store moved as scheduled to Old Town Mall in July 1977, but never quite resurrected its local customer base. The final blow was the opening of Meadowood Mall in 1978. The new generation of shoppers preferred to go to a location with a cluster of stores and the Old Town Mall,



*Fire followed the explosion of 1957. Portion of Gray Reid's sign visible in top left. Photo courtesy of Neal Cobb.*

while attractive and also located south of the city, never drew crowds of shoppers.

The longtime Reno institution finally admitted defeat in 1986 and closed for good, after an 85-year history of serving northern Nevada. Longtime Reno residents will forever remember the store, however, and the two beautiful homes, one of wood and painted gray and one of rich, dark brick, standing on Court Street just a few doors apart, monuments to the men who created the vision. 

Again, my heartfelt thanks to super-researcher Arline Laferry at the Nevada Historical Society for her help with this story. Information came from numerous *Nevada State Journal* and *Reno Evening Gazette* articles, 1901-1906; birth and death records; city directories; a 1970 Truckee River flood plan publication; and conversations with former employees Vi Van dyke Peevers and Jan Ryan. Special thanks go to Deborah Nelson, HRPS member and former GRW employee, who suggested the idea for a Gray Reid's history and introduced me to Vi and Jan.

Debbie Hinman is a HRPS Tour Guide and a member of the *FootPrints* Editorial Staff.



*View of Gray Reid on the left, and the Elks Home on the right after the blast and fire. Photo courtesy of Neal Cobb.*



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**June 26, 2010, 1:00 pm** - Johnson the Fighter - Lecture and original fight film footage. Speaker: Phil Earl, retired Nevada Historical Society Curator of History and co-author with wife Jean of *Basque Aspen Art of the Sierra Nevada*.

**July 17, 2010, 1:00 pm** - Jack Dempsey - and other famous fighters in Nevada. Speaker: Guy Clifton, *Reno Gazette Journal* Senior Reporter, sportswriter and author of his fourth book, *Dempsey in Nevada*.

The Historical Society is featuring "**Johnson-Jeffries: A Centennial Exhibition**" in the Changing Gallery through July 31, 2010, Wednesday through Saturday, 10:00 am to 5:00 pm.

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