

# Historic Reno PRESERVATION SOCIETY

# FootPrints

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

vol. 14 no. 2 ❖ Spring 2011

## Prejudice to Pride, the State Hospital's Historic Cemetery

by Kim Henrick

**T**he small boy stood silently watching the noisy excavator lumber along on its wide tracks through the old field at a southwest diagonal. The huge bucket pulled behind the dragline tore through the ground leaving a ditch large enough to hold a 36-inch concrete pipe. The boy was stunned when the muddy, 8-foot-wide, 6-foot-deep graben proffered old human bones and splintered casket bits.

The year was 1945 and the boy was Dennis Cassinelli. The old field was Nevada's state mental hospital cemetery located west of 21st Street—just north of Glendale Avenue in Sparks. The civic goal for the excavation work was to install a huge pipe to tame the English Mill Ditch water and control flooding in the Conductor Heights neighborhood east of the cemetery, where Dennis lived on Hymer Avenue.

The desecration, caused by poor cemetery boundary designations and carelessness, if not recklessness, would be just one in a long series of insults to the neglected burial site. The cemetery had been in use since 1882, when the Nevada Insane Asylum was completed. Approximately 800 (although some researchers estimate 1,000) patients had been buried there before the noisy dragline disturbed their slumber in 1945.

Young boys do not always fully understand what they see, but a five-year-old certainly senses when something is terribly wrong. Dennis said it was one of the worst things he had ever witnessed. He remembers his older cousin holding a skull that had been ripped from its grave. Activity at the cemetery was not new to Dennis: "Occasionally, my older cousin and I would walk over to the cemetery to watch

as inmates came out with a team of horses and a wagon to bury someone in the weed-covered field." [Note: patients were called inmates in earlier years.] These were awful images—the digging, the dumping of a flimsy box into the hole, the stomping on the box at times to make it fit—but none so horrible as the images from the dragline's destruction.

Dennis would not have believed that sixty-five years into the future he would be instrumental in an effort to bring long-overdue respect and dignity to those buried there and some peace of mind to their families and supporters. He had come

full circle with his nightmares and would finally have some peaceful memories of the cemetery to fill in for the sad ones of his childhood. But these new memories would come at a price.

In *The Lives They Left Behind* by Darby Penny and Peter Stastny, Patricia Deegan (described as an ex-patient activist) is quoted, "If people treat a cemetery like trash, it's a good indication of how they feel about the people buried there and those who are still receiving services." Nevada's state hospital, now called Northern Nevada Adult Mental Health Services, is just one of hundreds across the country with a cemetery problem but, unlike many of the others, ours finally received a facelift.



Nevada's state hospital cemetery, January 1945. View toward the east over some gravesites toward the Conductor Heights neighborhood east of 21st Street. Names are written on paper tacked on plain board on graves.  
Courtesy Nevada State Library and Archives.

In 1943, a patient by the name of Cora Wilcox Clark died at the mental hospital. Over six decades later, Carolyn Mirich, a distant relative of Cora's, asked the state some tough questions about the patients who had died there. She found hospital

*Continued on page 2*

## State Mental Hospital's Historic Cemetery (continued)

*Continued from page 1*

records incomplete, procedures sorely inadequate and the old cemetery totally neglected. No burial location maps have ever been found and the last few small grave markers were stolen in the 1950s. Death records have provided most of the meager information on the patients. Carolyn found this unacceptable, so she established a non-profit organization called Friends of Northern Nevada Adult Mental Health Services Cemetery. With other passionate supporters, Carolyn began the arduous task of working with the state to clean up the cemetery.

The state had practical reasons for wanting to address the cemetery issue. There was a small graveyard west of the old cemetery (directly east of the Dini Townsend hospital building) that had been used for patient burials from 1946 to 1949 — from around the time of the dragline incident to when the Nevada Legislature stopped all burials at the hospital. A new state building was proposed for a location perilously close to the small burial site. Moving the human remains to the “old” official cemetery would resolve that problem.

The planned project would address other past offenses as well. Pinion Park (a small, leased City of Sparks community park) had been built in the early 1960s north of the old cemetery over some old hospital graves. Construction of 21st Street had unearthed bones as did every

major road construction job in the area. It was time to act. In March 2009, Senator Bernice Mathews and Assemblywoman Debbie Smith co-sponsored Senate Bill No. 256, (which designated the sacred grounds as “a historic cemetery” and directed appropriate agencies to use available funds from Project No. 07-C20 of the State Public Works Board, approved in 2007) to: “end the Pinion Park property lease with the City of Sparks, reinter patients’ remains from the smaller graveyard to the old cemetery, and handle the final touches such as fencing and appropriate memorial markers.” The bill passed in May 2009.

Dennis Cassinelli, owner of Cassinelli Construction Company, was selected to complete the delicate reinterment. With his dedicated crew, he started the difficult, but rewarding task of exhuming bodies on August 26, 2010.

In 2009, ground penetrating radar (GPR) indicated that around thirty graves were located in the area. Like many sensitive tasks, this one was best handled on two different levels—one intellectual and another more visceral, more emotional. The intellectual level guided a “business as usual” approach, reducing the exhumations to X and Y GPR coordinates; small wire flags indicating possible grave sites; and soil analysis to determine the most efficient extraction method. Dennis described the top two feet as “dried clay and river cobbles,” with about four feet of sandy soil below. Remains were usually found at a depth of six feet deep. The locations of ten small metal grave markers were compared to the GPR hits. The exhumation process (clear the area, check the survey, measure, compare, flag, dig, exhume, clean and secure) sounds pretty straightforward, but it was not. The graveyard resembled a tightly twisted Rubik’s



*Carolyn Mirich stands at the podium during the dedication ceremony of the historic cemetery on January 21, 2011.  
Courtesy Rosie Cevalco.*

Cube—the organized, measured, marked and flagged surface belied the disturbed ground below.

Often a GPR hit would not match with a grave marker, or remains were found where there was no GPR hit, or bones from one grave appeared intermingled with another, or a marker had been moved. It was clear early on that positive identification of any patient would be of secondary importance to carefully moving the exhumed bones to a new memorial site in the historic cemetery. With each set of bones, Dennis’s crew carefully exposed them, placed them into a container (or casket in some cases) with any artifacts found, and then turned them over to employees of Walton’s Funeral Home.

At the funeral home, Kimberly Hopkinson, M.A., the consultant for the project’s archaeological analysis, examined each set of remains for ethnicity. According to Hopkinson’s report: “The point of the project was not to ascertain the identities of the individuals exhumed. However, many of the graves were found in conjunction with grave markers, and burial records/death certificates did exist for some of the individuals buried in this cemetery.” After comparisons, she found, “There were multiple instances where the grave marker clearly did not represent the individual in the related grave.” For instance, a grave marker for ‘Nellie Dixon



*Carolyn Mirich and Dennis Cassinelli standing near the new “Historic Cemetery” memorial.  
Courtesy Rosie Cevalco.*



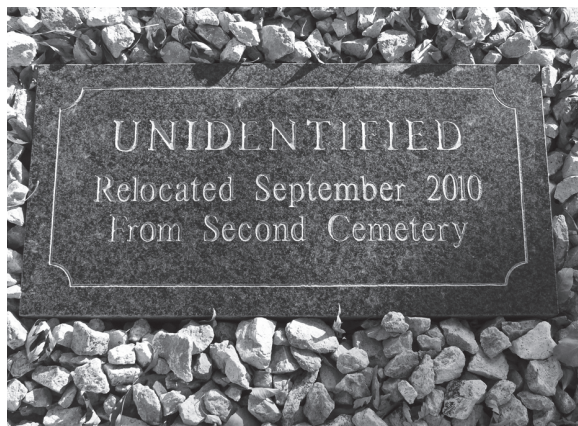
## State Mental Hospital's Historic Cemetery (continued)

[Dixon]' was found in conjunction with a grave. However, Mrs. Dixon (an elderly Caucasian woman) had been exhumed and reburied in Fallon a few months after her death in 1949, and the individual in the related grave was likely a male of Asian descent.

As it turned out, nothing was certain about this exhumation project—except possibly discovering that cedar caskets weather in Nevada soil better than pine ones.

Dennis is a tall fellow, tanned and strong, and would not impress anyone as squeamish. He has seen human bones before and is no stranger to death. In fact, Dennis is an author and history buff, as well as a contractor. His books *Chronicles of the Comstock*, *Uncovering Archaeology* and *Legends of Spirit Cave*, tell of his dealing with bones and dead people. But this job was different; it was much more personal and the mechanical aspects of the process must, at times, have given way to thoughtful reflection. Some of the bones he and his employees held in their hands belonged to patients who lived in the hospital on that awful day in 1945 when Dennis watched the excavator's bucket slice through the old cemetery.

Who were these people? The grave marked "Annie Simmons (Summers)" belonged to a Native American woman who was born in 1860 and died in 1946.



January 21, 2011. A black granite headstone placed over a gravesite of one of the reinterred patients from the smaller cemetery.  
Courtesy Rosie Cevalco.

Her silver ring with eagle decorations was still on her finger when her remains were uncovered. How would Annie have felt knowing that her bones would be returned to her Yerington Paiute tribe sixty-four years after her death? Why was a "copper jacketed bullet" buried with one patient's body? What about the animal bones found at GPR coordinates X-7, Y-20? Was the little graveyard used as a hospital dump at some point?

The crew plodded along, unanswerable questions piling up by the hour. On October 1, 2010, Dennis's notes indicate, "The caskets were placed in the vinyl vaults and buried. This completes all the burials we will be making for this project." [Note: Twenty-one sets of remains had been reinterred to the old cemetery, seventeen from the small graveyard and four found during the 21st Street construction projects. Sadly, not enough data was retrieved to positively identify any of these patients.]

The historic cemetery project ended on January 21, 2011, with a dedication ceremony. Nearly 80 people gathered in nice weather for the somber, but hopeful event. Speakers included state representatives, clergy and other cemetery supporters, but the new memorial speaks loudest of all. Where Pinion Park stood for over 50 years, surrounded by trees and a new iron fence, a seven-foot-tall, shiny, black granite obelisk stands on a concrete base. On the memorial's four sides are listed the names of 767 patients buried in the cemetery along with the statement: "There are thought to be up to 400 additional interments whose names have been lost to history." Buried at the base of the obelisk, are the twenty-one reinterred patients from the small graveyard and 21st Street construction. Each of



Northern Nevada Adult Mental Health Services Historic Cemetery memorial marker with 767 patients' names listed on the four sides of the obelisk. The reinterred remains are buried at its base.  
Courtesy Rosie Cevalco.

those graves is topped with a heavy black granite headstone with white lettering. The eye is drawn to the first word on each stone, the one in capital letters: UNIDENTIFIED.

This historic cemetery and all of its residents have finally been honored, possibly for the first time in the hospital's 129-year history. It was a moment of community pride, thanks to Dennis Cassinelli, Carolyn Mirich and everyone else who made this important project a reality. 🕒

I would like to thank Dennis Cassinelli and Carolyn Mirich for sharing their stories, Robbie Oxoby of the Nevada State Public Works Board for permission to review state reports, and Rosie Cevalco for her passion for anything to do with NNAMHS history. Written sources for this article included various newspaper accounts, state project status reports, the state planning report "2009Cemetery.PDF," and Nevada Historical Society vertical files (compiled primarily by NHS Docent and excellent cemetery researcher Arline Laferry).

Kim Henrick is a member of the HRPS Editorial Staff.

## HRPS Educational Programming: Inciting Your Inner Curiosity

by Sharon Honig-Bear, HRPS President

I hope you were at the January HRPS program to experience the insight of the speakers and the vitality of their interaction with the 125 people in the audience. It was HRPS programming at its best: a free and open occasion to foster lifelong learning in the community.

The program inspired this article focusing on the education component of HRPS's mission: *Preserving Truckee Meadows' past through Education, Advocacy and Leadership.*

The goal of our educational programs is to incite your inner curiosity! We do this in several ways:

- **Walking Tours** entertain and inform, reaching about 1,000 people a year with information on local history, architecture and special topics. Look for an expansion of our tour schedule for 2011.
- **Special projects** provide in-depth experiences including the Home Tour,

bus tours of the Lincoln Highway and WPA Project and our tour of UNR's Keck Museum. These tours attract dozens to hundreds of people.

- **Monthly programs** feature a wide array of topics on historic, preservation and cultural interest. Recent subjects include "35 Years of Casino Entertainment", "Basque Aspen Art" and "Historic Nevada State Hospital."

These aspects of HRPS's educational efforts are fairly well-known. There are two other exciting initiatives that are less known:

- **4th Grade Project**, now in its second year, engages Reno school children in local history. Almost 1,000 children were involved in 2010. Classroom study is followed by a field trip to experience historical locations. As one teacher stated, "The teachers and students thoroughly enjoyed themselves and, educationally, it was a perfect fit for the 4th grade history standards." See adjacent article for more details.

- **The Scholarship Fund** was established through the UNR Foundation and offers tuition assistance to a student working on historic preservation (or related) subjects. The endowment-based scholarship is a win-win situation, with the student gaining practical experience and HRPS fostering in-depth and conscientious research that complements our work. The fund was established with donations to HRPS and the generosity of Sharon Walbridge and Wanda Casazza. The HRPS Board recently approved a donation to "grow" the fund. We are happy to accept additional donations to encourage the next generation of scholars. See story below for our current recipient!

Albert Einstein once said, "Learning is not a product of schooling but the lifelong attempt to acquire it." I take great comfort to be in league with ol' Albert, knowing that HRPS offers plenty of chances to learn throughout life. Join us on the lifelong attempt!

## HRPS Scholarship Recipient & Wells Avenue Conservation District

by Barrie Schuster

The Wells Avenue Neighborhood is slated to become Reno's second conservation district, following the designation of the Powning Addition in 2008. The district's boundaries are Holcomb Avenue on the west, Locust Street on the east, Ryland Street on the north and Vassar Street on the South. This makes Wells Avenue the central axis of the district. The City of Reno's Historic Plan provides a process for neighborhoods striving to achieve conservation district or historic district status.

The field survey for the Wells Avenue Neighborhood Conservation District was completed in April 2010 by students in a Land Use and Planning class at UNR. The survey forms and photos are being compiled into an organized guide by HRPS Endowment Scholarship recipient Ashleigh Best, a history major at UNR. Her enthusiasm, organization and


attention to detail have proven to be a major asset to the project. She is aided by Emily Rogers, a graduate student in fine arts, in organizing and labeling the photos and is re-photographing some houses and buildings.

Once the survey is compiled into its final format, the proposed conservation district goes before Reno's Historical Resources Commission, the Planning Commission and City Council before it can be officially designated.

The Wells Avenue Neighborhood is home to some of the most unique and eclectic architecture in the city, with some homes dating back to the early 1900s. In recent years, the neighborhood has experienced renewed popularity among homeowners seeking the aesthetic appeal of an older home and the convenience of living close to the city center. The conservation district



Emily Rogers and Ashleigh Best working on the field survey for the Wells Avenue Neighborhood Conservation District.  
Courtesy Barrie Schuster.

will serve to reinforce the positive change that is occurring throughout the district and complement the renewed sense of neighborhood pride and identity. 

Barrie Schuster is a HRPS member, new HRPS Tour Guide and HRPS Board Secretary.



## Reno History Comes Alive for Students

by Barbara Courtney

Who thrills to the idea of being locked in a jail cell in the bowels of the Washoe County Courthouse? Reno's fourth graders, that's who! This experience is a part of their introduction to their hometown's history as provided by HRPS. Inaugurated in May of 2009, the Fourth Grade History Project is in full swing and more popular than ever.

The program is multi-faceted, including a classroom DVD presentation of images of Reno, past and present, and a bus tour of historic and present-day Reno that has been enjoyed by approximately 1,000 fourth grade students, their teachers and chaperones. Thirteen schools have taken part and three more presentations are scheduled for the 2010-2011 school year. The feedback from students and teachers alike has been positive and enthusiastic. The Washoe County School District deserves special thanks for their cooperation in making all of this possible.

Jerry Fenwick is at the core of this project. Jerry supplied the images for the DVD presentation and delivers the commentary. His knowledge of the subject matter, love for Reno history and dry humor makes the presentation a hit with students.

The bus tour includes stops at the Amtrak Station to see the Women's Christian Temperance Union fountain, which students find fascinating with its separate basins designed to quench the thirst of horses and dogs as well as that of parched citizens. The corner of Virginia and State streets across from the Courthouse is a stop filled with history and architecture, with the Art



*Randy Amestoy of the Washoe County Courthouse speaks to fourth grade students from Glenn Duncan Elementary. Courtesy Hannah Thrower.*



*Glenn Duncan Elementary fourth grade students pose in front of the historic downtown post office. Courtesy Hannah Thrower.*

Moderne post office, the Riverside Artists' Lofts and the courthouse all designed by Frederic DeLongchamps. The geodesic dome of the Pioneer Center for the Performing Arts presents a fourth contrasting style on this corner.

Randy Amestoy of the Washoe County Courthouse delivers an excellent tour of the landmark, featuring the mural, the dome, the courtrooms and a brief overview of county government. Amestoy


grabs the students' attention when he points out the wasps' nest under an eave of the courthouse and turns the key on them as they crowd into one of the old jail cells.

In addition to the public buildings on the tour, Mary Ellen Horan and her staff at the Lake Mansion at Court and Arlington present a popular talk on the history of one of Reno's oldest and most significant residences.

If there is time, the tour might also include McKinley Park Arts and Culture Center and the California Building at Idlewild Park.

This year, students are provided with a very informative booklet entitled *Washoe County Nevada Activities and Fun Facts* that was funded by HRPS. The bus transportation is also paid for by HRPS.

The HRPS Education Committee makes this program possible. Felvia Belaustegui, Phyllis Cates, Barbara Courtney, Joan Dyer, Jerry Fenwick and Terry Cynar serve on the committee and act as chaperones on the bus and tour guides at the stops. "It is a pleasure to work with the teachers and the students and to experience their enthusiasm. Our intent is to make history come alive," says Barbara Courtney.

As students look around the dank and dreary jail cell after hearing the door clang shut, they are indeed experiencing history. 

Barbara Courtney is a member of HRPS and the HRPS Board.

## High Noon at the Nevada Historical Society

The Nevada Historical Society at 1650 N. Virginia Street, Reno, invites you to a free documentary series at noon on the fourth Wednesday of each month. High Noon will feature a 30-minute video with a special guest speaker to present and discuss the film. Future programs are:

April 27:	Voices of the Holocaust
June 22:	Diving Lake Tahoe
July 27:	Nevada Nomads (wild horses)
August 24:	Playa on Fire (Burning Man)
September 28:	A Ranchers Legacy
October 26:	Day of the Dead: Dia de los Muertos



# Historic Preservation Month

## May 2011

### HRPS Historic Walking Tours

Tour cost is \$10 per person, or 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.**

Tuesday,  
May 3  
6:00 p.m.

**HISTORIC TRUCKEE RIVER WALK** — Take a relaxing stroll along the Truckee River and learn about the eclectic architecture grounded in rich political histories and spiced with colorful anecdotes. Meet at McKinley Arts and Cultural Center, 925 Riverside Drive. Tour guide: Joan Collins.

Saturday,  
May 7  
10:00 a.m.

**DEPOT-TO-DEPOT TOUR** — Join HRPS as we celebrate National Train Day and the 2nd Annual Reno/Sparks Railroad Days with a special tour of the 1925 Union Pacific/Amtrak Depot followed by a short walk to Fourth Street to view the DeLongchamps-designed 1910 Nevada, California and Oregon Railroad Depot. This tour will take about 1½ hours to allow for a tour and history of the depot, Railway Express building, Freight House and walking time to and from the NCO Depot. Tour guides: Debbie Hinman and Cindy Ainsworth.

Tuesday,  
May 10  
6:00 p.m.

**WELLS AVENUE NEIGHBORHOOD** — Take a stroll through a working-class neighborhood along the path of the Wells Avenue streetcar, across the V&T tracks and past the homes of the “Thoma Street Gang.” Meet at Southside School Annex, Sinclair & Liberty streets. Tour guide: Mark Taxer.

Saturday,  
May 14  
10:00 a.m.

**HISTORIC NEVADA STATE HOSPITAL TOUR** — Visit the site of Nevada’s first state hospital (originally the Nevada Insane Asylum) at Galletti Way and Glendale Avenue in Sparks, one of the state’s oldest institutions. The tour will include a look at the remaining Frederic DeLongchamps buildings, a walk through the approximately 106-year-old Stone House and a visit to the hospital cemetery. Park in the circular driveway on the Galletti Way side. Tour guides: Rosie Cevasco and Kim Henrick.

Tuesday,  
May 17  
6:00 p.m.

**UNIVERSITY NEIGHBORHOOD** — A walk through a historic and endangered neighborhood at the foot of the campus—with vintage Queen Anne homes and charming bungalows. Meet at the base of the 9th Street university steps. Tour guide: Debbie Hinman.

Saturday,  
May 21  
10 a.m.

**WEST OF WELLS** — Discover an often overlooked treasure trove of fascinating Reno history. Join us as we walk the neighborhood west of Wells Avenue, along the former path of the V&T railroad. Experience unusual architecture unique to this neighborhood and learn the history of the colorful characters who gave birth to Reno’s neighborhood on the other side of the tracks. Meet outside Silver Peak Restaurant at 140 Wonder Street. Tour guide: Barrie Schuster.

Tuesday,  
May 24  
6:00 p.m.

**THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STREET** — Perhaps you’ve done the Mansions on the Bluff and the DeLongchamps walk but how about the houses on the other side of Court, Ridge, California and Arlington? Architecturally distinctive homes line these quiet streets where many of Reno’s families lived, some for more than 50 years. Today the neighborhood is a blend of family homes and businesses. Meet at the southwest corner of Arlington and Court. Tour guide: Anne Simone.

Saturday,  
May 28  
10:00 a.m.

**ROADS AND RAILS: HISTORIC FOURTH STREET CORRIDOR** — Discover the 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.

Tuesday,  
May 31  
6:00 p.m.

**MANSIONS ON THE BLUFF** — A historical 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 who made early Reno The Biggest Little City. Meet at the McCarran House, 401 Court Street. Tour guides: Ed Wishart and Bill Isaef.



## HRPS

June 2011

### Historic Walking Tours

Tour cost is \$10 per person, or 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,  
June 4  
9:00 a.m.

UPPER RALSTON/NORTHERN LITTLE ITALY — Enjoy a walk in a residential neighborhood with a mix of architectural styles. Proximity to the University has traditionally determined the mix of residents, professors and students alike. Meet at the intersection of Washington Street, The Strand and College Avenue. Tour guides: Jim and Sue Smith.

Tuesday,  
June 7  
6:00 p.m.

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

Saturday,  
June 11  
9:00 a.m.

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

Tuesday,  
June 14  
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,  
June 18  
9:00 a.m.

PROHIBITION IN RENO — We have turned back the clocks to the 1920s and 1930s. We will walk streets and alleys and visit significant buildings, recalling Reno's saloons and reformers (the WCTU and Anti-Saloon League). We will even visit an alleged speakeasy. Tour starts at Amtrak's Reno Station, 135 East Commercial Row. Tour guides: Debbie Hinman and Sharon Honig-Bear.

Tuesday,  
June 21  
6:00 p.m.

INSIDE DELONGCHAMPS'S DOWNTOWN — Go behind the scenes in some of downtown's most notable buildings designed by Reno's most celebrated architect, Frederic DeLongchamps. Visit the interiors of the historic courthouse, the downtown Post Office and the Vacchina Apartments on California Avenue, along with several artist lofts at the Riverside. Meet at Washoe County Courthouse front steps. Tour guides: Sharon Honig-Bear and Anne Simone.

## Nevada Historical Society Changing Gallery Exhibit



### Winter Whites—The Language of Textiles February 11 - July 2, 2011

In 2006, Jan Loverin, curator of clothing and textiles at the Nevada State Museum, created a white program for the Tin Cup Tea. This exhibit is a continuation of the white theme, with white outfits from the 1870s through the 1970s and historic photographs from the archives. What did white mean in the fashion world? How did people take care of white outfits? What tools did they use in the care of the fashions? What were the norms in fashion from the 1850s through the 1880s? From christening gowns to graduation dresses to tennis outfits, you are sure to enjoy this exhibit.

Nevada Historical Society,  
1650 N. Virginia St., Reno, NV  
775-688-1191



## Reno's Hebrew Cemetery

by Sharon Honig-Bear

It is really hard to know where you might find the inspiration for a *FootPrints* story. For me recently, it came from a wintery visit to a cemetery.

On a snowy December day, I attended a memorial service for local school teacher and champion bridge player (and friend) Mary Aaronson at Reno's Hebrew Cemetery. As I walked amidst the markers and plaques of this peaceful place, I followed in the steps of many who made their mark on Reno—and that prompted the writing of this article.

Perhaps you didn't know that Reno has a Hebrew Cemetery. It's the only entirely Jewish cemetery in northern Nevada (except for the one in Virginia City; see article bottom of page 9). It is tucked away on two acres, west of the University, on Angel Street near Tenth.

A cemetery is known in Hebrew as the "house of eternity" and its land is considered holy. A special consecration ceremony takes place on its inauguration. Establishing a cemetery is one of the first priorities for a new Jewish community. A consecrated Jewish cemetery means that customs, such as no burial on the Saturday Sabbath and rapid rites and burial for the deceased, will be followed.

### Early History

Reno's Hebrew Cemetery has been in use from 1878 to the present. It's used by all area synagogues, including Temple Emanu-El (Conservative) and Temple Sinai (Reform). The site has 300+ graves and a caretaker. Unlike many cemeteries, individuals do not actually own their plot. The Cemetery Association retains ownership and people have an "easement of use" for a plot as needed.

As Reno developed into Nevada's largest city in its early days, the Jewish community played an important role. In 1868, that critical year when the Central Pacific Railroad auctioned off land along its right-of-way for the creation of the

town of Reno, Jewish merchants such as David Lachman were among those who purchased lots. By 1900, Reno Jews numbered approximately 140. Although they rarely exceeded more than one percent of the population, Jews dominated Reno's dry goods and clothing markets during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and were among the first in the hotel and casino businesses after 1931.



*Main gate to the Hebrew Cemetery in Reno. Tall pillars belong to the Sheyer, Levy and Jacobs families.*

*Courtesy Sharon Honig-Bear.*

The job of establishing Reno's Hebrew Cemetery fell primarily to David Lachman (1831-1901) in 1877. Mr. Lachman, who is buried in the Cemetery along with his wife Harriet, co-founded the Reno Hebrew Benevolent Society in 1879 to assist newcomers and, in the absence of a rabbi, he was often called upon to lead High Holiday services.

Today, Hebrew Cemetery, Inc., a nonprofit, provides oversight for the cemetery and includes representatives from local religious congregations. The current president is Father Chuck Durante, a Roman

Catholic priest. Each congregation pays dues for the cemetery's upkeep.

### A Walk Through the Notables

The Hebrew Cemetery is beautifully maintained. The handsome iron front gate declares "Hebrew Cemetery" and below that is the date "1878." Three Stars of David top the gate.

One thing that immediately distinguishes this as a Jewish cemetery is the use of Hebrew lettering on many grave markers. The cemetery contains headstones, grave markers, some elaborate statuary and wooden markers. The last are about 100 years old, sadly fading to the elements. There are even 13 unknown graves.

As I walked the frozen paths of the cemetery and, later, "walked" through obituaries in Reno newspapers, I noticed patterns common to long-established cemeteries:

- Many buried in the cemetery were immigrants, many from eastern Europe. Nathan Furst (1841-1879) was a native of Germany, Bessie Rose (1884-1964 from Russia), Florence Roth (1891-1977 from Hungary), Frank Greensweig (1908-1959 from Warsaw) and Max Cohen (1881-1958 from Poland).
- There are the ever-present graves of infants and youngsters. The white-marble headstone for Newton Abrams (1914-1921) is topped by a gentle lamb. The lamb motif also graces the graves of Jerome (1920-1929) and Ronald (1928-1935) Simson. What untold story is behind their deaths? Research showed that Jerome played a second grade farmer in the Southside School's Flower Show Parade in 1925—and only four years later, he was dead. Ronald died six years later in San Francisco.
- Military service was a great source of pride for these Jewish-Americans and many headstones indicate this. An



## Reno's Hebrew Cemetery (continued)

early marker is for Spanish American war veteran Cpl. Mark Robinson who was born March 17, 1860, served in the Nevada Infantry, Co. A and died February 16, 1927. A small flag flew recently at his grave.

Many other graves of veterans are marked with their military service: Samuel Blatt (1905-1970) was a captain in the Medical Corps and Private Robert Shimkovsky (1918-1970) served in the Signal Service. Others serving during World War II included Sgt. Irving Margolis (1912-1971), Arthur Gould (1924-2005), Sgt. Emanuel Ash (1917-2006) and George Matteson (1908-1976). Cpl. Lee Saymon (1933-1994) served in Korea.

- Some of the gravesites are graced with small "souvenir" stones, following a common Jewish custom. The graves of Fannie and Morris Abrams are so marked and Sandra Medvin's grave has an entire lineup of rocks, including some vividly painted purple rocks, one saying "I miss you" along with a heart and kisses.

### Three Tall Markers for Pioneering Families

There are three tall memorial pillars that figure prominently in the cemetery's landscape. The pillars bear the names Sheyer, Levy and Jacobs, early Northern



*Grave of Mark Robinson, who proudly served in the Spanish American War.  
Courtesy Sharon Honig-Bear.*

Nevada pioneering families, and each is topped with a carved, draped urn.

Jacob Sheyer (1834-1875) was born in Warsaw, where he became a rabbi, married Amalia (1823 est.-1895) and had three daughters. They moved to Carson

City in 1863. He brought much needed religious practices with him and the *Daily State Register* conferred the title "Rabbi for the State of Nevada" on him in 1872. Along with his religious duties, he purchased a women's clothing shop (where the Capitol is now located). After his death, Amalia operated the store and raised their three daughters. Jacob and Amalia are both buried in the cemetery.

The family dynasty carried on when one of the Sheyer daughters married Sol. Levy, who erected another pillar for "Our Brother Fred" Levy. Sol. joined his brother in Fred Levy and Bro., in Reno, in 1881. After Fred's death in 1885, a newspaper announcement indicated Sol. "will continue the dry goods business... on a very extensive scale. We respectfully ask a continuance of the patronage bestowed on the former firm."

The last pillar marks the Jacobs family plot. Father Solomon Jacobs (1852 est.-1939) was an early Reno merchant and civic leader. Called a "Reno pioneer" he was given the honor of shoveling the first spade of dirt during the ground-breaking for Temple Emanu-El (since demolished) in 1921. Wife Hannah (1847 est.-1917) and other family members are also buried there.

*Continued on page 10*

## Virginia City Hebrew Cemetery

Set apart from the extensive Virginia City cemeteries is the Jewish cemetery, a 100-foot-by-100-foot plot that was established about a mile from the Silver Terrace Complex in Virginia City. Vandalism and disuse took its toll and it contains only one fully intact headstone. Once described in the local newspaper as "a pretty little piece of land," loveliness has long since passed.

The Comstock Cemetery Foundation worked to protect the site, raising \$11,000 to install a black iron fence and holding a re-dedication ceremony. Research identified the names of 23 people and a \$1,500 marker with names

and death dates now greets visitors at the entrance. Work continues using ground-penetrating radar to identify all the grave holes and match them with the names of those buried. Future plans include interpretative panels, plantings and a reproduction of the original wooden fence.

As a footnote, HRPS Board member Debbie Hinman and I got stuck in deep snow, needing to be towed by the Sheriff, when we tried to reach the cemetery in January! ❄️

*Sharon Honig-Bear*

## Reno's Hebrew Cemetery (continued)

*Continued from page 9*

### A Walk Among Other Notables

Harry Parker (1911-2003) was co-owner of Parker's Western Wear, a Reno tradition since 1919. It catered to locals and famous customers like Walter Matthau, Jerry Lewis, Bill Cosby and Cary Grant. Harry received the Raymond I. Smith Civic Leader of the Year award from the Reno Sparks Chamber of Commerce. His gravestone reads, "Beloved husband, father and grandfather. He loved life, family, people and his city of Reno."


Abraham Zetooney (1893-1940, name on headstone is Zetoony) built Reno's Art Deco-styled El Cortez Hotel in 1931. Born in Damascus, Syria, Abe first came to Reno in 1920 and opened the Silk and Linen Shop. When he opened the El Cortez, it was the tallest building in Reno and served a wealthy clientele.

Nathan Bulasky (1885-1928, Bulawsky was original spelling) came to Reno from Russia in 1914. In a path common for Jews, he started as a junk peddler, and with prosperity, opened a scrap metal yard, eventually investing in real estate. Three of his sons—the "Bulasky Brothers"—leased the El Cortez property



*The tall markers for the pioneering families Sheyer, Levy and Jacobs.  
Courtesy Sharon Honig-Bear.*

from Abe Zetooney, adding the legendary Trocadero showroom that featured Chico Marx, Victor Borge and others.

This is a partial list. Many other deceased, with names you would recognize, were men and women who made valuable contributions to the community. The cemetery may be the final resting place for many northern Nevada Jews—but they are not dead to those who read history and share it with others. I am glad to help keep these memories alive. 

Sources for this article were:

John P. Marshall's *Jews in Nevada: A History*; Online Nevada - Reno Jewry entry; numerous references in the *Reno Evening Gazette*, *Nevada State Journal* and other Nevada newspapers; Comstock Cemetery Foundation's website: [comstockcemetery.com/virginiacity.html](http://comstockcemetery.com/virginiacity.html); and interviews with cemetery secretary Steve Matles.

For a list of the interred, check out the website "findagrave.com."

Additional information on the history of the cemetery and documents relating to it include an oral history interview with the caretaker of the cemetery: Reno, NV. Mar. 7 and 31, 1978 and Jan. 3, 1980. Small Collections and Cassette No. C-506 at AJA. American Jewish Archives, 3101 Clifton Ave. Cincinnati, Ohio 45220-2488. (513)221-1875 (tel); (513)221-7812 (fax). E-mail: [AJA@cn.hc.edu](mailto:AJA@cn.hc.edu). This email address is protected from spambots and you need JavaScript enabled to view it.

Sharon Honig-Bear is a HRPS member and is President of HPRS.

## All Aboard! Reno and HRPS Celebrate National Train Day on May 7th at the Amtrak Depot

National Train Day on May 7th will again celebrate America's love for trains with events across the country. The free event marks 142 years of connecting travelers coast-to-coast and commemorates the day the transcontinental railroad was completed. On May 10, 1869, at Promontory Summit, Utah, the golden spike was driven into the final tie that joined 1,776 miles of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railways, transforming America by creating the nation's transcontinental railroad.


This year, Amtrak is calling all kids—young and old—to join the festivities in cities across the United States, including

Reno. It will also celebrate Amtrak's 40th anniversary as America's Railroad.

Reno-Sparks Railroad Day will celebrate its rich rail heritage with a full day of activities at the Amtrak Depot. The

**HRPS will offer a special Depot-to-Depot tour of the Southern Pacific/Amtrak Depot followed by a brief walk to the Nevada, California and Oregon Depot on Evans and Fourth Street. Tour time is 10:00 a.m. Reservations are required and can be made at 747-4478 or [www.historicreno.org](http://www.historicreno.org).**

event takes place from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Music, hobo storytellers, model railroading and tours of the 1925 Mediterranean Revival-style train depot are part of the celebration. There will also be drawings for Amtrak tickets. Come early and greet the California Zephyr as it arrives at the depot around 8:43 a.m.

With 21,000 route miles in 46 states, the District of Columbia and three Canadian provinces, Amtrak operates more than 300 trains each day—at speeds up to 150 mph—to more than 500 destinations. For more information about National Train Day, contact Tim Elam at 775-722-8934. 



## 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

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

☐ Student \$15.00

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☐ Supporting \$100.00

☐ HRPS Angel \$250.00

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

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

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## Gazebo Restoration at Rancho San Rafael Regional Park Troop 107

*by Eagle Scout Brent Bremer*

In April 2010, I met Ranger Marie Fong at Rancho San Rafael Park. The ranger showed me a gazebo (located behind the ranch house) that had fallen into disrepair, with the paint peeling, the windows broken, nails sticking through the roof and wood deteriorating at an alarming rate. The gazebo was so run-down that it was being used as a storage shed.



weekends cleaning the gazebo, scraping off peeling paint, filling holes, sanding, caulking and repainting the entire gazebo. We ended up putting several layers of paint on both the interior and exterior as



end, the result was worth all the effort put in by me, my family and my friends.

Throughout this project, I have had the support of many people all around

the community. I received help from Kelly Moore Paints, which donated much of the paint and sealants that I needed to complete the project. I received a considerable grant from HRPS, which allowed




*Left: Gazebo's original condition, Middle: Brent Bremer and friends working on gazebo, Right: Gazebo interior after Brent's project. Courtesy Brent Bremer.*

Since this gazebo was built in the late 1930s, I was determined to fix it up and allow it to be displayed as the piece of history that it is. I soon began my planning and all of my fundraising in preparation for the project.

In mid-October, I began the work on the gazebo itself, with many of my friends and members of my troop helping me to complete the project. We spent many

well as repainting the window frames. My stepfather helped me by refurbishing the door of the gazebo, placing plastic panels behind the lattice to seal the gazebo, and by replacing the broken glass panes in the windows. The project continued into late December, when we finally sanded and varnished the floor, bringing the project to completion. It took many long months to plan and execute the project, but in the

me to purchase the supplies necessary to complete the project and feed the workers. My grandmother provided food for the workers during the project. In the end, the hard work from everyone involved with the project helped to restore the gazebo to a much better condition. I give my sincere thanks to the people and organizations which made this project possible. 



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**SPRING 2011 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, April 27: HRPS Film Night, *Wild is the Wind***, shown at 7:00 p.m. at Studio on 4th, 432 W. Fourth Street. Filmed mostly in Carson Valley, it's a steamy movie about an Italian sheep rancher who sends for a mail-order wife from Italy only to have her fall for a ranch helper. The 1957 film stars Anna Magnani, Anthony Quinn and Anthony Franciosa. Tickets are \$10 and reservations are required. To make reservations, call the HRPS voicemail line at 747-4478 or purchase tickets online at [www.historicreno.org](http://www.historicreno.org). Cut-off date for reservations is April 22.

**May 3-31: HRPS celebrates Historic Preservation Month** with a series of walking tours given every Tuesday at 6:00 p.m. and every Saturday at 10:00 a.m. See page 6 for details and page 7 for June Historic Walking Tours. Please visit [www.historicreno.org](http://www.historicreno.org) or call 747-4478 for information and reservations.

**Wednesday, May 25: "Is it remodeling or remuddling?"** Barrie Schuster and Jack Hursh present guidelines and examples of HRPS newly-developed Neighborhood Preservation Fund grant. The Neighborhood Preservation Fund, founded in 2010, will allow property owners the opportunity to apply for small grants for the rehabilitation of historic homes in a manner authentic with the historic architectural style of the home and neighborhood.

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