

Historic Reno PRESERVATION SOCIETY

FootPrints

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

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The Alameda-Wells Avenue Underpass and Bridge

by Joyce M. Cox

When the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act was passed and signed in April 1935, it was intended as a public works program to put men and women back to work, with parts of the bill providing money to state highway departments to build or improve highways and bridges. Nevada received \$887,000 from 1936 to 1938 to improve or rebuild dangerous railroad crossings.

The Alameda-Wells Avenue Underpass and Bridge, the West Second Street Underpass, and the Lake Street Bridge, all completed in 1936, were Washoe County projects. The Alameda-Wells Avenue Underpass and Bridge were located in Reno connecting the north-south streets of Wells and Alameda avenues, between the east-west streets of Second and Fourth. The bridge and underpass were separated by a 40-foot section of roadway. North-bound traffic on Wells Avenue went over the new Truckee River bridge then proceeded down to the underpass beneath the Southern Pacific railroad tracks connecting to Alameda Avenue. Later Alameda Avenue was renamed Wells.

The Alameda-Wells Avenue Underpass and Bridge reduced the traffic congestion on East Fourth and Virginia streets and provided a better route between the business districts of Reno and Sparks.

These structures were designed to replace the old Park Street cattle bridge and improve traffic flow at the railroad crossing. The cattle bridge which intersected a dangerous railroad grade crossing, was one block west of the new underpass and was so named when ranchers drove their cattle to packing houses north of the Truckee River. Traffic accidents on the old bridge killed four people and injured several others in the early 1930s.

Contractors submitted sealed bids to the Nevada Highway Department for the construction of the concrete and steel Alameda-Wells Avenue Underpass and Bridge on April 15, 1936. At 2:30 p.m. that afternoon, Contract No. 463 was awarded to the J. F. Knapp Construction Company of Oakland, California which had submitted the lowest bid. The Reno re-employment office, an early version of the WPA, provided skilled and unskilled workers for the project. An average 100 men worked daily on the construction.

As required by law, the City of Reno cooperated with the Highway Department on construction and maintenance. Work began on May 5, 1936, with J. P. Murphy as resident engineer. The J. F. Knapp Construction Company was also awarded the contract for the West Second Street Underpass.



Looking south on Alameda Avenue to the Alameda Wells Avenue Underpass and Bridge. The roads to the side of the underpass are used to get to the buildings on either side of the underpass.

Courtesy of Nevada Historical Society.

An article in the January 1937 *Highways and Parks* reported: "This construction involved the building of a railroad underpass, a new bridge across the Truckee, together with two approach units, a concrete siphon, and a box culvert to by-pass waters from two irrigation ditches paralleling the river, under and across the right of way." Considered the largest underpass and bridge in the state of Nevada, the bridge was 188 feet long while the underpass was 200 feet long, together covering .31 mile. In addition there were "26,466 cubic yards of roadway excavation work, 2,335 cubic yards of structural excavation, 4,031 square yards of sub-grading, 1,320 cubic yards of crushed gravel or stone surfacing, and 242 cubic yards of crushed gravel or stone surfacing material for the footpaths."

Some buildings on Alameda Avenue were removed because of the sub-grade excavation from Fourth Street to the Truckee River.

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Alameda-Wells Avenue Underpass and Bridge (continued)

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Railroad traffic was moved to “shoofly” or temporary tracks to make room for the steam-shovel operations on the underpass.

For pedestrians, there were five-foot sidewalks with steps that descended to about eight feet above the road with a path going the full width of the underpass. The sidewalks and underpass were lit with sodium vapor lamps that were installed on December 10, 1936. The lamps were the same as those used on the San Francisco Bay Bridge. Designed with triple walls of glass that were separated and devoid of air, the lights issued a reddish glow that turned yellow-orange in 30 minutes, and produced a non-glare light at night. An automatic switch turned the lights on and off. On December 11, 1936, the *Nevada State Journal* suggested that automobile headlights were not needed at night due to the brightness of these sodium vapor lamps.

The Alameda-Wells Avenue Underpass and Bridge opened to traffic in early November 1936 and according to *Highways and Parks*, “hundreds of cars have passed over the new route daily since it was opened for use.” The structure was built for \$200,000 with all but \$750 coming from the federal government.

The City of Reno held a two-day Reno Bridge Festival to celebrate the opening of the Alameda-Wells Avenue Bridge and Underpass, the Sierra Street Bridge and the Lake Street Bridge. The activities began at 10:00 a.m. September 10, 1937, at the Alameda-Wells Avenue Underpass and Bridge with Mayor John Cooper introducing Robert A. Allen, the state highway engineer, who turned the three projects over to the City of Reno. Mr. Allen thanked the city and the WPA for their cooperation in the bridge projects, and Mayor Cooper said, “Reno is grateful to the federal government and to the state highway department for their generous efforts in bringing these new structures to a realization.” U.S. Congressman James G. Scrugham made the dedication of the Alameda-Wells Avenue Underpass and Bridge saying, “Money is only an instrument of progress and the increase in the velocity of its turnover is a means for prosperity. The vast program of lasting public improvements has added much to the prosperity of everyone.”

The festivities continued with an “evolution of transportation” parade led by a large truck trailer moving from bridge to bridge carrying guests and speakers, while residents followed in their cars. Governor Richard Kirman, U.S. Congressman James G. Scrugham, U. S. Attorney E. P. Carville, and Mrs. Florence M.

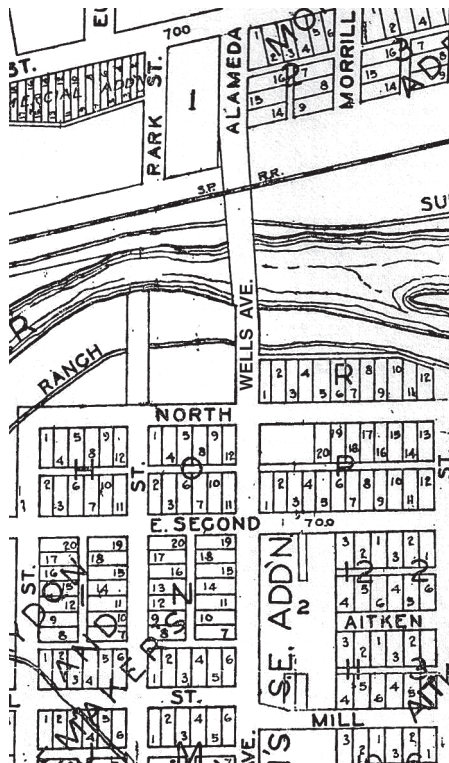
Thompson, stepdaughter of Myron Lake, attended the ceremonies. Buffalo Bill, portrayed by Jack Brite, and Kit Carson, portrayed by Tom Vestal, dressed in full western regalia, rode horses to demonstrate the importance of horses to the course of transportation. Hundreds of visitors lined the parade route applauding the many entries and floats.

Numerous activities were scheduled for the two-day event. The Partipilo Venetian Quartet, directed by Professor Guio Diero, serenaded visitors with Italian folk songs from a gondola anchored in the Truckee River. The quartet was accompanied by a chorus of 20 singers on a specially built platform at Wingfield Park and the Reno Municipal Band held a concert at the civic auditorium.

Sporting events included hole-in-one and 36-hole open handicap golf tournaments at the county golf course, tennis matches at the Reno Tennis Club, a baseball game between Reno and Susanville, and a boxing match at the rodeo arena between Frank Rowsey of Hollywood and Ernie Collins of Reno. Fourteen teams in a hip-boot derby splashed through the Truckee River to the Lake Street Bridge. Fireworks from Newlands Hill ended the celebrations. After the first day, the *Reno Gazette Journal* called the event one of the biggest celebrations in Reno’s history.

The Alameda-Wells Avenue Underpass and Bridge made Wells Avenue a main north-south road and a secondary state highway. In a May 15, 1967 *Nevada State Journal* article, reporter Jack Stevenson wrote, “an estimated 50,000 cars per day used the route to bypass trains going through Reno” and caused great traffic jams.

The underpass and bridge were replaced by the Wells Avenue Overpass built in 1968. The railroad bridge was removed when RETRAC was built.



The Alameda Wells Avenue Underpass and Bridge from this 1938 map by the Department of Engineering, City of Reno.

Information for this article was taken from “Reno’s New Underpass in Service.” *Nevada Highways and Parks*, vol. II No. 1, January 1937: p.15-17; Nevada Dept. of Highways. (1934-1936). Biennial Report of the Department of Highways. Carson City, NV: Department of Highways. p. 15-46; Nevada Dept. of Highways. (1936-1938). Biennial Report of the Department of Highways. Carson City, NV: Department of Highways. p.42-77; “Two-Day Program Packed to Limit with Features.” *Nevada State Journal*, September 10, 1937: p. 1-2.

Joyce Cox is the author of the recently released book *Images of America: Washoe County*. She is a retired reference librarian and a researcher of Nevada history.

Reno: Its “Spirited” Past... and Prohibition

by Sharon Honig-Bear and Debbie Hinman

Ken Burns may be considered the best documentarian around but he certainly has nothing on HRPS when it comes to flushing out interesting topics. His recent series on Prohibition was as well produced as any of his fine works, but did you know HRPS has been offering the Prohibition Era in Reno Walking Tour for the past three years?

Our intention was to portray Reno in the 1920s and '30s, when Reno was moving into national prominence with the opening of the Transcontinental Highway and the expansion of easy divorce and legalization of gambling. What follows is our Armchair Prohibition in Reno Tour.

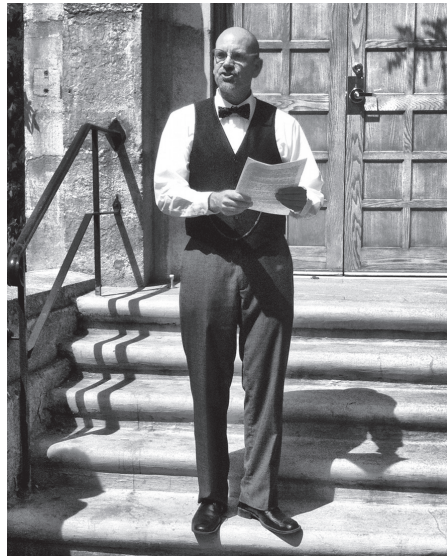
When Prohibition ended in 1933, Reno's population was 19,010. Our rival city to the south, Las Vegas, had only about 5,000 residents. To give you an idea of the cost of living in Reno at that time, you could buy steaks for 15¢ per pound and the most fashionable shoes at Sunderlands went for \$4.85. The Wigwam Theater was showing John Barrymore in *Reunion in Vienna* for a ticket price of 20 cents, which included a Terrytoon Cartoon and Metrotone News.

But let us roll back the calendar to 1918, when Nevada was as wet as any state in the nation, with an average of one drinking establishment for 150 residents. Reno was ripe for reform and the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution establishing national prohibition, officially known as the Volstead Act, attempted Prohibition from January 17, 1919 to December 5, 1933.

Led by the Anti-Saloon League and the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the dry forces linked Prohibition to a variety of Progressive-era social causes. Reformers were concerned about alcohol's link to wife beating and child abuse as well as the impact of drinking on labor productivity. Others argued that outlawing alcohol would eliminate corruption, end machine politics, and help Americanize immigrants. Prohibition was tied to World War I and patriotism

as a measure to save grain for the soldiers and free up brewery and distillery workers for more productive labor.

The temperance movement was around from Reno's beginnings in 1868 with the presence of the International Order of Good Templars, the largest temperance order open to men and women. In July 1900, the *Nevada State Journal* described a well-attended temperance lecture entitled “Nails in His Coffin.” “Our space forbids a report of the thrilling discourse, well-spaced with telling illus-



*HRPS member and Damonte Ranch High School Drama Director Rod Hearn portrays Mayor Ed Roberts on the steps of the First Methodist Church during the Spring 2011 Prohibition Era in Reno tour.
Photo by Debbie Hinman.*

trations. The first part was a touching presentation of the gospel and the latter an earnest plea for more temperance work in Reno and a great lessening of the temptations to the young, the weak and the unsavory.”

Weeks after Nevada voters approved Amendment 18 on November 5, 1918, most saloonkeepers had sold out of their reserve stocks and 20 of Reno's 58 saloons had closed their doors. Others were transforming into alcohol-free restaurants and the Reno Brewing Company came out with a “Sierra bever-

age,” a near beer containing less than 1/10 of one percent of alcohol. However, even this was challenged by the law and production was halted.

So where can you go to experience Prohibition History in Reno?

The Historic WCTU Fountain at Reno's Amtrak Station

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) led the way in the crusade to outlaw alcohol and kindred narcotics. In Reno, a local chapter was formed in 1882 and became part of the statewide WCTU in May 1883.

A primary WCTU directive was the erection of drinking fountains in their towns so that men could get a drink of water without entering saloons. Often the fountains offered additional basins for horses and dogs. Mrs. William Van Buren, then president of the Reno WCTU, presented a fine drinking fountain to the city, the joint gift of the WCTU and the Red Cross Society. This 14-foot fountain once stood on the southwest corner of Virginia and Plaza streets to “quench the thirst of all of God's creatures.” Dedicated on October 17, 1908, the fountain honored the veterans of the Spanish-American War of 1898, with crossed swords on two sides of the base. Another side displayed the Red Cross symbol, honoring its work caring for wounded veterans. The fountain was removed in 1932 to make way for a Flying A gasoline station. The fountain was relocated to the front of the California Building in Idlewild Park. However, rather than providing water, it provided a receptacle for garbage and pigeon droppings and the opportunity for vandalism.

The Reno City Council approved the relocation of the fountain to the train station, and in 2007, after four years of restoration under the leadership of Neal Cobb and David Hollecker, it was rededicated. While it no longer serves water, the monument welcomes travelers. View this icon of Reno's Prohibition past on the lower level of the new Amtrak Station.

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Reno: Its “Spirited” Past... and Prohibition (continued)

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The Ethnic Community

We leave the train station to walk over to Lake Street, early Reno’s center of ethnic hotels and eateries where foreign-born proprietors were likely to ignore Prohibition.

The Basques remained connected to their imbibing traditions. In his famous semi-autographical novel, *The Basque Hotel*, Robert Laxalt describes growing up in his mother’s hotel in Carson City. The business went pretty well and even during Prohibition the hotels served wine. It was only when the government agents came to town looking for illegal liquor that a shadow fell over the hotel clientele: “It was the strangest dinner Pete could ever remember. The boarders sipped their soup grumpily and with little conversation. His mother served the rich beef stew, apologizing to the boarders and muttering it was a scandal to serve a French dinner like this without wine. Tristant the shepherd nodded in silent agreement. His father sat at the head of the table, scowling and speaking to no one.”

The Italians were known as the leading bootleggers and suppliers of illegal liquor in Reno. Wine was an integral part of their culture and many private citizens were arrested for making liquor. In 1931, a private residence on West Third Street was raided and 100 gallons of wine were seized and Mrs. Theresa Cassinelli was taken into custody. Incidentally, this contraband was conveniently stored in the basement of City Hall. Although many people were producing illegal liquor, the Italians seemed particularly prone to getting caught. In 1921, a Reno newsman looking over the Grand Jury indictment list was moved to comment that it “looked like an Italian telephone book.”

Commercial Row

Our tour continues several blocks west on Commercial Row, to illustrate how lively this stretch of downtown once was. From Reno’s founding, saloons and breweries lined the railroad. Reno’s first

brewery, Reno Brewery, was opened in 1868 by Frederick Hertlein. It burned in 1873, but others took its place. The area was well known—even during Prohibition. Fire, always a problem, was made worse during Prohibition, with increased illegal activity.



A view of busy Douglas Alley in its heyday, circa 1930, with three of its major clubs: the Wine House, and the Rex and Bank Clubs.

Douglas and Fulton Alleys, off Sierra Street

Most of the tour guides avoid the downtown alleys, but they are a good place to “time travel” to the time drinking went “underground” during Prohibition. We encourage tour participants to disregard the odor and unsightly debris and try to imagine the alleys in their heyday, when establishments such as the National Club (formerly the Haymarket), the Mecca Club, the Reno Club, My Cellar, the State Club, the Casino, and the Rex Club were noisy and thriving.

Alleys were hopping with activity, as can be seen in the many printed accounts of the period. One of our favorites, from the *Reno Evening Gazette* in 1931,

reports: “37 Are Arrested As Agents Hit 19 Resorts Here.” The newspaper reported a humorous incident at one locale: “An officer had just arrested a bartender at a resort when the telephone rang. The prisoner was allowed to answer the phone and a voice at the other end of the wire excitedly said, ‘the prohis are in town!’ Nearly speechless from rage, the bartender informed the speaker, ‘Don’t I know it!’”

These busts were inconsequential, however. Hip-pocket peddlers of booze operated in the alleys and did a fair business. In a 1926 *Nevada State Journal* article entitled “Agents Nab 5 in Wet Alley,” agents are described making three raids in quick succession: “Using their improvised ‘de-hinger,’ a curved iron bar designed to separate barred doors from their hinges, the agents stormed the Douglas Club, 130 East Douglas Alley and the door came off.” From that raid they got a half-gallon of gin and some additional moppings from a sink.

The Alleys and Crime

A natural effect of the laws against gambling and alcohol in a formerly “anything goes” town such as Reno was an expanded black market. Crime increased during the 1920s, involving everyday people, those looking to make money and not caring about the legality of it, and even those who were supposed to serve and protect. News stories on law men “on the take” and enforcement officials who could be bribed to tip off saloon keepers of impending raids brought about a disrespect for the law in general during the Prohibition era. Crimes of all sorts multiplied.

You cannot discuss crime in Reno during this period without mentioning two men—William “Curly” Graham and James “Red” McKay. These two men had their fingers in most of the illegal activities in Reno. They operated the Bank Club, the Rex Club, the Haymarket, the Monte Carlo, the Willows and the Cal Neva Lodge. They also had a sizable interest in the local brothel, the Stockade. Aside from the income amassed from these properties

Reno: Its “Spirited” Past... and Prohibition (continued)

and activities, Graham and McKay did a considerable side business in laundering money for gangsters. In 1923, the *Sparks Tribune* reported the “biggest rum raid” ever in Nevada at none other than Jim McKay’s residence on South Virginia Road—\$75,000 in beer, wine and liquors was seized by government agents from San Francisco. McKay was out of the country at the time and much of the liquor had been concealed behind secret panels in the McKay home.

First United Methodist Church, 201 West First St.

Even churches were not immune to Prohibition laws. Sacramental wine could only be obtained through a licensed druggist. Citizens also tried to work around the law: certain physicians and pharmacists were willing to write and fill prescriptions for alcohol to be used for medicinal purposes.

But the First United Methodist Church became well known for a reason other than its long history as a place of worship (this is the congregation’s third building since the Methodists began worshipping in Reno in 1868). It is from this location that Reno mayor Ed Roberts expressed his “live and let live” attitude on Prohibition. From the pulpit, at the monthly Men’s Night Meeting, the Mayor announced, “Prohibition is unenforceable.” He told the men that he had long since instructed the city police to ignore



Sober-faced Prohibition agents in Churchill County pose with their confiscated stills and liquor.



The Order of Camels was Reno Headquarters of one of the anti-Prohibition organizations who asserted that the issue was self-government and the rights guaranteed to all under the Constitution.

liquor offenses unless specifically requested to assist federal agents. “If the city officials raided one joint and missed another, I would be accused of being as big a grafter as some prohibition officers are accused of being.” He then voiced the words that made him famous in the press around the nation: “The only way to put the bootleggers out of business is to place a barrel of good corn whiskey on every downtown street corner, with dippers attached, and signs inviting passersby to help themselves to all they want, free of charge. The only condition is that they’d have to drink it there, and couldn’t take any away. That is the way to eliminate the problem of whiskey and graft, and it is the only way.”

The Washoe County Courthouse

The famous Washoe County Courthouse, designed around an older version by famed architect Frederic DeLongchamps, saw lots of traffic during the Prohibition era. Judges found themselves unable to cope with the flood of liquor cases, and prosecutors were soon unable to obtain convictions, so repugnant had the dry laws become to jurors. In his oral history, Andrew Ginocchio, always keen on

noticing events in Reno, commented: “and the lawyers, they were big promoters. They preferred to have the country dry for the reason that every time someone get knocked over by the Prohi, they had to go to a lawyer to fight the battle.”

Reno After Repeal

The Twenty-First Amendment repealed Prohibition. Oversight of alcohol remained higher than before Prohibition, with speakeasies and saloons forced to get licenses and go legitimate. The night of repeal, Reno was quiet on the streets with no rise in drunkenness noted. Drinks were being offered for between 25¢ and 50¢. On December 7, nine Reno clubs put on a fling for regular customers and on New Years Eve, the supply of alcohol was steady and prices came down. Renoites did the occasion up properly with processions of automobiles filled with jubilant celebrants jamming the downtown streets all night long. There were eight auto accidents, three passengers or drivers hospitalized, and numerous thefts and fights.

Reno’s “dry spell” lasted nearly 15 years although the degree of dryness is debatable. Nonetheless, the Prohibition era was a significant chapter in Reno history and perusal of local newspapers of this period provides as much entertainment as actual facts. If you would like to hear more about what you’ve read here, please join us on future walks—you might even catch a glimpse of some of the significant characters from this page of Reno’s history! 📖

Information for this article came from *The Ascent of Reno Iron Works*, Andrew Ginocchio; *Reno: Hub of Washoe County*, William Rowley; and numerous *Nevada State Journal* and *Reno Evening Gazette* articles, 1918-1933.

Debbie Hinman is a HRPS Tour Guide and on the HRPS Editorial Board. Sharon Honig-Bear is HRPS President and a HRPS Tour Guide.

Last Issue: Where in Reno?

Thank you to all of you who responded to the photo in *FootPrints'* Summer 2011 issue. Of course, the correct answer is that the stunning Art Deco window is located at the Lander Street Salon, 682 Mt. Rose St. at the corner of Lander and Mt. Rose streets. These days, people know the area because it's next door to Bibo's Coffee.

We received 11 entries to our contest from Sandra Jaeger, Barbara Biggs, Marilyn Marston, Marilouise Reynolds Brayer, Elsie Newman, Hannah Satika, Connie Jo Smith, Eva Demosthenes, Ellie Lawson-Gilgovan, Mary Maul and OUR WINNER (selected at random) Beverly Igo.

Several people suggested that if anyone had interesting comments about the location that we should include them in *FootPrints* so here we go:

- **Hannah Satika** added details: "the window west of the Beauty Shop (Mr.s Lawery) on Mt. Rose between Plumas and Arlighton in the Old Lawery's Market building circa 1941"
- **Elsie Newman** had personal memories: "This window is in the beauty parlor, to the east was a drug store from my earliest memory. When the drugstore went out of business I remember purchasing many items as they were greatly marked down." Elsie and her husband rented space on the west side of the building for their business...
- **Marilouise Brayer** included this comment: "...this is the front window of the longtime beauty shop within the tile building...I've noticed it all my life."



*Window of Lander Street Salon at
682 Mt. Rose Street.*

Winter Issue: Where in Reno?

*A tufa fountain; rough, tan and grey,
Near a project of the WPA,
Stands to greet and feed the soul
of those who jog and those who stroll.*

**Where in Reno will you
find this fountain?**



So join in on the fun and tell us the answer to this issue's location.

All correct entries will be placed in a ballot box and the winner will be drawn on February 10, 2012.

The winning entry wins a free year of HRPS membership.

Submit your guess by mailing it to: HRPS, P.O. Box 14003, Reno, NV, 89507; or go to our website historicro.org and post your answer.

Message from HRPS President Sharon Honig-Bear

Perhaps you missed the story, since it happened at an abandoned location east of Reno.

On September 10, 2011 the 121-year-old Wadsworth School was destroyed by fire. For safety reasons, the fire officials decided to let the building burn. Now, a landmark that opened its doors in 1890 and served children from Wadsworth, Fernley and Nixon is no longer.

The loss of this structure struck me for two reasons. For one, just last spring I explored the area around the school. I took a pretty good photo of it, taken from the suspension bridge across the Truckee and it comes up periodically as a screen saver on my computer. Thanks to technology the old school will not be forgotten.

The other reason losing the Wadsworth School struck me was because it was another example of Nevada losing an iconic image. The loss echoed the impending demise of the Virginia Street Bridge. The fate of the bridge has been on my mind for months. I write this column in November as the Reno City Council takes its final vote on the bridge design type that will replace the 106-year-old span that has represented Reno and its colorful history.

As I mentioned in the President's Message in the Fall 2011 issue of *FootPrints*, the HRPS Board understood that there was no "winning" a battle to save the bridge.



Working with certain engineering and hydraulic assumptions, it appeared that removal of the lovely arched bridge was unavoidable. The only solution widely endorsed is a "free span" that allows unobstructed flow under the bridge in high water times. Not all recommended free span bridges are equal, however, and we supported the two "grade" (street) level options that reduced the impact on the historic River Corridor, especially the equally iconic Riverside Hotel. We sent letters and spoke publicly in support of these grade level bridge types.

Recently, we had several members encourage us to fight for the old bridge. The HRPS Board discussed this and decided, although with regret, not to participate. There just is no winning on this battle. Various community organizations, business leaders, stakeholders, in fact most citizens . . . all endorse any solution that will eliminate flooding downtown. The new bridge design has become a panacea for this problem. Even our members, with a handful of exceptions, have been silent on this issue. Without a groundswell or constituency to save the bridge, the effort is doomed before it starts.

There are still many aspects of the flood project that need to be clarified. There are significant questions about when and how any bridge choice will be constructed. Money is an ongoing problem. Changes to the "locally preferred plan" for flood management compounds the issues further.

We will continue to monitor the situation and provide input when useful. If and when the engineering stage moves on to the next phase, in which aesthetic and historic elements are incorporated into the design, HRPS will do all that we can to promote a safe bridge that evokes the beauty of the historic one. Fortunately, we have a recognized seat at the design table.

Reno is not the only community struggling with preserving its landmark structures. Gregory Paul Williams, a historian commenting on why the Hollywood sign has become such an important image, said "L.A. is a place that has not saved a lot of old places, the sign becomes iconographic."

Once the Virginia Street Bridge is gone, I wonder where Reno will find its next icon? Let us see what we can do to preserve it before it, too, is gone.

Sharon Honig-Bear
President

Letter About "The Old Ryland House"

I was surprised and delighted to see Ms. Hinman's recent article on the old house located at 1495 S. Marsh Avenue.

The former home of my paternal grandparents is located directly across the street. My father and uncle built the little rock house located at 1410 S. Marsh Avenue and my father, mother, sister and I moved into it in the 1940s. My mother still owns the rock house and currently lives at 1450 S. Marsh Avenue.

Most of the land was still vacant when Mr. Dodd moved his family home to the area and it was quite an exciting event to watch an entire house arriving by truck and moved onto the property.

He was a very kind man and didn't seem to mind when I would wander over to visit with him while he worked in the yard, even though I was just a child. After receiving permission from my parents, he presented me with an all black cocker spaniel puppy that I named Spooky.

Mr. Dodd was well-liked by all the members of my family and we were heartbroken upon learning of his unexpected death.

Thank you again for the article.

Sincerely,
Rosemarie Miller
Sparks, Nevada

The Historic Building at 301 Vassar Street

by Tom Stewart

Editor's Note: Tom Stewart from the Wells Avenue Merchants and Property Owners Association wrote this wonderful piece on the US Bank building on Vassar and Wells in Reno.

The beautiful brick building on the northeast corner of the Vassar and Wells intersection has a colorful history. At different times it has been home to a military chapel, a church, a restaurant and bar, a saving and loan, and now US Bank.

The Reno Army Air Base opened in 1942 in Stead, Nevada, north of Reno. When the base closed in 1945, two military chapels on the property had to be moved to make room for housing. In 1947, requests were made to the War Assets Administration to acquire the two chapel buildings. These came from the Rev. Charles J. Dohn, pastor of the First Christian Church, and Msgr. Thomas Collins, who asked that one of the chapels serve the recently-established Little Flower Catholic Parish at 301 Vassar Street at the corner of Wells Avenue in Reno.

One building was moved to the Vassar and Wells site and the other to Plumas and Taylor streets where it is now a wing of the Reno Buddhist Center. At the time, these were the largest moving projects of their kind in Reno. Crews started moving the buildings the nine-mile distance beginning March 29, 1948, arriving at their sites in Reno on

April 1. To accomplish the move, the Reno arch over Virginia Street was temporarily dismantled. The Southern Pacific train schedule had to be rearranged to allow time for the buildings to cross the tracks downtown, and crews went ahead of the buildings to disconnect electrical wires. Contractors for the move were George Panicari and John Scott. Movers were Tony, John and Dario Bevilacqua. A foundation for the new church was built prior to the arrival of the building. The move went well.

Originally, both buildings were clad in white horizontal wood siding. Once in place, both buildings were faced with brick. Architect Edward Parsons, who oversaw the renovation of the Vassar street building, rounded the windows at the top and added peaks over windows at the request of Father Collins, to make it look more like a Catholic church. The new church was named Church of the Little Flower.

The Little Flower Church Altar Society, which formed in August 1947, furnished a new rectory. The rectory was also designed by Parsons and built to the east of the Vassar and Wells intersection. With a seating capacity of 200, the first Mass was celebrated on Easter Sunday, 1948. Confessions were heard in the furnace room! Some upgrades were made in 1960. The last Mass at the site was celebrated 30 years after the move



Original military chapel on the Army Air Base in Stead, Nevada.
From Debbie Hinman's postcard collection.

on July 1, 1978, after which, the Little Flower Church congregation moved to a new church at the corner of Kietzke and Plumb Lanes.

The church and rectory buildings were purchased from the Church of the Little Flower by businessman Sidney Stern in 1983. Mr. Stern's son used the building as a restaurant and bar. A few years later, Mr. Stern again transformed the building, this time into a bank. A bank vault and drive-up window were added. He did a complete remodel to resemble an old-fashioned bank, adding wooden teller windows and other features. He included many of his own antiques when furnishing the inside. He replaced the steeple with a clock. Stern ran the building as Nevada First Thrift Savings and Loan.

US Bank purchased the building in 1998 and has maintained the historic structure and interior ever since. This former military chapel – one of the most recognizable and iconic buildings in Reno – has become the pride of the Wells Avenue neighborhood. 🏠

Information for this article came from Debbie Hinman, Anne Simone, Barrie Schuster, Little Flower School, and US Bank. Tom Stewart is with the Wells Avenue Merchants & Property Owners Association compiled the information.



The US Bank building at 301 Vassar Street in 2011.
Courtesy Debbie Hinman

The 2011 Harvest of Homes Tour



*At Burns Street, members of Reno Pops entertained tour attendees.
Photo by Larry Neel.*



Mary Beth Goddard, one owner of 59 Winter Street entertains tour attendees with stories of her house. Photo by Cindy Ainsworth.



Lauren Reeser of the Great Basin Costume Society sits on the porch of 59 Winter Street in the Powning Addition. Photo by Cindy Ainsworth.

For the second year in a row, the weather gods smiled on the Reno Harvest of Homes Tour. The day dawned warm and sunny, a beautiful, golden late September day, much to the relief of the volunteers stationed outside each home to sign in visitors. Judging by the turnout, the participants also appreciated the perfect weather and although booties were available to protect the floors of the tour homes, they really weren't needed.


More than 300 people purchased tickets for the tour this year and another 100 worked as volunteers, hosts and committee members. Sundance Books was again our top ticket seller.

The tour was again highly praised by attendees for its good organization, informative program, helpful volunteers and interesting mix of homes. One comment expressed the view of many: "All the homes on the tour fulfilled what you promised." Another said, "I viewed each home as a work of art and appreciated each home globally."

The day went flawlessly, prompting this comment: "Thank you for a terrific morning and afternoon: educational, entertaining and very interesting plus a peek into Reno's history as well as Reno's present way of living." And then right on cue, almost an exact repeat of last year's tour—as the last participants

left the homes and volunteers were packing up leftover materials, the clouds opened and the rain began.

Organizers of the Tour wish to thank our wonderful volunteers and everyone who supported HRPS by purchasing a ticket and taking part in getting to know Reno's historic homes. And we especially want to thank our homeowners; without their generosity and willingness to open their homes, there would be no tour.

We have some of the wonderful programs left so give a call to our office (747-4478) if you would like us to send you one. 



*HRPS volunteers await tour attendees on South Arlington.
Photo by Rosie Cevalco.*



*The Williams home at 700 Monroe contains a delightful collection of friars; here, a charming example keeps a watchful eye on the garden.
Photo by Debbie Hinman.*



Members of the Great Basin Costume Society, Oscar and Debbie Sessions, add an historic touch to the tour. Photo by Debbie Hinman.

Neighborhood Preservation Fund Projects


by Jack Hursh Jr.

HHRPS is celebrating the completion of the inaugural season of the Neighborhood Preservation Fund's façade mini-grant projects. Proceeds from the Harvest of Homes tours are being put to work by private property owners.

The exterior of the Reno First United Methodist Church was successfully restored to original condition by the removal of a no-longer-functioning chimney that was built over several arched windows facing First Street. The chimney drastically scarred the exterior appearance of the building. The removal of the chimney unveiled the original windows and now treats the interior to a bounty of light.

Brick and stone mortar repairs were completed on 524 Holcomb Avenue, a Queen Anne cottage owned by Char and Dennis Eckmeyer, now the location of their MetLife/New York Life business. Mortar between the Truckee River rock foundation and the broken-down brick porch pedestal was absent from years of weathering. Mortar repairs and the porch pedestal reconstruction, give this old beauty a fresh look with the character of the original materials that will withstand many more years of weather and garner admiring glances.

The Neighborhood Preservation Fund façade mini-grant season will begin again in January 2012. Check the HRPS website in January for applications and guidelines. These grants are offered to property owners for façade improvements in the original architectural style on historical buildings within Reno city limits.

Three more projects were funded from the 2011 grant cycle and will be described in future *FootPrints*. 



After removal of a non-functioning chimney (left) that covered original windows at Reno First United Methodist Church, a bounty of light comes through the beautiful arched windows. Photos by Cindy Ainsworth.



Mortar repairs to the Truckee River rock foundation (left) and to the brick porch pedestal (right) give this old beauty at 524 Holcomb a fresh look with the same character as the original materials. Photos by Char Eckmeyer.



Thanks to Our First Lifetime Members!


It seemed like a good idea to create a new membership category: Lifetime Member... and we're happy to announce that three people have responded so far. We'd like to recognize Lynn Bremer, Sharon Honig-Bear and Charlotte Voitoff for their contribution and belief in HRPS's work.

As the year begins, consider making this level of commitment to our organization.

We are dedicating Lifetime Memberships towards our Neighborhood Preservation Fund grants. We offer two levels, one for an Individual (\$500) and one for Family (living within one household, \$750). Beyond your support of HRPS's work, your membership will mean:

- No need to renew membership annually
- Annual receipt of walking tour passes (2 for Individual/4 for Family levels)

- Special recognition in *FootPrints*, meetings and at other HRPS events
- Special invitations to all HRPS Events

To enroll as a Lifetime Member, please use the membership application in the newsletter or visit us at historicro.org to complete your Lifetime Membership. *It's a perfect way to show your love of our town!* 

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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NEW! Pay online at www.historicreno.org

Annual Membership Includes:

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- ☐ New Member ☐ Renewal
- ☐ Student \$15.00
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- ☐ Business Contribution \$50.00
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- ☐ HRPS Angel \$250.00
- ☐ Lifetime Member \$500.00
- ☐ Additional donation to help our
Neighborhood Preservation Fund \$ _____

Thank you for joining HRPS.

As a supporter, you have the opportunity to learn more about the history of this community and make a difference in its future. There are many areas in our organization where your enthusiasm, skills and dedication will be invaluable to us. We currently need help in the following committees. Can you help?

- ☐ Communications
- ☐ Special Events
- ☐ Outreach/Education
- ☐ Preservation Issues

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RV 12.09.2011/FO-DCD

From Monroe Street HRPS Tour Guide — Elsie Newman

It is an ongoing joke among HRPS tour guides that every walk has to have some mention of notorious gangster Baby Face Nelson. This is not hard to do, as Baby Face, aka George Nelson, aka Lester Gillis (his birth name), aka Jimmie Burnett (his West Coast identity), was a familiar presence in Reno between the years of 1932 and 1934. A protégé of William “Curly” Graham, Nelson performed odd jobs for the Reno kingpin and was implicated in the biggest crime to hit Reno in the 1930s, the abduction and presumed killing of banker Roy Frisch.

Three of Baby Face’s residences are mentioned on our tours: an unassuming brick bungalow in the University Heights area (pointed out on the Upper Ralston/Northern Little Italy walk), and a southeast brick duplex (on the El Reno Apartment walk) and a mention of a home in the area of California Avenue and Plumas Street (on the Lake Addition walk). His exploits are also




1150 Monroe Court, also known as Hart House in Reno. Monroe Street Tour Guide Elsie Newman called this house home for a period.

enumerated on Beyond the Arches and the Prohibition Era in Reno walk, and the home of his friend and mechanic Frank Cochran is included on the Newlands Neighborhood walk.

But an interesting discovery in a unique home on Monroe Court also brought the gangster into focus on the Monroe Street walk, designed by Anne Simone and Elsie Newman.

The lovely, pagoda-style Hart House at 1150 Monroe Court was built for piano-player George Hart and his heiress wife, Marcia Keresey Hart by noted local architect Russell Mills. Tour Guide Elsie Newman and her husband Larry owned the home for a period and remodeled the kitchen. When they opened a wall, they discovered a copy of a long-defunct local paper, the *News-Advertiser*, dated April 5, 1935. The headline read: “Baby Face Trial in Hands of Jury Today in Bay City.” The story detailed the charging of seven people with harboring Nelson—garage owner Frank Cochran was one of the seven.

Nelson’s tenure in Reno was brief, as was his life. He died from wounds suffered in a gun battle in November of 1934 at the age of 25. However, he remains a local legend and a key player in the history of Reno, as highlighted in so many of our walking tours. 

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WINTER 2012 PROGRAMS

Jack Hursh Jr. – Program Chair: Jack.Hursh@gmail.com

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.

January 25 – The Evolution of Reno’s Historic Wells Avenue Neighborhood – photographer Emily Rogers and research enthusiast Barrie Schuster will present the unique and colorful history of the Wells Avenue Neighborhood—a story that has been overshadowed by a period of decline that began more than 40 years ago. Learn what happened and where the neighborhood is headed today.

February 22 – Center Street Heyday with Dr. Michael Fischer. Legal gambling was new in Reno in the early 1930s. The hub of activity was Center Street in an era when east-coast divorcees arrived on the train, were met by their Reno lawyer, and spent the long desert nights gambling and drinking in the finest of formal attire. Enter the “square deal” Bank Club owned by Reno’s most famous sportsmen, William John Graham and Jimmy McKay. Reno was truly “Wide Open,” wild and wicked.

March 28 – Early Reno in Pictures, 1868–1920. HRPS *FootPrints* Editor and Nevada Historical Society docent Carol Coleman uses images from her *Early Reno* book to describe Reno as a tough railroad town in 1868, through the boom-and-bust years of the Comstock and later the Tonopah/Goldfield era, then to become the state’s financial and industrial center by the early 1920s.

April 25 – Reno History and the “Heydays” of Moana Hot Springs. Native Nevadan Bill Berrum will reminisce about the growth of Reno from the Moana Lane and family perspective from the early 1900s up to the 1950s. He is uniquely qualified to inform us on this subject as he and his father, Louis W. Berrum, grew up and worked in the three swimming pools that have occupied the same location for more than 100 years.

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