



FootPrints

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

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2014 Reno Harvest of Homes Tour Saturday, September 27, 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

by Debbie Hinman • Photos by Steve Ellison

It's hard to believe we're embarking on our fifth Reno Harvest of Homes Tour. Your HRPS Harvest of Homes Tour Committee is very excited to show you our tour offerings for 2014! Since early this year, we have been planning for our annual event by seeking out historic and unique properties throughout the city, planning enhancements to make the tour an even more captivating experience, and reviewing your comments from the surveys that many of you kindly complete, so we understand what's important to you. We believe we have lined up an exciting and eclectic group of featured homes for your enjoyment.

We are calling the 2014 tour our **Bookends Tour**, since we offer a home in each of Reno's conservation districts that serve as the bookends, with three homes in Southwest Reno in between. For 2014, we move from a rustic home in the Powning's Addition, so old its construction date can only be approximated; to three Old Southwest gems: a tiny rock "castle," another "Mansion on the Bluff," and an early Craftsman home that has been restored and enlarged to perfection; to a delightful brick bungalow in the Wells Addition whose owner's flair for design will be sure to charm you. We are happy to feature homes in these conservation districts in addition to our "tried-and-true" Old Southwest, illuminating the fact that there are homes with great character found throughout the city.

The 2014 HRPS Reno Harvest of Homes Tour has been recognized as an official "Nevada 150" event, in celebration of this year's Sesquicentennial.



Reno Harvest of Homes Tour

119 and 121 Vine Street
970 Joaquin Miller Drive
761 California Avenue
587 Ridge Street
506 Wheeler Avenue

"Two on Vine" – 121 (c.1870s) and 119 (c.1912) Vine Street: 121 Vine in the Powning's Addition (now in the current Pownings Conservation District) is a side-gabled Folk Victorian cottage; the style of this home is also often referred to as a Carpenter Gothic, after the Gothic-influenced central gable, which often features a church-style window. Neighborhood lore tells of this home being moved down from Virginia City, following the decline of the Comstock. The theory is further borne out by the owner's research of old documents indicating the home "appeared" at its current location somewhere between 1892 and 1893. Owner Jack Hursh, HRPS longtime Program Director, wants visitors to understand this is an ongoing project; removing years of remodeling that obscured its original simplicity of design. It is simply and rustically appointed on the interior, with period-appropriate artifacts from Jack's own family. 119 Vine, a small Craftsman home, possibly a Sears kit home, sits on the same lot, added sometime between 1908 and 1916.

Continued on page 2

2014 HRPS Reno Harvest of Homes Tour (continued)



“The Bennett Home” – 587 Ridge Street (c.1920):

A beautiful example of a Craftsman bungalow, this home is in the Newlands Heights Addition. This style of architecture was made popular by various California architects during the Arts and Crafts movement in America. The land was passed down from Francis Newlands' vast land holdings in early Reno to his son James through The Newlands Company, who sold this lot to George Osen, an early automobile dealer who opened Osen Motors in Reno in the 1920s. The home had fallen into sad disrepair and had been slated for demolition when the Bennetts purchased it in 1983. The couple began a long restoration, adding a second story in keeping with the architectural style of the home. The home features original cherry woodwork, French doors in the living room, inlaid wood floor in the dining room and lovely crown molding. Lisa Bennett has added her creative flair to the home, creating mosaics in the kitchen and upstairs bath, and her use of an aqua color palette throughout the home creates a calming atmosphere.



“The Steinmiller/Parsons/McGinley Home” –

761 California Avenue (c.1921): One of the grand homes perched on the bluff overlooking the Truckee River, this lovely 3000-square-foot brick home is a fine example of the Colonial Revival architectural style. Popular from 1880 through the 1950s, the style grew out of a resurgence of interest in America's colonial roots. The lot was purchased by dentist George C. Steinmiller from The Newlands Company and resides in the Newland's Heights Addition. The architect was Fred Schadler, who designed other notable homes and public buildings in early 20th century Reno. The home remained in the Steinmiller family until 2004. The home has lovely hardwood floors throughout, oak downstairs and pine on the second floor. The current owner has added dramatic color in the entry and dining room and the furnishings are a blend of eclectic pieces that add personality and interest to the formal architecture. The views from the glassed-in porch and various patios are stunning, from the Truckee River to the cityscape to Peavine Mountain.




“Greystone Castle” – 970 Joaquin Miller Drive (c.1930):

Developer W. E. Barnard was known for his unique and architecturally significant homes from the mid-1920s through the mid-1930s in Reno. He built primarily in the northwest University Terrace area and the Old Southwest, such as this home in the Newlands Manor Addition. The style of Greystone can be considered a Cotswold Cottage; the Open House announcement published in August of 1930 stated, “Greystone Castle has the charm of an old English castle and all the modern conveniences of the very latest American home.” The ad touts its cathedral window, random-plank floor, tiled dining room floor and window sills, all of which are still in evidence, 84 years later. The kitchen and bathroom have been remodeled several times over the years. The front garden is a beautiful accompaniment to the home and there is a small, charming patio to the rear.

2014 HRPS Reno Harvest of Homes Tour (continued)

Owners Tim and Nancy Gilbert have numerous unique rental properties throughout southwest Reno, including Casa del Rey, to the immediate west of Greystone.

“The Wright Home” – 506 Wheeler Avenue (c.1937): This home was built in the Wells Addition (now in the current Wells Avenue Conservation District) in a style known as the Minimal Traditional style with a Tudor arched front porch. This style met the national need for good-quality small homes during the Depression and through the war years. The living room has a wonderful, coved ceiling and the home has original windows and oak floors. Owner Loretta Wright has utilized her design talent to enhance the period architectural detail of the home, adding decorative molding and an archway between the kitchen and breakfast room/nook area. She also modified the structure to meet her needs, creating a fabulous formal dining room out of a second bedroom. Interior doors connecting rooms have been removed for a more open flow. The home has a cozy, inviting feel that immediately welcomes all who enter. 



This year we are happy to announce that the complete Tour Program will be available on our website in advance of the Tour. Many of you have requested to see it before you actually visit the homes and we listened! The Program also suggests parking, places to lunch along the way and full descriptions of the homes.


The homes are listed from oldest to youngest, but as always, you are invited to visit them in any order. Wherever you wish to start, our friendly check-in volunteers will be ready to sign you in, fit you with a wristband, and give you your program so you can step back in time and visit Old Reno with us. If you have further questions, contact Event Chair Sharon Honig-Bear at sharonbear@sbcglobal.net. 



Reno Harvest of Homes Tour

This celebration of Reno's older neighborhoods and homes of distinction will be held Saturday, September 27 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tickets may be purchased in advance for \$25 at the following outlets:

Sundance Bookstore	St. Ives Florist
Ryrie's Art and Home	Rail City Garden Center
Napa-Sonoma Grocery Company	Paper Moon
Moana Nursery	The Freckled Frog

These locations accept checks and cash only. The last day to purchase at one of the retail sites is Friday, September 26. We have also simplified the online ticket purchase process and you can order tickets conveniently at historicroeno.org. We expect tickets to go on sale mid-August. You may also purchase a ticket at any of our homes the day of the tour for \$30. 

Dishing Up Dinner with a Side Order of History

by Sharon Honig-Bear

Most HRPS tour guides have their “soapbox speech,” a personal appeal about the importance of saving older buildings. I have my own version, influenced by the almost eight years I spent as restaurant writer for the *Reno Gazette-Journal*. My rant goes something like, “One of the best ways to preserve older properties is to support the businesses that currently reside in them.” The logic goes, as long as a business stays viable and the doors stay open, the building is repurposed and saved from some unknown fate.

There is one category of commercial enterprise that is surprisingly easy — not to mention pleasurable — to support: restaurants that have moved into older properties. The Midtown and Downtown areas are rich with examples. I call these Reno’s Historic Kitchens.

What follows is a list of restaurants that are located in historic properties. It is not all-inclusive and I can’t, unfortunately, guarantee you a great meal or experience. I can only say that I’ve had many good times and spent much money in these places and I encourage you to follow my lead. Where else can you have your taste for food and history satisfied in one sitting?

Personal Faves for all Seasons

Here are my two “go-to” restaurants, crowd pleasers for a wide variety of tastes and occasions:

Wild River Grille, in the Riverside Artist Lofts: Why not start your culinary travels at the location where Reno began? The current Riverside was built by George Wingfield and designed by Frederic DeLongchamps in 1927. It is on the National Register of Historic Places and achieved fame as a centerpiece of Reno’s Divorce Colony. It is six-story, red brick, Period Revival with Gothic terra cotta elements. Late in the 1990s, the Riverside escaped the wrecking ball when it was renovated by a national organization Artspace, Inc., in partnership with Sierra Arts Foundation.

The ground floor now houses a restaurant with a variety of seating options, including private rooms and Reno’s best outdoor seating, facing the Truckee. The menu is creative and casual, covering food as diverse as not-your-mother’s meat loaf to wild mushroom truffle ravioli.



Photo by Sharon Honig-Bear.

Stone House Cafe, 1907 South Arlington Avenue: The restaurant is beautifully made of stone and the surrounding gardens make it a delightful place from spring to fall. The property’s history goes back to 1876 when R.P. Chapin opened a nursery on forty acres, naming it after his son Arlington; the dusty lane that took city dwellers out to the Nursery took on this designation. Jane Lake bought the ranch for \$8,000 and converted it to a dairy. The existing house was built in 1918 by Dr. Fred Phillips as a family home, in a Craftsman bungalow style. It is now on the State Register of Historic Places. It was built from the rounded river rock gathered on the property. Well-known restaurateurs Paul and Cyrina Abowd offer an enormous selection of tastes for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

The Twins in Midtown

Midtown is growing, almost daily it seems, with shopping, bars and eateries. Two of the most popular are brew pubs and leaders in the craft brewing movement. Both have lovingly adapted significant old buildings.

Silver Peak Restaurant and Brewery, 124 Wonder Street: This brew pub led the way in the revival of Midtown eateries and I have a special fondness for that reason. You’d never guess it, but the building is one of the oldest in Reno, built in the 1870s. Underneath all the changes is a “shingle style” dwelling, one of the subcategories of Queen Anne Revival styles that were popular from the 1860s – 1880s. In 1883, Andrew Litch bought a 72 acre ranch south of downtown that included the house. It stayed in the family until 1955 and has primarily been used as a commercial building since. It was a restaurant previously and Silver Peak opened in 1999. It’s casual and has warmth. Some of the original space is revealed with an open beam ceiling, exposed brick and concrete floors. There’s a great outdoor seating area upstairs and a nice selection of crafted beer. I’ve had the tacos more times than I could count but the menu satisfies whether you want a burger, pizza or more exotic offerings like jambalaya, shepherd’s pie or ahi poke.

Brasserie St. James, 901 South Center Street: Warm, fun, young, the brew pub occupies the former Crystal Springs Water Company building, built around 1929. Brasserie Saint James Owner Art Farley lovingly repurposed the property, reclaiming nearly all the wood during the remodel. Floors became ceilings, walls became tables, and stones dug from the property became fireplaces. It’s a marvel to see the work put into the adaptation. Farley is also an accomplished brewer. I love the “tasters,” small glasses that allow me to try several of their wonderful beers without getting wasted. The menu, along with burgers and pizzas, contains some European surprises like steamed mussels, a rich poutine and a salad called the Alsace.

Dishing Up Dinner (continued)

Pies Two Ways

It's not all about well-established restaurants. Some of the newer and smaller places are serving up innovative food and filling specific niches in the culinary spectrum.

Noble Pie Parlor, in the El Cortez Hotel, 239 West 2nd Street: One of those surprises, a hip pizza joint, right on the first floor of this historic hotel. Built in 1931 by Abe Zetooney, the El Cortez was then Reno's tallest building and only major hotel with a casino. It was tremendously successful and popular with the divorce trade, who flocked to the casino and Trocadero nightclub. A rare and beautiful example of a major Art Deco building in Reno, it's distinguished by the foliated motif and terra cotta ornaments on the façade. Into this history moves Pie Face Pizza Co. (as it was first named), now called Noble Pie. Thin crispy crust pizzas have irreverent names with delicious toppings (Ain't No Thing, White-Boy, Hey Zeus to name a few) and this is one of the few places where you will find strombolis. Benign during the day, there is a devoted following for the late-night hours (they're open to 5 a.m.), in keeping with Noble Pie's celebration of Reno's "underbelly."

Z-Pie, 138 West St., adjacent to the West Street Market: It was a treat when I was a girl to eat pot pies, even the frozen variety. My tastes have changed but I still find it soul-satisfying to cut into the crust of a good pot pie. Fulfill that pleasure at Z-Pie and discover that the building has a strong connection to the early Chinese community. Like many other herbal shops in the downtown area, Dr. Q. S. Wong advertised in 1930 as an "Herb Specialist for acute and chronic diseases." The space was shared in the 1940s with the Chinese National Party. The space is now occupied by Z-Pie, where they serve "Pies with a Purpose." The restaurant supports a local non-profit designed to help young adults and many of them work in the restaurant. The interior is bright and modern—no sign of a Chinese lantern anywhere. As a traditionalist, I order

the chicken mushroom pie but there is a tempting variety of mostly savory and delectable choices. Salads and soups round out the menu.

Basque in Good Taste

We love our Basque restaurants, experiencing abundant, hearty food and the unexpected when you are seated with unknown tablemates. Not to mention the picons! I am happy to say that our two local favorites are better than ever.



Photo by Sharon Honig-Bear.


Louis Basque Corner, 301 East 4th Street: This culinary landmark is located inside a good example of a working class railroad hotel. The building dates to 1907 because of its proximity to the railroad, making it one of the oldest operating hotels in Reno. Owners and names changed over the years, from the Hotel Richelieu to the Lincoln Bar (named for the Lincoln Highway that passed in front) to owners Louis and Lorraine Erreguible. They opened the restaurant as Louis in 1967 and retired recently. New and young, owners Chris Shanks and Brian Elcano, carry on the tradition but have spiffed up the place. A remodel, new bar and rooms upstairs breathe fresh life into this classic. I love the bar menu — the lamb burger brings me in again and again — and a recent dinner confirmed that the kitchen is paying excellent attention to the food.

Santa Fe Basque Restaurant, 235 Lake Street: Time seems to stand still from both the outside and inside of this classic Basque restaurant. You will still

see tenants coming out the front door of the hotel and the adjacent barber shop seems in a state of suspended animation. The original building appears in city directories back to 1930 and was rebuilt in 1949 after a fire. The solid brick shape is completely surrounded by the whiteness and enormity of Harrah's, an apparent David and Goliath tale. The business has been owned by the Zubillaga family for over 60 years. One thing that's new that I especially like: the tapas menu for times that I want a picon without the hearty Basque meal to go along with it. The baby lamb chops may be one of the best deals in town. The perfect place before an Aces game.

Plenty More To Enjoy

There are restaurants and bars in historic buildings throughout Reno. Everywhere you turn, eateries are occupying spaces that could be empty and face demolition. Only editorial space prohibits more descriptions of time-honored spots like the Gold 'N Silver, the Halfway Club and the Coney Island. Or think about visiting one of these the next time your thirst or hunger calls out to you: Men Wielding Fire, Little House on Center Street, Sup, Beaujolais, Homage, Daughters Café, Old Granite Street Eatery, Midtown Eats, Café DeLuxe, My Favorite Muffin, Michael's Deli, SoDo, even the Siena Hotel. The list goes on...

I hope that I have whetted your appetite. Support the new generation of young restaurateurs bringing fresh life to vintage buildings. Putting it directly, join me in putting your money where your values are! If you want to play a role in preserving Reno, go out and dine in one of these great historic kitchens! 

Sharon Honig-Bear is a HRPS member, HRPS Tour Guide, and a Past-President of HRPS. Debbie Hinman is a HRPS member, a HRPS Tour Guide, and a member of the HRPS Editorial Staff.



Historic Reno Preservation Society
presents

Historic Walking Tours September 2014

HRPS offers three walking tours in September along with the Harvest of Homes Tour. This will wrap up our tours for 2014 with our free evening programs starting in October. Tour cost is \$10 per person, free to HRPS members. Walks generally last from 1 ½ to 2 hours. No dogs please. **Reservations required and space is limited.** Go to www.historicreno.org or call 747-4478 for information and reservations. Home tour advance tickets cost \$25.00, day of tour \$30.00.

Saturday
September 6
10:00 a.m.

BRICKS AND STONES – A walk in the Humboldt and Lander Streets Neighborhood. Discover the architectural treasures of this area, a mix of bungalows, Tudor and mission revivals and cottage styles. Meet at My Favorite Muffin, 340 California Avenue. Tour guide: Bill Isaef.

Saturday
September 13
10:00 a.m.

LITERARY RENO – Take a Tour of Writing from the “Underbelly.” There’s more to Reno’s literary history than *The City of Trembling Leaves*! Reno continues to be a mythical magnet for ‘outsider’ writers and characters... the misfits, outcasts and seekers. Let your imagination roam as we travel downtown streets encountered by traditional writers like Will James, Robert Laxalt and Joanne de Longchamps, then walk the haunts of contemporary writers such as Bernie Schopen, Willy Vlautin and Susan Palwick. Meet at the Riverside Artist Lofts, 17 S. Virginia. Tour guides: Charlotte Voitoff and Nancy Manfredi.

Saturday
September 20
10:00 a.m.

WEST OF WELLS – Discover an often overlooked treasure trove of fascinating Reno history. Join us to 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 at 140 Wonder Street. Tour guide: Barrie Schuster.

Saturday
September 27
10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

RENO HARVEST OF HOMES TOUR – HRPS gives you a chance for an inside look at six historic and distinguished homes in Reno. Tickets are \$25 in advance, \$30 day of the tour. For ticket information visit historicreno.org.

2014 HRPS Neighborhood Preservation Fund Recipients

HRPS is proud to announce our Neighborhood Preservation Fund (NPF) grant winners for 2014. The panel selected six recipients to receive our fourth annual grants. Projects ranged from replacing glass panes while retaining the original steel window frames to new paint to major roof replacements. The NPF panel’s focus is to award grants to projects that contribute to the rehabilitation of the historic structure while improving the curb appeal of the neighborhood.

The awards include:

1.) 637 Saint Lawrence Avenue (Owner Christine Pinney Kardow) Replace broken, stained and poorly

glazed 100 panes of glass while retaining the original metal windows. Home was built in 1929 and the front windows are an integral part of the home.

2.) 570 W. Taylor Street (Owner Kathy Kershaw) A nice duplex with a little street-visible garage. Grant approved to replace the garage roof and possible beam replacement.

3.) 216 E. Liberty Street (Owner Paul Quade) Exterior paint of this Victorian home. The owner has thoughtfully rehabilitated this lovely home, which is now his office.

4.) 655/665 Monroe Street (Owner Mark Taxer) To repoint and repair brick duplex porches.

5.) 575 Ridge Street (Owners Mercedes de la Garza & Scott Gibson) This significant 1927 Frederic DeLongchamps-designed home will receive a new roof.

6.) 666 California Street (Owner Darcy Kathleen Gibson) Old roof asbestos abatement and replacement with a period correct energy-efficient metal roof.

The panel was impressed with the selection of applications. The applicants’ eye for detail on the preservation of their buildings was noted when selecting the winners.

Our next grant round will begin January 2015.

Message from Your HRPS President Byllie D'Amato Andrews

The Historic Reno Preservation Society is *dedicated to preserving and promoting historic resources in the Truckee Meadows through education, advocacy and leadership*, and our organization of volunteers is proving every day that we are up to this challenge laid out in our mission statement. As we grow as an organization, we are seeing more than ever the impacts of our mission and the increasing breadth of our reach and influence in the community.

The battle we didn't have to fight

The main agenda item for the HRPS Advocacy Advisory Council meeting on June 13 was the preservation of Lincoln and Manzanita Halls at the University of Nevada, Reno. We were joined by representatives from other concerned groups, and we reviewed the facts, discussed the issues, defined our position, and came up with a plan of action.

On the morning of June 19 we learned that further action would not be necessary. An email from UNR Communications was sent to many of us, stating, "University of Nevada, Reno President Marc Johnson will announce later today that the University will be preserving Lincoln and Manzanita Halls.... This is very positive news and President Johnson wanted you to know this before we circulate this announcement to a wider audience."

Engaging Reno's future preservation advocates

HRPS is proud to offer fourth-grade educational programs to all Reno elementary schools. I had the privilege to participate in one of these programs, joining Jerry Fenwick and Felvia Belaustegui at Hunter Lake Elementary School on Wednesday, April 28, when Jerry presented his slide show of old Reno to two fourth grade classes.

The next day, Felvia, Terry Cynar and I boarded a school bus with the classes, their teachers, and several parent volunteers for a field trip. The first stop was the Amtrak Train Depot on Center Street

where we started in the downstairs waiting room to see the historic water fountain donated by the Women's Christian Temperance Union to the City of Reno in 1908. Back upstairs, we entered the historic part of the depot to view the 1926 waiting room and the collection of artifacts uncovered during the ReTRAC.

Our next stop was the Washoe County Court House where the students were given a tour by Randy Amestoy. The tour proceeded to the Lake Mansion, where we ate our bag lunches and participated in a guided tour of the mansion. The trip ended with a drive by the California Building where students were told about the 1927 Transcontinental Highway Exposition. Based on the students' thank you letters to HRPS following one of the fourth grade tours, the drinking fountain at the Amtrak Depot was a big hit!

Collaboration, education, and preservation

On Monday, July 7 a group of HRPS board members took a field trip to the historic Reno Amtrak Depot, built in 1926 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places in December 2012. We were met by Maureen McKissick from the City of Reno and local historians Alicia Barber and Mella Harmon for a tour of the historic facility. At one time, the city was ready to go forward with plans to turn the historic building into a Heritage Center, and in fact, there is already signage on Virginia Street near the Reno Arch listing the Reno Heritage Center pointing visitors east to the Depot. The Heritage Center may provide an exciting opportunity for collaboration between HRPS

and the City of Reno – stay tuned for more details.

There is good news for those of you who were unable to attend the February and March HRPS Programs. Because of unprecedented demand for our programs, we exceeded the fire safety limit at the Laxalt Auditorium, so HRPS is partnering with Washoe County Library System to offer both programs at the historic Downtown Reno Library's auditorium, and possibly at other library locations. Steve Ellison will present *Harolds Club or Bust!* on Thursday, September 25 at 3 p.m., and Michael Fischer's *Reno's Dark Underbelly of Prostitution and Drugs from 1900-1950* will be offered on Sunday September 28 at 2 p.m.

Lifetime members

Pat Klos's article honoring Cindy Ainsworth as the first recipient of the Patricia Ferraro Klos Volunteer Award prompted Jan and Jim Loverin to renew their membership at the Lifetime level. Jan included a note saying, "Enclosed is our check for enthusiastic support as lifetime members of HRPS. I was sincerely touched by Pat Klos's article honoring my friend, Cindy Ainsworth." Twelve others – Dr. Francine Mannix, Tom and Phyllis Cates, Ted and Francine Gray, Al and Nancy Pagni, Tom and Leanne Stone, Florence Ann Burgess, and John and Susan Hancock – join the Loverins as new HRPS Lifetime Members. They join the other couples and individuals who made this commitment to the mission of HRPS. Income from Lifetime Membership is used to support our Neighborhood Preservation Fund. 

Popular HRPS Programs to be Offered Again!

HRPS Programs to be offered again in the Auditorium
at the Downtown Reno Library

Thursday, 9/25/14:	Harolds Club or Bust! — Steve Ellison.....	3:00 pm
Sunday, 9/28/14:	Reno's Dark Underbelly of Prostitution.....	2:00 pm
	From 1900 to 1950 — Michael Fischer	

LaVere Redfield and Reno's Hill/Redfield Mansion

by Jack Harpster

From its founding in 1868 to the early days of the 20th century, Reno's residential and commercial corridor had remained girdled within a narrow belt on both sides of the Truckee River. Cattle and sheep ranches and small farms dominated the countryside. But by 1907 the city's increasing population began to force development outward from the river, primarily in the area known as the South Side, much of it today called the Old Southwest. A newspaper ad for the Reno Development Company on April 14 of that year discussed big plans that were underway for the South Side:

"TAKE A LOOK FOR YOURSELF

More improvements are being made in Reno today than in any other time in the city's history. The building of homes and improving of residential sub-divisions are confined almost entirely in the beautiful south side district. Chief among the new tracts is the Sierra Vista... Take a look for yourself at the grading work on the new boulevard, Plumas Street, where the Moana Springs street car line will be in operation within sixty days."

The Reno Development Company was owned by some of the state's wealthiest and most influential citizens, including U.S. Senators Francis G. Newlands and George S. Nixon and cattle baron T. B. Rickey, chief among them. The firm had purchased three large ranches just south of the city boundary with the intention of, "induc[ing] people to buy suburban homes and to greatly increase the population of this city and vicinity." The purchase of the Gibson, De Reamer and Litch ranches for over \$200,000 indicated the company's faith in the future of the growing little city. The Sierra Vista Tract, which would occupy a large portion of the Litch Ranch property, was to be the company's crown jewel. The tract was bordered by South Virginia Road on the east, Plumas Street on the west, Monte Rosa (now Mt. Rose) Street on

the south, and near today's Mary Street on the north. It would soon be joined by other new residential developments, and by many small businesses that sprung up to serve the needs of all the new South Side residents.

Sales in Sierra Vista were brisk for a number of years, and modern bungalow and cottage homes began to dot the landscape. University of Nevada, Reno graduate Walter Van Tilburg Clark described the area as it appeared in the 1920s and 1930s in his 1945 novel, *The City of Trembling Leaves*:



*This three-story brownstone home in Brooklyn, New York was the model for the house built by August Hill and his son William in Reno in 1930/31 known today as the Hill/Redfield Mansion. The Hill family had previously lived in the Brooklyn house.
Courtesy of the family of August Hill.*

"...The Mt. Rose Quarter... Here there are many new trees, no taller than a man, always trembling so they nearly dance, and most of the grown trees are marching files of poplars, in love with wind and heaven. Here, no matter how many houses rear up... you remain more aware of the sweeping domes of earth which hold them down, and no matter how long you stay in one of the houses, you will

still be more aware of Mt. Rose aloft upon the west, than of anything in the house.

...It may be significant, for instance, [that] that part way out Plumas Street, which is the main thoroughfare of the Mt. Rose quarter, there is still a farm, with a brook in its gully, cows on its steep slopes, and a sign on a tree saying EGGS FOR SALE."

It may have been that bucolic rural environment with its panoramic view of the Sierra Nevada's Mt. Rose that first attracted a family from Brooklyn to the Sierra Vista tract. Early in the 1920s William Hill arrived in Reno to establish his residency and obtain a "quickie" divorce. He instantly took a liking to the small town and soon his father August, a self-made millionaire, arrived in Reno, and he too decided to stay. August's wife Elizah, less enamored with the West, retained her permanent residency in New York, but she would visit Reno a couple times a year.

By the mid-1920s August and William had established Hill & Sons as a residential real estate development and construction company, and they began buying parcels of land in the Sierra Vista Tract. In 1926 and '27 alone, they purchased forty-three lots in the names of Elizah or William Hill. By 1930, according to a Hill & Sons' advertisement, the firm had amassed one hundred lots in the tract.

August Hill had been attracted early to a number of adjoining lots in Sierra Vista, on the south side of Mt. Rose Street between Plumas and Manhattan (now Watt Street) avenues. There was a high hill sitting right in the middle of the parcel, sloping down to Plumas on the west, Watt on the east, and Mt. Rose on the north, one of those "sweeping domes of earth" Walter Van Tilburg Clark had described. It was perfect for the large home August Hill had in mind for himself and William, who had by

LaVere Redfield and Reno's Hill/Redfield Mansion (continued)

now re-married. From the top of the knoll, where they would build the house, there was an unobstructed view north to downtown, south to Mt. Rose rising majestically in the distance, and west to cattle lazily grazing in green pastures.

The floor plan of the home would duplicate a large brownstone the family had once owned in Brooklyn, according to August Hill's great-grandson, Richard Hill, a Reno attorney. It would be two identical levels, each one 1,814 square feet. Each of the two duplex suites would have four bedrooms and two baths with walk-in showers, as well as identical living rooms, dining rooms, tiled kitchens and fireplaces. August would reside in one level, and William and his wife in the other. There would also be an attic, a 1,424 square-foot unfinished basement, and two narrow but deep garages burrowed into the side of the hill at street level on Mt. Rose Street. A large riser of stone stairs, crowned by a stonework arch at street level, led from the garages up to the house on top of the hill, which was completely fenced in by a rock wall and surrounded by a lawn, gardens and a stone wishing well.

It was not the floor plan, however, that would make the home one of the most unique buildings in the state. It was the building material. The house would be built entirely of native Truckee Meadows river stone. Many of Reno's stone houses began as part of the numerous nineteenth century ranches that once occupied the area. After the turn of the century river rock and fieldstone continued to be used because it was so readily available and cheap. However, few stone houses were built after the 1930s.

Construction of the Hills' new home began in 1930, and it was completed by

mid-1931. Architecturally, the house is described in a 1984 nomination form for the National Register of Historic Places as a, "five level, Period Revival... residence, with its design elements derived from the English Cottage style... prominent, steeply pitched roof, a sharply pointed gable facing front, scant roof overhang, and the use of a 'natural' construction material which integrates the house with the surrounding terrain."

As soon as the house was completed, a newspaper classified ad indicated that



c.1932, west side view of the Hill/Redfield mansion on Mt. Rose Street just before it was sold to Otto Steinheimer. William Hill's 1929 Lincoln sits on the property. Courtesy of the family of August Hill, the original builder.

the Hill family's plans had changed. The ad stated, "The Sierra Vista Castle... The finest rock estate in Nevada," was for sale or lease. Subsequent ads indicated the house was completely furnished, and was alternately offered for rent. A news article the following month reported that the Hill family was selling all their property and closing their business, likely due to the advance of the Great Depression. William Hill and his wife continued to live in the house while he tried to sell it, but his father August headed back to New York, although he would return to Reno and re-start the construction business after the Depression.

One of Hill's newspaper ads caught the attention of an old Reno family, Mr. and Mrs. Otto Steinheimer, who became the next owners of the house. The family owned and operated Steinheimer Brothers Studebaker, located at 47 West 4th Street, just west of downtown. But after only three years, the Steinheimers sold the house and moved back to their old neighborhood. The new owners of the Sierra Vista Castle were Reno newcomers LaVere and Nell Redfield. The Redfields had arrived in Reno in mid-

1935, and had been looking for just the right house. Unlike with most buyers in the mid-1930s, money would be no problem for the wealthy Redfields.

LaVere Redfield purchased the house and eleven contiguous lots along Mt. Rose Street in November 1936 from the Steinheimers, for which he paid \$20,000 according to his wife. Six months later he purchased an adjoining seven lots on the street from August and Elizabeth Hill, ending up with seventeen contiguous lots totaling more than a third-of-a-mile of frontage along Mt. Rose Street. The parcel stretched from Plumas Street east all the way past

today's Watt Street. Redfield would amass 50,000 acres of land on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada and become the state's largest private landowner—he deeded all of the land in the name of a Los Angeles niece, retaining control over the properties by virtue of a general power of attorney.

Money was no concern to the couple when it came time to furnish the large house. LaVere likely realized that buying quality furniture was best (and cheapest) in the long run, but he would still have sought out the very lowest prices he could find for top quality goods. They

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LaVere Redfield and Reno's Hill/Redfield Mansion (continued)

Continued from page 9

bought much of it in California and had it shipped to Reno; but LaVere continued to seek out fine furniture pieces and art locally, usually at estate auctions that he loved to attend. As to the quality of their furniture selections, and Nell's immaculate housekeeping, Pamela Galloway of the *Reno Evening Gazette* wrote in a 1975 article about Nell Redfield and the house, "Dining room, bedroom, and living room sets purchased in the 1930s by the Redfields [still] appear in perfect condition and fill the rooms."

Nevada, with its long history of gambling, divorce and legalized prostitution, has attracted more than its share of unconventional people over the years. But few could compare with the Sierra Vista Castle's new owner. Even as a child, LaVere Redfield was "different." Born in 1897 in Ogden, Utah of a fallen Mormon family—his maternal great-grandfather was famed Tennessee gunsmith Jonathan Browning—young Redfield was always a loner. The youngest of seven surviving children, LaVere claimed years later that he often went to bed hungry. However, his five older brothers all worked, and ended up as very successful businessmen; so it's doubtful that claim was entirely true. But there is no doubt that he grew up with the concept of thrift drilled into his head. "There was no garbage can in our house—everything was consumed," he once told a newspaper reporter of growing up in Ogden.

Redfield made his first fortune as a contrarian investor. He thrived during the huge Wall Street surges of the Roaring Twenties; he thrived during the market's staggering collapse in 1929; and he thrived during the miserable equity market doldrums of the Great Depression. He was a genius at picking stocks—he knew intuitively when to buy and when to sell—and

he did it entirely on his own, never seeking or accepting anyone's counsel. Stockbrokers in the Los Angeles financial district where he practiced his trade for fifteen years tabbed him the "Lone Wolf of Spring Street."

The Redfields had been attracted to Nevada because of its tax haven status. LaVere was a lifelong foe of the IRS; he did not believe the Constitution gave federal or state governments the right to tax its citizens. Despite his beliefs




Nell and LaVere Redfield relax on the front lawn of their Mt. Rose Street home in this photo from the 1940s. The wishing well is the focal point of one of many myths that surround the Hill/Redfield Mansion. According to this myth, Redfield hid a huge cache of silver dollars in the well, a story that is likely untrue.

LaVere was, at heart, a quiet, unassuming fellow who went about his business with little fanfare. He puttered about in his yard and gardens, taking care of the massive property himself. He normally dressed in denim overalls or jeans, a checkered shirt and high-top boots. Neighbors who saw him in his gardens, or walking along the neighborhood streets—he seldom drove, preferring to save gas—believed he was the handyman or gardener at the huge stone mansion. That was fine with Redfield; he preferred to remain anonymous.

Over the years the house itself, which by now had become known as the Hill/Redfield Mansion, would become an important part of the Redfield legend. A 1952 burglary at the home—the largest in history to that time—netted thieves \$1.5 million, the equivalent today of \$13 million. The take in a second burglary in 1962 was estimated at between \$1 and \$2 million, but Redfield refused to reveal the true amount. Other burglaries in 1954 and 1969 also made news.

Redfield's penchant for not trusting banks with his money led to perhaps the Hill/Redfield Mansion's greatest fame. Once, following the 1952 burglary, and a second time after the multi-millionaire's death in 1974, huge hoards of rare silver dollars and silver bars, barrels of postage stamps that could be used as currency at the time, gold coins and negotiable securities already signed by Redfield, were discovered behind false walls in the basement.

Today, the house is still in the hands of the family, although signs posted on the empty lots at both the east and west side of the mansion indicate that new homes will soon be built on those parcels of land. A niece of Nell Redfield has lived in the house since Nell's death in 1981; and she assists in administrating the Nell J. Redfield Foundation that has generously poured tens of millions of dollars into Reno institutions, including the University of Nevada, Reno. 

This article is adapted from Reno author Jack Harpster's upcoming book, *The Curious Life of Nevada's LaVere Redfield: The Silver Dollar King*, that will be published in October by The History Press. Harpster has six other published books, including *King of the Slots: William "Si" Redd* and *100 Years in the Nevada Governor's Mansion*.

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Would you like to assist the Nevada Historical Society and its professionals by volunteering as a docent? To become a NHS Docent you complete a 4-hour training program, two shadow sessions and attend three lectures. You must become a member of the Nevada Historical Society and the Docent Council and work a minimum of 48 hours per year.

The next docent training will be Friday, September 19, 2014 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Nevada Historical Society, 1650 North Virginia Street, Reno, NV 89503. For information, please call 688-1190, and ask for Shery.



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FALL 2014 PROGRAMS

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

Historic Reno Preservation Society's free programs offer an assortment of Reno historic topics. **All program events are on the 4th Wednesday of the month at 7:00 pm at The Laxalt Theater in the Nelson Building at 401 W. Second Street, Reno.** For more program information contact Jack Hursh at Jack.Hursh@gmail.com or call 747-4478 and leave a message. More organization information can be found at www.historicreno.org or on Facebook.

September 27: HRPS Reno Harvest of Homes Tour (see pages 1-3)

October 22: A Family Look at Reno in the 1920s and 1930s — Reno attorney Richard Hill has agreed to show never before publicly displayed family movies of Reno in the 1920s and 1930s. These include moving pictures of parades through downtown Reno, shots of "old" southwest Reno before it was "new," and various other former sites around town like Laughton's Hot Springs and the Nevada Stock Farm. The presentation will be informal with some detours along the way.

November 19: Twelve Inches from Hell: Archaeology at a Black Rock Desert Stagecoach Station Between 1852 and 1869 — Teaching and Research Assistant and HRPS' 2014 University of Nevada, Reno scholarship recipient, Laura Sechrist, will present her research results about this emigrant station. Granite Creek Station in Nevada's Black Rock Desert provided trade goods, rest and a source of water for emigrants, travelers and stagecoaches after they crossed the alkaline playa. Though emigrant diaries and other written sources provide some information about this station, the archaeology was able to challenge some emigrant accounts, confirm others, and help fill in the details of everyday life at this 19th century trading post, stagecoach station and military camp.

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