

The Reno Hot Springs Resort: Oasis in a Barren Land

Article by Debbie Hinman and Photos from Neal Cobb

Nevada is a state of many contrasts: within its boundaries are desert plains dotted with scrub, and towering mountains with lush forests. And in quite a few areas of the state the ground rumbles with geothermic activity, steam escaping through fissures in the ground, emitting ghostly puffs of white over a barren landscape, and even the occasional geyser shooting a column of water into the air. Northern Nevada has more than 220 naturally occurring hot springs. Early inhabitants made use of the springs for cooking and bathing, and modern residents and visitors take advantage of the springs for their overall wellness or just for recreation. And, of course, clever entrepreneurs soon realized that people would pay to experience the enjoyment



Above: 1931 aerial view of Reno Hot Springs; two cooling towers can be seen spraying into the air, to regulate the heat of the water. Below: Original sign from the entrance gate, salvaged from a massive mound of concrete and debris following the demolition of the site in 1969.

block of S. Virginia Street. It included the old Litch Ranch house. This plot of land would later be sold to Roland Giroux who would build the El Reno Apartments on the site. Today it is a small shopping center which includes Statewide Lighting. The larger tract of land was south of Reno, outside the Reno city limits on the South Virginia Road, roughly across from the Steamboat Springs Resort and possessing the same geothermal activity but only featuring a few cottages with baths.

and restorative powers of soaking in pools of warm water.

One such person was John Canson, born Giovanni Canzona in Italy in 1878. Canzona arrived at Ellis Island by 1903 and found work in the West Virginia mines, but soon left for the Philippines, where he met and married Hilaria Sikat in 1904. Hilaria gave birth to a son, John Jr., in 1911. By 1921, Canson had transformed a humble hut outside of Manila into a grand center of entertainment, seeking to make it the place for the American community at Fort McKinley and then, local dignitaries. In 1922, Canzona became a naturalized Filipino citizen. In 1928, he arrived in Reno where he became a naturalized American, adopting the anglicized version of his name, Canson.

Canson divorced his wife and purchased two tracts of land from Jacob Meyer; the first was a smaller one in the 1300

Canson was a successful businessman, traveling back and forth to Manila to oversee operations at his Santa Ana Cabaret, touted as "The Largest Cabaret in the World and the Best Dance Music in the World." Canson's fashionable property had a seating capacity of 3,500 people. Locals claimed that every peso in Manila passed through his restaurant at least once a year. A popular as well as wealthy figure in Manila, Canson became friends with then President Quezon and General Douglas MacArthur, who was stationed there in the early-to-mid-1920s.

In 1928, ads began appearing for Reno Hot Springs, boasting of the "high, healthful mineral count of the water" and offering cottages for rent by the week or month and hot baths for \$1 with a 2-hour limit. Then in December the following Personals ad ran: *Wanted—Bids on digging swimming pool 102x254. Reno Hot Springs 1307 S. Virginia.* [An Olympic-size pool is



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82x164.] Canson was thinking big; bigger than the few small cottages and bigger than Steamboat Springs across the way. Apparently viewing the popularity of the Steamboat Hot Springs and Carson Hot Springs in Carson City, both dating from the 1880s, Canson decided to build a competing resort that would wow the residents of the Truckee Meadows and bring visitors in from far and wide. An ad appeared in the local papers requesting reliable massagers, male and female. By June, the ads were larger, featuring a certified and professional masseur and the Springs now had its own Medical Director.

A sign erected at the entrance featured an amazing list of benefits to be gained from the mineral composition of the water, such as a cure for: high blood pressure, sciatica, neuralgia, obesity, kidney and bladder disease and auto-intoxication, to name a few. This likely was Canson's original sign, as the large pool was not mentioned.

The resort now had a swimming pool—and not just ANY pool. Canson had found an outfit to dig it to his specifications, billing it in advertisements as “The Largest Mineralized Swimming Pool in America.” In addition to its huge dimensions, it ranged from 18 inches to

14 feet in depth. In the event the pool didn't attract visitors, for the one-year anniversary of the resort, Canson brought in entertainment, including a strongman, Louis Sciorato, who would entertain the crowd by holding up two automobiles.

The Springs sponsored its own swim team beginning in 1930, with Pat O'Brien and Gilbert Edwards as coaches. O'Brien offered swimming lessons for all ages—\$10 for six lessons. An all-state meet and other team contests were planned. For the summer, the resort stayed open until midnight and two diving boards had



Looking east, cottages were on the west side of the pool, perpendicular to the changing facilities.

been installed; one at 7 feet and for the daring, one at 10 feet. Admission to the pool was 50 cents or 25 cents for those under 12. An elegant restaurant, The Rendezvous, was added to the resort in 1931, featuring steak and chicken dinners for \$1.25.

The stunning pool sat in an east/west orientation, perpendicular to the highway. The south side of the pool featured individual changing rooms for ladies and gentlemen. At the west end was Silver Beach, billed as Nevada's Waikiki Beach. In 1933, truckloads of pure white sand were brought in to fill the area between the pool and the back wall. The north side of the pool had lounge chairs for more refined sunbathers. Behind the wall at the back of the “beach,” sat cottages with tiled tubs for private soaking. A business card for the resort proclaimed it as “The World's Greatest Medicinal Baths.”

May of 1934 saw the opening of the Reno Hot Springs Dance Hall, music by Joe Caffey's Orchestra. The featured libation was Sierra Beer on draught—ten

cents bought you a large glass. Sale of alcoholic beverages had just become legal the previous year, upon the repeal of Prohibition, though it's likely this was not a new addition to the resort.

As Canson spent the majority of his time in the Philippines overseeing his holdings there, his brother-in-law James Cicchese (alternately spelled Chickese) ran the resort. The Cicchese family lived on the premises, as did Canson, when in Reno. The eldest child, John Cicchese, took over from his father to run the resort until his untimely death in 1941 at age 27.

Until 1937, the junction of the Carson Highway and the Mt. Rose Highway ran along the north/backside of the Hot Springs. A proposal was made to move the junction a mile north of the current location, to avoid dangerous curves. The county commissioners at first rejected the proposal, saying the purchase of the necessary rights-of-way were too expensive, but it eventually passed and the change was made. A dirt road still exists where the old highway ran, to the site of the hot springs. (See photo top right page 4)

The resort welcomed families, young children, teens and adults of all ages, but the evenings seemed to attract mainly an older crowd, filling the dance hall, bar and cottages. Rumors of “female company for hire” circulated, causing some local parents to refuse to let their young children and teens patronize the Hot Springs after dark. During the war years, soldiers on leave could be found enjoying the food and drink, dancing and music the resort provided.

World War II had another impact, however—the prolonged absence of John Canson and members of the Cicchese family. At the fall of Manila, Philippines to the Japanese in March of 1945, John Canson and Mike Cicchese were captured and sent to Los Banos internment camp. The Santa Ana Caberet became a garment factory for the Japanese army. John Canson Jr. escaped capture and became a member of a Filipino guerrilla outfit. Pat Cicchese and Pat's wife Leota and two young sons had been interned in the Santo Tomas University internment

TODAY
Wednesday, July 10th, 2:00 P. M.

Grand Opening
RENO HOT SPRINGS

The largest, natural hot water, mineralized outdoor swimming pool in America.
Located 9½ miles south of Reno, on the Reno-Carson City highway.

Come out and enjoy a refreshing, invigorating and health-giving swim in our great open air pool, which is 250 feet long and 100 feet wide.

Safe for Women and Children

Inspect our modern cottages, where you can enjoy a steam bath, a private pool and a good bed to relax upon.

Also investigate and inquire as to what we have to offer to those who are seeking health. Efficient service and courteous treatment for your pleasure and health is our desire.

Dr. John P. Kibb, Resident Physician
F. O. Harrison, Masseuse
Jim Chickese, General Manager
John Canson, Proprietor

Admission to Pool 50c - 2:00 P. M. July 10th

Nevada State Journal ad, 7-10-1929.

Do You Want Something Different in Food?

Tonight's Menu

\$1.25
 Crab Louis Cocktails or Fresh Citrus Fruit
 Lettuce and Tomato or Fresh Peach and Cottage Cheese Salads
 Magnolia Cream or Consomme Soups
 Filet Mignon with Bernaise or Mushrooms Sauce
 Escalloped Potatoes Broiled Italian Squash or French Peas
 Hot Sweet Rolls

\$1.25
 Half Fried Spring Chicken a la Victor Salads
 French Fried or Escalloped Potatoes
 Broiled Italian Squash or French Peas
 Hot Sweet Rolls

\$1.25
 Half Fried Spring Chicken a la Rendezvous Salads
 (A juicy fried chicken, distinctly different)
 French Fried or Escalloped Potatoes
 Broiled Italian Squash or French Peas
 Hot Sweet Rolls

\$1.00
 Soups Salads
 Vienna Loaf with Wine Sauce
 Escalloped Potatoes French Peas
 Hot Sweet Rolls

DESSERTS
 On All Dinners
 Orange Ice Vanilla Ice Cream
 Fresh Fruit Pie Fresh Cream Pie
 Fresh Fruit Jello

Come to
The Rendezvous Restaurant
 At Reno Hot Springs Phone 6118
 No Cover Charge

Menu for July 1, 1931 in the *Reno Gazette-Journal*. Look at those prices for a many-course meal!

camp for a year before they were allowed to communicate with family. Leota was then permitted to send a message broadcast shortwave from Tokyo. She said they were all well, the boys were in school and although one was treated for a gastric ulcer and the other had his tonsils out, they were now fine. Early in February of 1945, the camp was liberated and the prisoners released. Mrs. Cicchese reported that rations had been cut and the family had all lost weight—Pat went from 170 to 119 pounds, and she from 126 to 99 pounds. But, she said, after a visit to the US to

GRAND OPENING **Saturday, May 19TH**
 FOR THE 1951 SEASON 9:00 A. M.

RENO HOT SPRINGS
 9 MILES SOUTH OF RENO ON U. S. HIGHWAY 395

FREE BUS SERVICE
 TO AND FROM RENO HOT SPRINGS
 VIA WELLS AVENUE

STOPS AT—
 RUTH ST. AND VIRGINIA
 VIRGINIA ST. BRIDGE
 CALIFORNIA AVE. AND VIRGINIA
 (STONE SIGNAL STATION)
 WARDEN SUPER MARKET


STARTING SATURDAY—10 A. M.
 Every 2 Hours 10 A. M. to Daily Throughout Season

• HOT DOGS
• BAR SERVICE
• COLD DRINKS

THE LARGEST MINERALIZED POOL IN AMERICA
RENO HOT SPRINGS
 9 MILES SOUTH OF RENO PHONE 2-2961

JOHN CANSON - Proprietor

• CRYSTAL CLEAR WATER
 • HIGH DIVING BOARD
 • LOW DIVING BOARD
 • 25,000 SQUARE SWIMMING FEET
 • PRIVATE DRESSING ROOM



Reno Hot Springs announces the season's opening in the *Nevada State Journal* on Saturday, May 19, 1951.

see family, they would be returning to the Philippines, which they considered home. John Canson remained in Manila and became president of the Philippines National Red Cross. In 1953, Canson married Geryl Knox, widow of Charles B. Knox whose family created Knox gelatin. The Cansons then decided to retire to Reno, leaving John Canson, Jr. to run the Cabaret.

The Hot Springs Resort continued on as a popular location for day and night entertainment throughout the 1950s. On summer days, the large pool was filled with local and visiting adults escaping the heat, along with children, high school and college-age students enjoying their vacation time. There were still swim meets

and any number of celebrations and activities centered on the fabulous pool.

In 1955, James Cicchese, who had managed the Springs until 1946, died. Then, in November of 1960, John Canson passed away following a five-day illness. The ownership of the resort passed to John Canson Jr., but due to a dispute over failure to disclose assets during his 1959 divorce, the property was tied up as security.

In 1962, bids were opened for the property and four or five were received. The high bidder was local businessman Jack Arian, offering \$109,000. However, the property was re-assessed at \$161,000

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Left: bathers enjoy the pool from the shallow end. Right: A view of the Men's and Ladies' changing rooms. Note the lamp posts along the north side of the pool for night swimming. The two diving boards are at the far end of the pool.

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and bids re-opened. In July of 1962, it was announced that John Canson Jr. would purchase the property for the assessed value with plans to further develop the resort as a playground and health area.

The sale must have fallen through as one month later, Jack Arian purchased the 80 acres for the \$161,000 asking price. His plans for the property were grandiose to the extreme. He would refurbish the main pool and add a “ghost town” of about 25 buildings, no cars allowed, with a saloon, gaming, grocery and other businesses. The plan described a 100-unit motel of small house trailers. There would be a kid’s carnival and horse-drawn wagons with counselors to keep the children occupied while their parents had their own recreation. Aside from the Hot Springs, Arian proposed a plan to incorporate the city of South Reno, from Hash Lane to Pleasant Valley. This plan was not favored by most residents. As the 1960s continued, no dramatic changes occurred at Reno Hot Springs and the city of South Reno never came to be. In 1964, Arian advertised for a man and wife couple to manage the property, plumbing experience required.

In 1966, a Howard Coffey was leasing the Hot Springs but had not made the required electrical and plumbing improvements requested by the county in order to maintain his liquor license and it was suspended. Coffey reapplied for the license but was turned down due to no new plumbing system. He finally received his license in 1967 but over the next couple of years, one incident after another plagued the resort; a man

found dead in a pool, then a fire, which destroyed the main tavern building and a garage and damaged three cottages. Six months later, one cottage was burned to the ground and three others had apparently been set to burn. At that time, the owner was listed as Nevada Comstock Enterprises and the cottages were vacant. These occurrences seem to have been the swan song for the resort and it was demolished in 1969.

Today, the area is a vast expanse, populated by odd chunks of concrete and detritus such as rusted out pipes, small tiles and other relics of what was once an oasis in a barren stretch of land. The wall that stood behind the “beach” is adorned with graffiti and there are patches of its original red and green cement, but not much

else remains to tell the story of the fabulous resort that served the area for nearly forty years. Along with Lawton’s Hot Springs and the Moana Pool, today it only lives in the memories of those who were fortunate enough to experience it. 

Information for this story came from *Nevada State Journal* and *Reno Evening Gazette* articles 1928-2007; various online articles on John Canson and the Santa Ana Cabaret; Ancestry.com citations on the Canson and Cicchese families; and a conversation with Neal Cobb.

Debbie Hinman is a HRPS Walking Tour Guide, HRPS Board Secretary, Vice Chair of the City of Reno Historical Resources Commission, and Editor of HRPS’ *FootPrints* publication.



Left: Bathers enjoy the sun and sand at Silver Beach and the wall separating the beach from the cottages - 1940s. Bottom right: View of same spot - August, 2021. Right top: google map with annotations showing where this spot is located. Note the location of Mt. Rose Hwy in 1940 and today. Right images courtesy Brad Carlson.

Reno Heritage Fund (RHF) Mid-Year Report

by Cindy Ainsworth, Administrator of RHF Grants

By July, HRPS had awarded three Reno Heritage Fund (RHF) grants for 2021. The recipients' homes include two that are on HRPS' Bricks and Stones Walking Tour and one home that was saved and moved from the UNR Gateway/N. Center Street area to the Newlands area.

737 Humboldt Street

The owners are Wayne and Bridget Tuma. The RHF grant funding was used to paint the exterior home and trim. The home is a 1908 eclectic style Salt-Box Farmhouse that includes decorative lead glass windows, extended roof trusses, exposed gables and a dormer in the hipped roof. There are many original interior features including a built-in buffet and china cabinet, and hardwood beams and trim. The home is included on HRPS' Bricks and Stones walking tour.

This home was built by W.E. Turley, a mining and real estate investor. Today's owners, the Tumas, were the former owners of Reno's Polly Ann Bakery located on Arroyo Street (now El Adobe Restaurant).

705 Humboldt Street

The owners are Chris and Kelly Case. The RHF grant funding was used to paint the exterior home and trim. This beautiful ca. 1914 Shingle Style house with Craftsman elements is another featured home on HRPS Bricks and Stones walking tour.

The home was owned at one time by David Sinai, Sr., a successful Reno divorce attorney. Many guests stayed at the home while they were obtaining a divorce. It is rumored that one of the Vanderbilts stayed there as a guest while taking "the cure."

579 W. Taylor Street

The Armstrong/de Longchamps home—now owned by Loren Jahn. The RHF grant funding will be used to fabricate new 1900s reproduction box gutters that will match the 131-year old original crown moldings. Loren is using local "old Reno" companies that still do this kind of work. This 1890s Evans Addition/Gateway District spindle-front

Queen Anne cottage is the only house that was saved on the west side of North Center Street. During the summer of 2020, the house was re-located to its present location in the Newlands Historic District.

The home was purchased in 1922 by Edna and Elmer Armstrong who raised children: Raymond, John and Ruth there. With Sam Kafoury, Raymond founded Kafoury Armstrong & Co. In 1974, Galen and poet, artist and university professor Joanne de Longchamps purchased the house. Upon her death in 1983, the home was willed to the university as a guest house and later became the Northern Nevada International Center.

HRPS Rolling Grant Deadline

This is a reminder that the HRPS' Reno Heritage Fund now has a rolling grant deadline; so you may apply anytime during the year. We first require a Letter of Intent which includes the applicant's basic information about the project. Once approved by the RHF committee, the applicant will then fill out the full grant application. To streamline the process, we now ask that you scan and email all forms to the RHF administrator.

Information about the grant can be found on the HRPS' website at historicro.org. If you have any questions, please call (775) 747-4478. The links for the grant guidelines and the Letter of Intent are:

RHF Grants: <https://historicro.org/index.php/resources/rhf-grants>

Letter of Intent: <https://historicro.org/index.php/letter-of-intent>

Information for this article came from *FootPrints*, Summer 2019, The Last Tour of the "Gateway Homes" by Debbie Hinman. Photo credits to Jack Hursh and Loren Jahn.

Cindy Ainsworth is the Administrator of the HRPS RHF grant process. She is a Past-President of HRPS.



737 Humboldt Street



705 Humboldt Street



579 W. Taylor Street

Chicken Soup Hot Springs

Previously published in *edible RENO-TAHOE*, article written by Sharon Honig-Bear



Among the springs ... is one that when salt and pepper are added to its waters, it tastes like chicken soup! — and was renamed Chicken Soup Hot Springs. Courtesy Western Nevada Historic Photo Collection

Many of you know that I write a regular food history column for *edible RENO-TAHOE* magazine.

While there are always challenges writing about history, especially social history, the biggest challenge for me has been trying to echo the theme of each issue. Sometimes it's easy (the drinks issue, for example, led to a story on the Wine House or on another occasion to picon punch). But sometimes it's not so easy—like finding a good fit for the publication's annual Wellness Issue.

I toyed with a variety of ideas (how about the photo of three corpulent men touting Mason Valley spuds?) but when I discovered an old photo of Chicken Soup Hot Springs at Steamboat, I knew I had my topic. Natural hot springs have long been notable for their curative properties and we have a famous one right in our backyard. The article was called *Letting off steam: wellness and Steamboat Hot Springs* and it appeared in the February, 2018 issue. This article is modified from that story.

Famous hot spring resorts—think Baden Baden in Germany, Bath in England or Vichy in France—dot the globe and in its time Steamboat Hot Springs, located eleven miles south of Reno, would be listed among them.

It sits on a small volcanic field of rhyolitic lava domes with extensive geothermal activity, including



The Virginia and Truckee Railroad (V&T), built from Carson City to Virginia City in 1870, was extended from Carson City to Reno in 1872, thus providing easy access from Reno to Steamboat, a stop on the railroad line. Courtesy Friends of the Nevada State Railroad Museum.

numerous hot springs, steam vents, and fumaroles. Native Americans considered the springs a sacred place. Settlers, heading west during the Gold Rush in 1849, noticed steam coming from cracks in the rock and the hot springs became a welcoming watering place for traveling wagons. In those early days, William Wright reported that as many as sixty or seventy columns of steam could be seen when the air was cool and calm.

Yet, it wasn't until 1859 that the first development occurred, consisting of a shed with two rooms, one for a tub and one as a steam room. The area was developed further as Comstock mining created a need to get passengers and freight to Virginia City, resulting in the Virginia & Truckee Railroad making Steamboat a railroad terminal. Materials for the silver mines were transferred to freight wagons for the steep haul to Virginia City at this point. The completion of the tracks from Reno to Carson City abolished the need for a junction, but the resort's popularity continued, reaching its peak with the Virginia City bonanza days of the 1870s. The hotel and health resort built at Steamboat hosted many of the 19th century's rich and famous, including President Ulysses S. Grant in 1879, to "take the waters" as a way to cure many ills and contribute to their overall wellness.

A welcome stop along the trail

What a sight the springs were. Before 1900, the area featured the third largest geyser in the United States, erupting 60 to 80 feet into the air, surrounded by open pools of boiling hot water. Native Americans often located their winter camps there. Emigrants coming through the Truckee Meadows in the mid-1800s used the springs for cooking and bathing. Mark Twain publicized the Steamboat name in 1863, saying, "From one spring the boiling water is ejected a foot or more by the infernal force at work below, and in the vicinity of all of them one can hear a constant rumbling and surging, somewhat resembling the noises peculiar to a steamboat in motion—hence the name."

Who brought the noodles?

So here is the food history tie-in: one hot spring became especially famous and was described in 1879 in the *Nevada State Journal*, "Among the springs...is one that when salt and pepper are added to its waters, tastes so near like chicken soup that it will deceive anyone. In fact some go so far as to say it out-chickens the genuine article." Renamed Chicken Soup Hot Springs, the water was analyzed in the 1880s and found to contain natural chlorine, sodium, silica, borate, sulfate, carbonate, potassium, lithium, calcium, arsenic, phosphate, antimony, magnesium, alumina, iron, and mercury. Not exactly your mother's chicken soup!



Nevada Historical Marker 198
Steamboat Springs, US 395,
Steamboat, June 5, 1998.



Mark Twain publicized the Steamboat name in 1863, saying, "From one spring the boiling water is ejected a foot or more by the infernal force at work below, and in the vicinity of all of them one can hear a constant rumbling and surging, somewhat resembling the noises peculiar to a steamboat in motion — hence the name."

The Saratoga of Nevada

Whatever the water's taste, the remote area was magnetic for visitors seeking promised cures for blood disorders, rheumatism or "nervous imbalance." By 1859-60, sheds were constructed to capture the steam and artesian spring water. It was Dr. James Ellis, a hydrotherapist from England, who created buzz about the springs when he established a hospital on the premises in 1861.

The timing was perfect since the nearby silver mines on the Comstock Lode brought both traffic and renown. Attendance skyrocketed when in 1872 the Virginia & Truckee Railroad made the stop only a half hour train ride from downtown Reno. With the influx of day-trippers, the Grand Hotel, a dance hall, and saloon were added. Author John Townley dubbed Steamboat "The Saratoga of Nevada."


Athletes let off steam

In the 1920s and 30s, the area's fame caught the eye of the sports world. In 1931-32, Paolino Uzcudun, a Basque heavyweight boxer, and King Levinsky, a Chicago heavyweight, trained there with Jack Dempsey while he was preparing for 20-round bouts with Max Baer. Horses also used the springs and champion Man o' War arrived in the 1940s after sustaining serious injuries. His handler used the mud and mineral water for therapeutic purposes. Were the waters magic? The horse returned to win the Kentucky Derby, despite many thinking he would never race again.

A victim of natural calamities

Nature often intervened. On December 10, 1900, an earthquake caused the hot springs and geyser to dry up. A year later, a wildfire burned the Hotel and most of the other buildings. In 1925, Dr. Edna Carver bought the land, drilled a new well, and built the Pioneer State Health Hotel. Nature again triumphed with another devastating fire in 1937. Facilities were rebuilt, only to be burned again in 1942. Dr. Carver envisioned a major resort at Steamboat Springs. Noted African-American architect Paul Revere Williams—who designed the Lear Theater, the Ranch House in Rancho San Rafael and was widely known as "Architect to the Stars"—even created a master design for the resort. It was never built.

The state of Nevada created a Historical Marker for Steamboat Springs situated along the eastern shoulder of the busy Carson-Reno Highway. On a cold day you can still see steam rising from the hills near Steamboat. Ormat Technologies harnesses some for its geothermal power plant.

But tucked in the creases of earth east of U.S. 395 Alternate, visitors can still take the waters at the Steamboat Hot Springs Healing Center, connecting visitors not only to the explosive earth, but to a little bit of unique Nevada history. 

Sharon Honig-Bear is a HRPS Tour Guide, Board Member, Lifetime Member, originator of the HRPS Home Tour and Reno Heritage Fund, and a HRPS Past President.

Historic Reno Preservation Society with Washoe County Library System

2nd Tuesday 2021 Educational Programs

Virtual via Zoom

Co-Chairs: Sheryln Hayes-Zorn and Susan Mullen

Historic Reno Preservation Society's free programs offer topics related to Reno's history.

There will be NO program in December of 2021.

Programs will resume January through April.

Zoom links for these programs will be emailed to HRPS members through our email newsletter. They will be available on the HRPS website historicreno.org under Tours & Events / Speakers and on the Washoe County Library System website under Events / Calendar / Historic Reno Preservation Society.



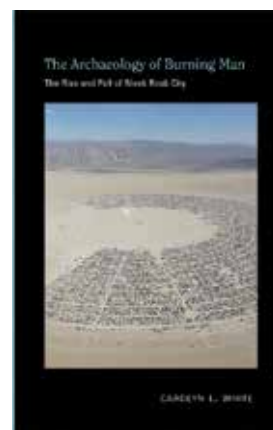
Tuesday, September 14, 2021, 5:30 pm

Topic: The Archaeology of Burning Man: The Rise and Fall of the Black Rock City

Presenter: Dr. Carolyn White

Each August staff and volunteers begin to construct Black Rock City, a temporary city located in the hostile and haunting Black Rock Desert of northwestern Nevada. Every September nearly seventy thousand people occupy the city for Burning Man, an event that creates the sixth-largest population center in Nevada. By mid-September the infrastructure that supported the community is fully dismantled, and by October the land on which the city lay is scrubbed of evidence of its existence. *The Archaeology of Burning Man* examines this process of building, occupation, and destruction.

For nearly a decade, Carolyn L. White has employed archaeological methods to analyze the various aspects of life and community in and around Burning Man and Black Rock City. With a syncretic approach, this work in active-site archaeology provides both a theoretical basis and a practical demonstration of the potential of this new field to reexamine the most fundamental conceptions in the social sciences. Dr. Carolyn White is chair in Historic Preservation, director of the Historic Preservation Program and professor of anthropology at the University of Nevada, Reno.



Tuesday, October 12, 2021, 5:30 pm

Topic: Suffrage, Women's Rights, and Historic Preservation in Nevada

Presenters: Alicia Barber and ZoAnn Campana

In 2020, the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office received a federal grant through the National Park Service to create a Historic Context for Women's History in Nevada, with the goal of identifying places and properties associated with women's history and the suffrage movement in our state. Project coordinators ZoAnn Campana and Alicia Barber will discuss how they went about writing the context and how it can be put to use.

ZoAnn Campana is an architectural historian and historic preservation consultant with Kautz Environmental Consultants of Reno. She works on cultural resource and architectural history projects throughout Nevada.

Dr. Alicia Barber is a writer and historian who specializes in the cultural history and landscapes of Nevada and the American West and collaborates statewide on public history projects through her consulting firm, Stories in Place.






Tuesday, November 9, 2021, 5:30 pm
Presenter: Sharon Honig-Bear
Topic: Hebrew Cemeteries in Northern Nevada

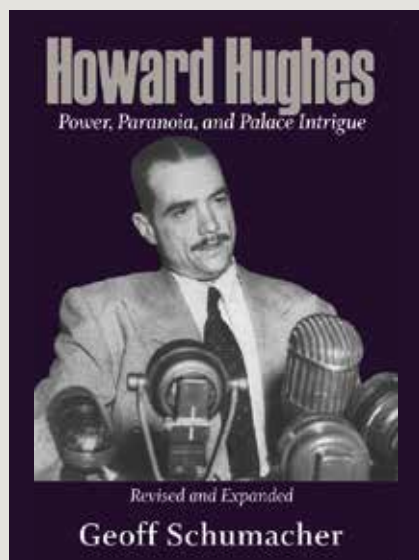
This presentation looks at the early days of Jewish presence in Nevada and the need to establish cemeteries for their population. The Comstock brought Jews to Nevada—engineers, storekeepers, traders, doctors, journalists, lawyers and of course, fortune seekers. While the Jewish population didn't exceed one percent of the population, after the Comstock, the majority of Carson City and Reno dry goods shops were operated by Jews. It was a priority for early Jewish settlers to establish a cemetery. Reno's Hebrew cemetery was begun in 1875 and follows Jewish customs. It is the only entirely Jewish cemetery in Nevada.

Sharon Honig-Bear is a HRPS Board member, Tour Guide and a Past President of HRPS, as well as a past Chair of the City of Reno Arts & Culture Commission.



Speaker Programs Available on HRPS Website

HRPS has been offering its Speaker Programs since its inception back in 1998, usually a couple in the Fall and four in the Winter-Spring. Think of how many interesting presentations we have had no ability to capture. COVID has definitely interrupted our ability to offer in-person walks, talks and a home tour, but using Zoom we brought Speaker Programs (and Neighborhood Stories) to you on a regular basis, through your computer. Another amazing advantage is that we were able to record (and edit) the presentations and the questions / answers. These Speaker Programs are available to you to view on the HRPS website historicreno.org at your leisure. 



Archived Speaker Programs:

- The U.P. House**
with Loren Jahn and Neal Cobb
- American Mountain Men**
with Larry Walker
- Before Reno and Sparks**
with Betsy Morse
- Fact, Fiction and Howard Hughes**
with Geoff Schumacher
- Nevada Barn Heritage**
with Jack Hursh
- Harolds Club** with Neal Cobb
- Adaptive Reuse and Revitalization of the Reno Downtown Post Office**
with Bernie Carter
- History of Washoe County (and Nevada)** with Jim Bonar
- Alice Ramsey's Journey**
with Debbie Hinman
- A Taste of History**
with Sharon Honig-Bear
- ALSOS: The Hunt for Hitler's A-Bomb**
with Jerry Wager
- The Westside Slugger: Joe Neal's Lifelong Fight for Social Justice**
with John Smith
- The 150th Anniversary of the Transcontinental Railroad: What a Different it Made**
with Dan Thielen

NDOT Cultural Resources Team Sets Historical Context for the Lincoln / Victory Highways in Nevada

by Cindy Ainsworth

The Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT) and the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) have made an important announcement about the historic Lincoln and Victory Highways. The Cultural Resources office of NDOT has completed what is known as the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) Multiple Property Documentation Forms (MPDF) for the Lincoln and Victory Highway across Nevada. These provide the historic context statements of the overall development of the Nevada segments of the Lincoln and Victory Highways.

A NDOT press release stated that “With the completion of this five-year project, the NDOT Cultural Resources team has set the standard for work conducted from the California state line to the Utah state line, not only for NDOT but for every federal agency and Cultural Resources contractor working in the state of Nevada, resulting in money savings and significant time savings moving forward.” These recorded segments will be used as templates to identify and evaluate property types associated with the two highways and for future NRHP nominations.

This is a significant development for the Nevada Chapter of the Lincoln Highway Association, as it will make working with NDOT much easier, when for instance the chapter needs to identify significant Lincoln Highway sites or routes when marking the highway with new signage or interpretive plaques.

More importantly, as the result of this documentation, the SHPO has concurred on two of NDOT’s national register nominations and the submitted determinations of eligibilities on many segments of these two highways. The SHPO agreed that:

1.) Carroll Summit Roadbed Segment nomination—that the “17.5 mile

segment of the Lincoln Highway that extends from Eastgate at the western terminus and an unnamed road 0.4 miles east of Campbell Creek Ranch at the eastern terminus should be nominated. The nomination contains three contributing resources: the road segment, the Carroll service station and a complex of buildings at Eastgate.”

2.) Victory Highway Pequop Summit Roadbed nomination—“for a 3.2-mile segment of the Victory Highway that extends from approximately 0.5 miles southwest of the maintenance station at Interstate 80 exit 376 to the top of Pequop Summit in the vicinity of Oasis.”

As of this writing, NDOT is still working with the SHPO on the two nominations that will hopefully be submitted to the National Park Service’s officials for their review as possible National Register of Historic Places candidates.

Background information about the Lincoln and Victory Highway’s Routes

The Lincoln Highway Association was incorporated in 1913 with the thought of building the first graveled coast to coast highway. The organizers felt that the highway could be finished in time for the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco. Funding primarily would come from auto manufacturers, car accessory companies and association members.

However, Henry Ford refused to support the privately funded project so the association therefore shifted its attention away from building a highway



Eastgate Station located on the Carroll Summit Lincoln Highway route, is included on NDOT’s nomination form for possible National Register of Historic Places consideration. Photo courtesy Cindy Ainsworth.

to educating the country for the need for good concrete roads using the improved Lincoln Highway as an example.

A route was established in 1913 and started from Times Square in New York City and passed through New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada and ended in Lincoln Park in San Francisco, California. The state of Nevada officially joined the effort on October 29, 1913.

The historic Lincoln Highway route through Nevada loosely follows what is today Highway 50. From Fallon, the original Lincoln Highway followed the present day US 50-Alt towards Hazen before connecting going west with Farm District Road into Fernley. The route continued northwest to Wadsworth and onward to Sparks and into Reno. Beginning at Reno, one could travel west crossing Donner Summit to Sacramento or use the alternate route going through Carson City to scenic Lake Tahoe by way of Glenbrook and Lakeside near the state line. One would then travel on to Placerville, California before joining up with Sacramento’s main Lincoln Highway alignment.



Figure 29. 1946 Sanborn fire insurance map of Sparks showing the 1934 US 40 reroute that created the "Y" junction at Prater Way and B Street.¹⁷² The previous route is shown in red and the reroute in blue.

New Deal programs and other federal support were instrumental in Nevada's economic recovery from the depression years. Due in part to the efforts of Nevada Senator Key Pittman, the state received the highest per capita federal dollars of states benefitting from the New Deal programs and resulted in several projects completed along the state's roadways. The Victory Highway/US 40 was improved across the state, including a section cosigned with the Lincoln Highway/US 50 in Sparks to create a more direct path through the area. Instead of turning south at 15th Street, the new route veered onto B Street (Victorian Avenue) near the Coney Island auto campground to create a relatively straight path through Sparks.

In 1921, a group of individuals in Topeka, Kansas, formed the Victory Highway Association (VHA), with the idea of establishing a national transcontinental memorial highway to honor veterans of the recently fought World War I. The highway would primarily be improved and maintained with federal and state funds.

Like the Lincoln Highway, the VHA's route utilized existing road systems. From New York City to Topeka, Kansas, the highway loosely followed the National Old Trails Road. From Topeka to San Francisco it paralleled the early California Trail and Overland Trail. In Nevada, the highway traveled the pre-existing Route 1 which passed through Wendover, Wells, Deeth, Elko, Carlin, Battle Mountain, Winnemucca and Fernley.

Both the Lincoln and Victory Highways merged while traveling through Sparks, Reno, and Verdi to the California state line. By 1927-1928, the national numbering road system replaced the named highways. Through Nevada, the Victory Highway became US-40.

NDOT's MPDF with extensive information about the Lincoln Highway through Nevada including information about the Sparks and Reno alignments. The link is: <https://www.dot.nv.gov/home/showdocument?id=17839>

NDOT MPDF addresses the Carson City and Stateline alternate Lincoln Highway alignment called the Pioneer Branch. The link is: <https://www.dot.nv.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/14062>

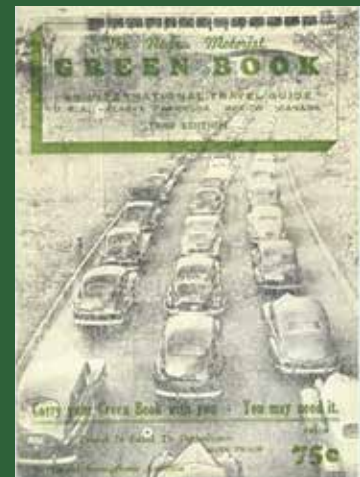
NDOT MPDF form with extensive information about the Victory Highway through Nevada. The link is: <https://www.dot.nv.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/17841>

The link for more information about the Nevada Chapter of the Lincoln Highway Association is: nevadalinchhighway.org

The national Lincoln Highway Association's link is: <https://www.lincolnhighwayassoc.org/> 

Cindy Ainsworth is the President of the Nevada Chapter of the Lincoln Highway Association and one of the founding members of HRPS.

African American Migratory Experience



Due to widespread discrimination, travel was full of potential danger for African Americans prior to 1967. Those seeking basic services on the road may not have clear information on which businesses would welcome their patronage. Recognizing the need for a travel guide to serve the African American community, Victor Green, a postal worker from New York City, patterned a guide bearing his name after a similar publication put out by the Jewish community. The Green Book outlined the businesses that served African Americans on the road, including hotels, gas stations, and restaurants, as well as a host of other businesses. Through his postal system contacts, Green was able to compile information from every state, Canada, and Mexico. While Green Books were not available for Nevada between 1938-1941 and 1948, versions were available from other years that proved invaluable for African American travelers. The passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 lessened the need for the Green Book, and three years later the last edition was published.

Research revealed four tourist homes that were listed in the Reno Green Book near the Victory Highway/Lincoln Highway: Billie Ross, proprietor (520 Spokane Street, 1948), Mrs. Floyd Gardener, proprietor (875 E. 2nd Street, 1948), Hawthorne Guest House, J.R. Hamlet, Proprietor (542 Valley Road, 1952), and New China (260 Lake Street, 1961).

Seeking Divorce, Doris Duke Bought Reno Property

by Alexandra Cubbon

Editor's Note: Doris Duke (1912-1993) was an American billionaire tobacco heiress, philanthropist, art collector, horticulturalist, and socialite, often called the "richest girl in the world."

Taking advantage of Nevada's lenient divorce laws, American tobacco heiress Doris Duke purchased a large, elegant home at 114 Greenridge Drive, Lot 8 of the Greenridge Subdivision in Reno in August of 1943 in order to obtain a speedy divorce from her first husband, James H. R. Cromwell.

The property lies adjacent to the west side of the Washoe County Golf Course in the Old Southwest neighborhood of Reno. A letter dated July 30, 1943 reveals the purchase price as \$31,000 USD and identifies the previous owners as Adler M. Larsen and Jennie Larsen. The Larsens were a well-known couple in Reno, with Adler a prominent contractor and manager of Sierra Construction Company, and Jennie having come from an established Gardnerville family.

The house at 114 Greenridge is a single-family, split-level, stucco on frame house with a concrete tile roof sitting on a 0.327 acre lot that backs up to Washoe County Golf Course. The Washoe County Assessors records list a 1945 build date, which may be when a remodel occurred. In a local news item announcing her arrival in Reno, it made mention of Duke arriving in her private freight car from New Jersey with her three saddle horses,




Left: Tobacco heiress Doris Duke with first husband, James H. R. Cromwell. Right: Google Earth Map shows Greenridge Drive, with 114 Greenridge and Washoe County Golf Course. Courtesy Wikipedia and Google Earth.

her dog and her automobile.

Duke remained the owner until 1953, by which time she had obtained another Reno divorce from her second husband, the Dominican diplomat Porfirio Rubirosa. Greenridge Drive remains a quiet, tree-lined street with well-manicured lawns and charming mid-century houses.

Aside from her well-publicized divorces, not much is known about Duke's time in Reno. She did not keep a diary, and her personal correspondence from the time does not offer insight into her opinion of the city. What is clear is that the sole purpose of purchasing 114 Greenridge was

to meet the six-week residency requirement for securing a divorce. Many celebrities and socialites did the same, renting or buying properties in this neighborhood as well as others, including the Newlands Historic District, the Powning District, and present-day Midtown.

Duke died in Beverly Hills, California on October 28, 1993, leaving most of her great fortune to charity. 

Information for this article came from the following: *The New York Times* November 3, 1943, pg. 27 and October 28, 1948, pg. 31; Doris Duke Papers, Duke University; *Reno Gazette-Journal*, October 26, 1950, pg. 19; Washoe Co. Assessor Records; Redfin.com; and Mella Rothwell Harmon, "Divorce and Economic Opportunity in Reno, Nevada During the Great Depression," University of Nevada, Reno, May 1998.

Alexandra Cubbon has worked as a teaching fellow, writer, and independent historian in addition to her experience as a program manager at Stanford Graduate School of Business.



Two views of the very private exterior of the home at 114 Greenridge today.

Norman Biltz and Greenridge

by Debbie Hinman



Norman Biltz,
Courtesy UNR Special
Collections collection of
Eva Bertrand Adams.

Reno had its share of real estate developers in its early years, such as W. E. Barnard, who created the Newlands neighborhoods and the Brown brothers, of Country Club Acres, Southridge Estates and Westfield Village but Easterner Norman Biltz also left an indelible mark on Lake Tahoe and Reno.

It all began when the young entrepreneur, having acquired real estate in Long Island, Florida and California, came to Lake Tahoe to vacation in 1927. Seeing the possibilities offered by the

area, he purchased land and created many beautiful summer homes, then set his sights on Reno, establishing the Sierra Construction Company. Biltz quickly took his place among the movers and shakers of this city and began acquiring land here, including 26 acres south of the city limits where the Washoe Golf Course was under construction.

In 1935, Governor Richard Kirman and Nevada business leaders came up with a plan to promote Nevada as a state with no state income tax, no inheritance tax, no sales tax or tax on intangibles. Norman Biltz was a driving force in this initiative known as One Sound State. Their target audience was the very wealthy across the United States. The group published materials that were sent out to some ten thousand people paying in excess of \$50,000 for income tax annually. The booklets extolled the beauty of the area, availability of land and highlighted Reno's strategic location between Salt Lake City and San Francisco.

Scores of millionaires answered the call, establishing Nevada residency. Clients of Biltz included Max C. Fleischmann, E.L. Cord, Bing Crosby, Dean Witter, George Whittell, Wilbur May and more than 40 others. Biltz easily attracted them with his energy and dynamic personality. The men became known as the "Biltz immigrants." Of course, these immigrants needed homes—and could afford the best.


In early 1937, Biltz announced he would establish the Greenridge district, to be one of the most exclusive subdivisions in the city, located on his parcel of land west of and adjacent to the new golf course which had opened the year before. On May 5, 1937, a plat of the Greenridge subdivision was approved by the county commissioners (the land was outside the Reno city limits). Biltz told the commission the land was to be divided into 64 lots and

sold, once the infrastructure such as roadways, paving, curbs, and gutters had been completed, along with water and sewer connections. The lots were to range in size from 80' frontage, 140' depth, to 109' frontage with a 400' depth. A unique arrangement of the development provided that all property owners, through membership in the Greenridge Association, may exercise the right of approving or disapproving plans and specifications of proposed homes within the tract. This may have been the first homeowners association in Reno! Also, an architect's approval of all proposed building plans must be secured before construction may begin.

Lots in Greenridge opened for sale on August 7, 1937. Biltz set a minimum cost of any proposed house at \$7,500, with several lots limited to \$10,000 buildings. Biltz announced the development would be similar to homesite projects in Beverly Hills, the San Francisco Peninsula and Long Island. On an average, homes in Reno at that time averaged \$4,500 to \$6,500.

Many notable people purchased lots, some planning elaborate estates. One such purchaser was a woman whose name regularly appeared in the Society column. Mrs. Thomas Kearns, widow of the late Thomas

Kearns who made a fortune from the famous Silver King mine in Utah announced she would be building a \$20,000 home at 128 Greenridge, making Reno her permanent home. Local newspapers were enamored of her, reporting that her family still owns the *Salt Lake Tribune* and other extensive holdings in Utah. In 1940, Mrs. M. A. Evans had a Southern Colonial-style home built of wood with cedar shakes roofing in Greenridge. The home had been designed by prominent local architect, Russell Mills. Mrs. Elizabeth Cord lived at 122 Greenridge. Biltz himself had a home at 125 Greenridge.

Norman Biltz died July 3, 1973 of an apparently self-inflicted gunshot wound. He was 70 and, it was reported, in failing health. Often referred to as "the Duke of Nevada," many who had dealings with Biltz had nothing but high praise for him. Said William Lear, who claimed Biltz was responsible for his coming to Reno: "He was my friend. He was a man who was completely selfless as far as his friends were concerned. He loved Reno, he loved Nevada and he was completely dedicated to the state and city." 



One Sound State
Courtesy Nevada
Historical Society.



Reno Fire Museum Homeless (Again)

Have you ever visited the Reno Fire Department Museum? It used to be in the Central Fire Station on Evans Avenue, where the Reno Aces Ball Park is today. Then it moved to a City-owned warehouse on Winter Street in 2008. Now the City is selling that space to transfer moneys to two affordable housing projects – notable effort, but what about the Fire Museum? Reno Fire Antique and Classic Apparatus (RFACA) has used that space for 13 years to store the historic Reno Fire Museum Collection. It's a remarkable collection, that includes historic vehicles dating back to 1904 and much more. Please let the Reno City Council know that you are concerned with the preservation of this collection and the City needs to find appropriate space for it. Contact Jon Wagner, President of Reno Fire and Classic Apparatus (FRACA) to offer suggestions at wagnerj3490@gmail.com.



1917 American Lafrance tractor drawn aerial ladder
(Reno's first motorized aerial ladder)

Message From Your HRPS President Carol Coleman

The Lear, now City Owned

As you likely know, the Reno City Council voted to accept the donation of the Lear Theater and adjacent parking lot from Artown. Let's hope that this means that The Lear will now become an accessible and well-cared-for community space. Note that I'm calling it "The Lear" – not Lear Theater. I think this wonderful Paul Revere Williams designed building can be many things: a community space to hold performances, ceremonies, church services, dances, benefits, art shows and community meetings to name a few. Make it flexible to serve our community's varied needs. Although the cost of \$5 to \$10 million is being discussed, why not be practical and see what one can accomplish with \$1 million.

HRPS' Neighborhood Stories

HRPS participation in July 2021 Artown is now complete – there are sixteen new Neighborhood Stories on HRPS website historicroeno.org for you to enjoy. My husband, Sam, and I are the technical crew for all of HRPS' Zoom efforts, recording and editing, plus a few times creating PowerPoints for the presenters. It's a labor of love for us and we're proud of this year's results – I hope that you are too.

Proclaiming their Love of Reno History...

As Sharon Honig-Bear wrote in the August HRPS' email newsletter, "Lifetime

Membership is designed as a way for the community to proclaim their love of Reno history and to endorse the work of HRPS." Joyce Thompson, who has been a HRPS member since 2007, became a Lifetime member this month. Thank you Joyce! Neal & Mary Cobb became Lifetime members this August; Neal is a Charter member of HRPS, having joined up in 1999! Thanks Neal and Mary! Half the membership fee goes to Reno Heritage Fund for grants and half goes into the Operating Reserve to insure HRPS continues. With Joyce Thompson and Neal & Mary Cobb, HRPS now has 63 Lifetime memberships, which includes 92 members.

A second part of Sharon's request was for current Lifetime members to step up with an additional gift – which Sharon herself did with a donation of \$500. Sharon, thank you very much! Peter and Renate Neumann, Lifetime members since 2019, sent in a donation of \$1,000 to support the work of HRPS. Many thanks to Peter and Renate.

Fall Programs on 2nd Tuesdays

Again, we still aren't ready to offer in-person events. We've made the decision to provide our Fall Educational Programs virtually with the Washoe County Library – thanks to the Library for supporting us this way through COVID. The programs will be for the months of September, October and November at a new day of the month – on the second Tuesday of the month at 5:30 p.m.

Note the QR Codes

On the back page of this issue, between the HRPS Board list and the Table of Contents (or What's in this Issue) you'll find two QR codes, one to take you to the HRPS website and one to take you to Reno Historical when you scan them with your smartphone camera.

Thanks again for your support,

Carol Coleman, 775-849-3380
carolc@galenaforest.net

HRPS Lifetime Members

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Laurie & Greg Boyer
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Holly Walton-Buchanan
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(*) deceased

HRPS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

By joining **Historic Reno Preservation Society**, you are a member of a community group that celebrates Reno's history by sharing information and advocating for our endangered properties.

HRPS offers Walking Tours during the summer, Speaker Programs during the winter, and a Home Tour in fall as a fund-raiser to support our Reno Heritage Fund grants. As a member, you receive our monthly email newsletter and our quarterly publication, FootPrints, to keep you informed about HRPS events, places of historical interest as well as items of concern. HRPS information is on our website, Facebook and Instagram.

☐ New Member ☐ Renewing

Membership Levels:

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☐ \$45.00 Family
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My Additional Donation:

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HRPS respects your right to privacy. We will **NOT** share your email address.

PD LIKE TO VOLUNTEER TO WORK ON:

- ☐ Home Tours ☐ Walking Tours ☐ Board ☐ Research
☐ Other _____

Ways to become a member or renew your membership in HRPS:

- 1) Join or renew on HRPS website historicreno.org using credit or debit card
- 2) Fill out the above form and mail with a check to address below
- 3) Fill out the above form and credit/debit info below and mail to address below

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