

The Mayberry Bridge: A Long and Storied Past

by Debbie Hinman

"Between every two pine trees there is a door leading to a new way of life."

— John Muir, naturalist and conservationist

Dense forests of Jeffrey pines were certainly plentiful on that westernmost end of the Truckee Meadows in the 1840-1860 timespan and many who came that way established a new way of life indeed, in what would become Nevada.

In 1860, as the Henness Pass toll road entered its planning stages, a man named Stout staked a squatter's claim and built a simple log bridge across the Truckee River.

In 1861, Another settler, John M. Hunter, built a hotel. This early outpost, one of the principal stage stations, sat halfway between a log bridge called O'Neil's crossing in what would soon be known as Verdi and an outpost known as Fuller's crossing, soon to be renamed Lake's Crossing, prior to becoming Reno in 1868.

With the discovery of the Virginia City Comstock Lode in 1859, treasure hunters had begun coming in droves and many were using the Henness Pass route across the Sierra to bring them to the Utah Territory (what this area was known as prior to Nevada's statehood in 1864). The Central Pacific Railroad wouldn't arrive until 1868. Six-horse stages stopped daily at the station. Fresh horses could be exchanged for the weary ones and travelers could be on their way to the silver mines. Westbound travelers could rest there before crossing the bridge and continuing to Verdi and Dog Valley and the Henness Pass.

John Hunter was doing a pretty good business with his lodging house and early accounts of the area mention a post office there for two years or so, enabling travelers to send word home. Hunter was also said to be engaged in farming, raising crops of alfalfa. In 1860, Hunter had established a log-cutting mill on the banks of the Truckee.

Stout was also doing well, collecting tolls to cross via his bridge. However, in 1862, torrential rains produced flooding that swept Stout's bridge downstream. While trying to save the bridge, Stout was drowned.

Toll road employees constructed a more substantial bridge, able to withstand the weight of the heaviest loads of lumber or



The Mayberry Bridge, built in 1907, was hit by a strawberry truck in 1974 and demolished.
Courtesy Nevada Historical Society.

supplies. This bridge took on the name of Hunter's Crossing. Today the Hunter name lives on with Hunter Canyon, Hunter Creek, Hunter Lake Trail and Hunter Lake Drive.

On June 18, 1868, the first Central Pacific passenger train crossed the Sierra Nevada to newly-named Reno. The tracks ran along the river, in near proximity to Hunter's Crossing. Wagon traffic continued on the overland route but much of the freight was now sent via rail. The Virginia & Truckee Railroad reached Reno in 1872, and goods and passengers could transfer to that line to continue their trip to Carson City and beyond to Virginia City.

In 1872, the Hunter's crossing bridge became a free bridge maintained by Washoe County. Soon after, in ill health and wishing to move to a warmer climate, John Hunter sold the settlement, including the ranch and hotel, to Canadian-born James Mayberry, a wagon maker on the Comstock. Upon this sale, the bridge quickly became known as the Mayberry Crossing, or Mayberry Bridge.

Mayberry, who had come to Virginia City in 1862, purchased a planing mill at Verdi in 1868 and his skill at woodworking earned him a contract to supply the Carson City capitol

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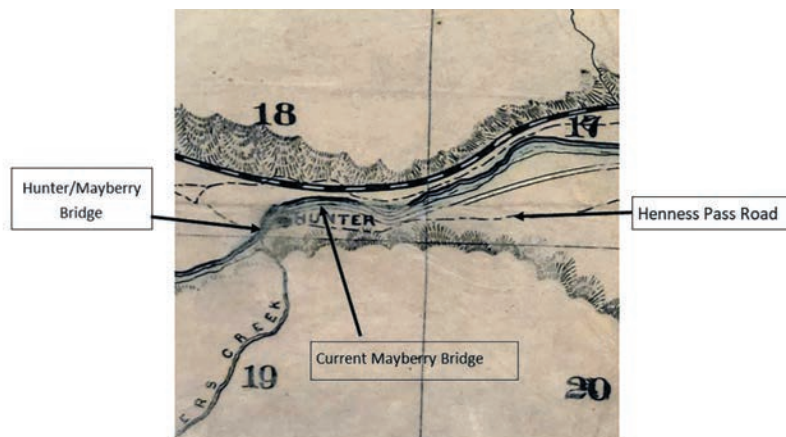
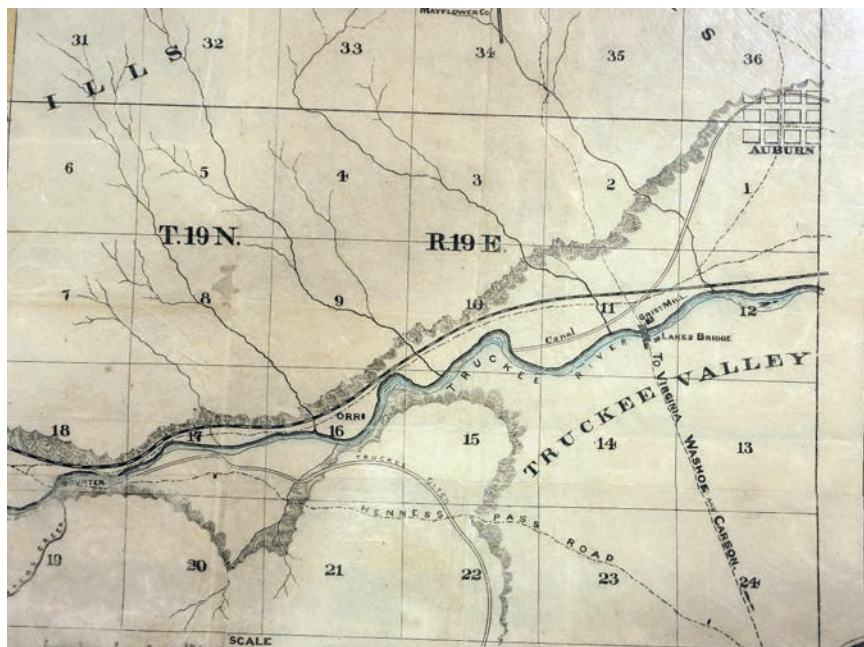
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building with its distinctive doors and finishing trim. He also reportedly superintended John Mackay's timber crews in the Carson range throughout the 1870s. It is likely that Mayberry was responsible for the wonderful, gable with wings barn, roughly 100 feet by 60 feet, commanding a field on what is today Aspen Glen Road. Its square-nail construction places its construction prior to the 1880s. Current inhabitants of the barn are a small herd of goats. In view of the many changes this area has undergone over the years, it is truly amazing that this barn still exists.

Interesting local newspaper items prove Mayberry to be newsworthy; in January of 1877 he threw a large party at his ranch, with dining and dancing until 3:00 a.m.; attendees included some of Reno's most important residents. In another item, he was said to be constructing a ditch to bring water to his ranch and another announced that his fine stallion named General Mayberry was to be entered in a competition at the State Fair. In 1881, Mayberry contracted with Mackay and Fair to supply 200,000 cords of wood for the Comstock.

James had married Kate Blessington in 1869 in Virginia City. The Mayberry family included daughters Kate and Mary Margaret and son, James K. The daughters attended Reno's elite Bishop Whitaker's School for Girls. Kate died at age 24 of typhoid in 1899, and was buried at Hillside Cemetery, in a plot with her aunt, Melinda Blessington. Mary Margaret married Andrew Martin and taught at Southside School in Reno. James K. became a hardware merchant in Oakland, California. The older Mayberry's brother Thomas also resided in Reno and was primarily engaged in farming. Another brother, Andrew, lived in Salt Lake City.

In 1890, Mayberry sold a parcel of the land to B. L. "Ben" Capurro. Soon after, a larger parcel of the ranch was sold to John Sparks, cattleman and owner of the expansive Alamo Ranch south of the fledgling town of Reno, at today's Peckham Lane and South Virginia Street. Sparks used the Mayberry Ranch as an adjunct to his Alamo Hereford stock farm. In July of 1900, a fire swept through the north side of the Mayberry road leveling most of the ranch buildings. The large barn was not mentioned in the account of the fire; it may have somehow escaped the blaze or been partially damaged and was rebuilt. Several days after the fire, Sparks announced his intention to rebuild what was lost. John Sparks was elected Governor of Nevada in 1902 and reelected in 1904. He died in 1908.



Upper image shows the river, the railroad and the Henness Pass Road from the Hunter/Mayberry Bridge on the left past the Virginia Road and Lake's Bridge on the right. The lower image is an expanded view of the Hunter/Mayberry Bridge site on the left and shows the old bridge, the Henness Pass Road, and where the current Mayberry Bridge is located.

Courtesy Nevada Historical Society.

Mayberry remained in the Reno area and busied himself with other projects. As he had been drawn to the area by the proximity to the river, he took an interest in water power and providing safe drinking water to the town. Mayberry organized a new company under the name Hunter Creek Water Company. A water analysis was performed; the final report read "In fact, a water more pure and healthful would be hard to find anywhere."

In 1889, the Donner Lake Dam was completed; a local newspaper article announced that Reno can then boast of having at least one storage reservoir of no mean proportions. However, later that year Mayberry and others from the Water Company traveled to Webber Lake to locate another reservoir site. Mayberry died in 1917 at the age of 76, after doing much to benefit Reno.



Mayberry Ranch. James Mayberry bought the ranch, once known as old Hunter's Station, from John Hunter in 1872.
Courtesy Nevada Historical Society.



The Mayberry barn, built prior to the 1880s as it used square nails, is huge with a footprint of 100 feet by 60 feet, photographed in 2001 by Jack Hursh.

In mid-1907, the Washoe County Commissioners decided to advertise for two contracts to construct steel bridges across the Truckee. One would be located at the Mayberry Ranch, the other at Verdi. They announced that the bridges would each have a span of 150 feet and be fourteen feet wide, supported on concrete piers and have a guaranteed strength of five-ton loads. One would remain standing until the present day; the other would meet an unhappy fate in 1974 (details later in the story).

After the death of John Sparks, the property was purchased by Charles T. Mullins. Mullins was a true American success story. He came to Reno in 1900 with \$5.60 in his pocket. He got a job as a clerk with Sunderland's clothing store. The following year he was able to purchase two ranches; the Eade Ranch and the Shields Ranch, near the Wedekind Mine. He traveled to the East Coast to purchase 1,000 strawberry plants and added them to the crops produced on his ranches. During his tenure at the Mayberry Ranch, Mullins put 400 acres of pasture land under cultivation.

In 1915, Mullins sold the ranch, having greatly improved the output of hay; when he bought the ranch, it yielded 84 tons of hay. Mullins guaranteed the new owners a cutting of 700 tons that year. The ranch was to be divided with this sale; a 220-acre parcel would go to the Borsi Brothers, wood contractors for the Hobart Mills, and 1,400 acres to B.L. Capurro, which was said to include the horses, farm implements and household furnishings. According to granddaughter Marian Capurro Durkee, B. L.'s son Ernest continued to purchase nearby land until his holdings totaled 4,000 acres stretching from Verdi to the Caughlin Ranch.

Like many other ranch properties in the Truckee Meadows in the 1930-1940s, as well as a working ranch, it became a guest ranch catering to divorcees. It was in the 1940s that the Capurros sold the ranch house to the Ambrose family. In 1955, a child playing with matches ignited the upper floor and a raging fire engulfed the old structure, damaging it so severely it had to be demolished. Upon Ernest's death in 1971, almost 3,000 acres of the heavily forested parts of the ranch were exchanged to the U. S. Forest Service, to protect them from development.

The sturdy 1907 Mayberry Bridge retained its name through all the changing of hands of the ranch and was commonly used by residents of the western end of the city to easily connect with Highway 40 to parts west. A dirt area to the right of the bridge was a popular place for teenagers to park, particularly on summer evenings.

However, the nearby railroad tracks were a danger. More than a few drivers missed the small, faded crossing signs and ended up stuck on the tracks or hit by a train due to inattention. Increasingly, deaths were occurring at this site. In April of 1974, the Washoe County commissioners awarded a contract to Holcomb Construction for a new concrete bridge about one quarter mile east of the Mayberry Bridge. The railroad tracks would run beneath the bridge, making the area much safer.

But before construction could begin, a different sort of tragedy occurred. On May 20, 1974, in the early morning hours, a 29-year-old truck driver by the name of Thomas Armstrong found himself lost while hauling a trailer-load of strawberries from Salinas, California bound for Cleveland, Ohio. He had stopped at Boomtown for a few drinks, then driven into Reno, exiting I-80 at Keystone Avenue. He reportedly asked for directions and got lost looking to get back on the freeway and somehow found himself heading west on Mayberry Drive. At an estimated 45 mph, Armstrong hit the Mayberry Bridge, his tractor-trailer exceeding the posted five-ton weight limit by 32 tons! Sheriff's deputies said the truck appeared to have skidded before striking the supporting overhead steel of the one-way structure, tearing off one side of the trailer and collapsing the bridge. Armstrong, unhurt, was jailed for investigation of driving under the influence of intoxicating liquor and destruction of county property.

The strawberries began making their way down the river, arriving in the town center about mid-morning, much to the

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delight of nearby residents who ran to get containers, then waded into the river to catch the berries as they floated by. As a poor college student living primarily on Top Ramen, the large container of strawberries my roommate collected went a long way toward supplementing our meagre meals, though I was heartbroken at the loss of the bridge.

Most locals were also heartbroken, as evidenced by the outpouring of sentiments to and by local newspapers. A nearby resident reported that upon hearing the crash, he believed he was dreaming. "It sounded like the end of the world," he reported. The day after the collapse, a local journalist wrote, "The Mayberry Drive bridge this morning clung tenaciously to the banks which anchored it for 67 years as workmen strove to get its carcass out of the Truckee River."

The new bridge was completed in the latter part of 1975. Most residents' feelings probably echoed those of Ty Cobb, expressed in his column of October 23, 1975: "We guess you can call it progress, but the Old Red Bridge, she ain't what she used to be. We took a ride over the new Mayberry Bridge the other day, and it was smooth, safe and uninteresting. It's safer and faster. The trouble is, it *Ain't Quaint*."

Today the site of the old Mayberry Bridge is at the end of Aspen Glen Road. It is a bridge with plenty of "quaint." No, it's not vintage, but it is a narrow steel walking/biking bridge with a wooden plank floor and people can cross it without having to worry about vehicle traffic. If you park at Mayberry Park, you can walk across and even stand for a while, watching the fishermen below and the way the sunlight sparkles on the water. Bicyclists and dog walkers abound and most smile and say hello, under the spell of the bridge, even those with no knowledge of its historic location. Keep walking until you see the hulk of the Mayberry Barn in its field.

Then you should stand awhile and imagine you're in 1870s Reno. If you're lucky, the resident goats may appear on their way to sample the grass in the field. 



Today a wood and metal footbridge crosses the Truckee where Stout's bridge once stood. It's part of the Truckee Trail System and the Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway.
Courtesy Debbie Hinman.

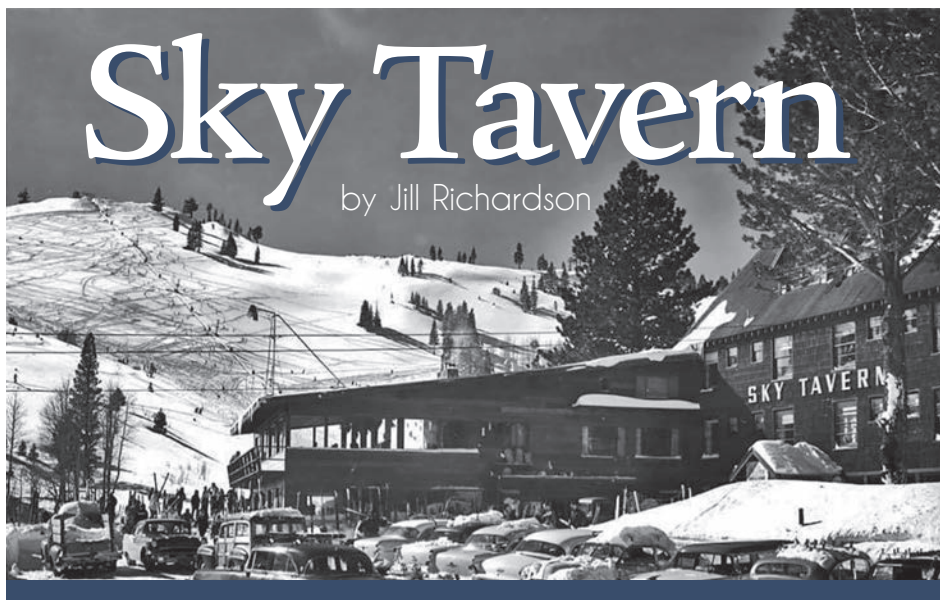
This information came from: *Tough Little Town on the Truckee*, John Townley; *History of Nevada*, Thompson & West; website Sierra Nevada GeoTourism, *Henness Pass Road*; a posting on CPRR.org on John Hunter by Robert J. King; *Marian Capurro Durkee Oral History*, University of Nevada Oral History Department; *Washoe County*, Joyce M. Cox, Ancestry and numerous local newspaper citations 1872-1980. A special thanks to Jack Hursh "the Barn Guy," for his book *Truckee Meadows Remembered* with its story of the Mayberry Barn, and his help with assembling information for this article and sharing his extensive knowledge.

Debbie Hinman is a Reno native and UNR graduate. Active with HRPS since 2004, she is a HRPS Walking Tour Guide, HRPS Board member, Vice Chair of the City of Reno Historical Resources Commission, and a researcher and Editor of HRPS's quarterly *FootPrints* publication.

Early Travelers on The Road

The site of the Stout's bridge (1860) over the Truckee and then Hunter's Crossing (after 1862) brings to mind that the connecting road was known in the 1840s as the Emigrant Trail, and was likely traveled by the Donner Party and others on their way West. Henness Pass Road also traversed this section, begun by Patrick Henness, who developed the

route in 1849 as an alternative to Donner Pass, and as a toll road in the 1850s as a supply route for the silver and gold mines in Nevada. Today, on a narrow country lane, Aspen Glen Road extends from that spot on the Truckee River, where the early bridges stood, to Mayberry Drive, a reminder of those who traveled the route a century and a half ago.



Ski Tavern's lodge. Date unknown, source Facebook.

Imagine being the rich and powerful business leader for one of the top companies in the United States, yet putting the fate of your family into the hands of a teenager driving you through a blizzard up the windy road to a ski resort. That's what happened to the president of the Levi Strauss Company when he brought his family to Sky Tavern for a ski vacation shortly after World War II.

According to Al Ramsey, who tells the story of being that driver who picked up the family at the airport and brought them up the Mount Rose Road (before it was widened and straightened), it was his job to shuttle guests to his father's ski

resort. He recalled that memorable trip—tough going but they all arrived safely!

Today, the numerous ski resorts in the Sierra Nevada Mountains around Lake Tahoe attract visitors all winter long.

But back in the early days of California and Nevada in the 1860s, these mountains attracted lumbermen who milled the trees of the forest to provide wood for the silver mines of the Comstock Lode of nearby Virginia City.

Besides using the trees for cooking and warmth, a revolutionary technique to mining demanded plenty of timber. Philipp Diedesheimer invented the

square-set timbering method to build mine shafts in a modular fashion from wood assembled into cubes.

The lumbermen who supplied the timber carved rough roads up into the mountains and deep into the woods, and mills popped up along the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada, including around Mt. Rose and the area where Sky Tavern is located.

By the 1910s, as silver and gold mining had played out and the need for lumber waned, these old roads fell into disrepair. People in the young city of Reno, like today, enjoyed spending time at Lake Tahoe. But with no reliable roads, the only access was through Truckee, California. In addition, accessibility to the mountains for the fire patrols in the Galena area was limited, and several fires caused by campers led to the need for a more accessible road over the Mt. Rose summit.

So Washoe County sent engineers out to find a way to make a road over the summit to Lake Tahoe from Reno. This they did by using part of the old loggers' road which went past Sky Tavern, and by 1921, the "Mt. Rose Route" was completed... although it remained dangerous in snowy conditions until the late 1950s when improvements were made. Today we know that as State Route 431 or the Mt. Rose Highway.

Why ski down a mountain? Because it's there! Once the mountains were more accessible, people became interested in skiing. Before formal ski hills came into existence, some of these daring outdoorsmen would climb up Slide Mountain and race down. The names of these adventurous skiers are a "who's who" of early Nevada skiing—Wayne Paulsen (developer of Squaw Valley—now called Palisades Tahoe), Chelton Leonard (ski coach at University of Nevada, Reno, and technical ski director for the 1960 Olympics), Doris "Dodie" Post Gann (Olympian), and others.



Left: Al Ramsey in 2018, photo by Jill Richardson. Ramsey's father, Keston Ramsey bought Sky Tavern in 1944. Right: Early days of skiing and the T-bar lift. Date/people unknown. Photo courtesy Sky Tavern.

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Thanks to these early visionary skiing enthusiasts, the first rope tow in the Sierra Nevada was installed at Galena Creek just prior to WWII, followed by another at Grass Lake (later to become Sky Tavern). Wayne Paulsen built and operated the Mt. Rose Upski and Ski School at Grass Lake, the first ski area in Nevada. People were impressed with the quality of skiing in the area; many said it had the potential to become another Sun Valley, Idaho, if not for the difficulty in keeping the Mt. Rose route open during the snowy winters.

In an interview with Al Ramsey, he recalled that his father, Keston Ramsey, bought Sky Tavern in 1944, along with business partner George Tett. The previous and original owner had hoped to open a ski resort, but WWII threw a wrench into those plans. The senior Ramsey was a building contractor at Lake Mary (near current Sugar Bowl Ski Resort where one of the earliest rope tows in the Lake Tahoe basin operated) and bought all the land up to Mt. Rose, according to Al, from a base of 7600 feet to the peak at 8250 feet. When it opened in December 1945, the resort offered steep downhill runs that were 1- to 3-miles long. The T-bar lift moved 450



Gary Cooper at Sky Tavern
(year and woman unknown).
Photo courtesy Sky Tavern.

skiers an hour up the hill. Lift tickets were \$2.50. Later, they added a 40-meter ski jump.

Ramsey's construction company built a 21-room hotel with a coffee shop, dining room and lounge. The resort was powered by a gasoline generator since they had no electricity. The lodge promised to offer "outstanding accommodations to an area hard to match for skiing pleasure." A lake existed where today's Sky Tavern

parking lot is now located. One excited new skier heard about the resort's amenities until she learned about the T-bar, to which she asked disappointedly, "Is tea the only thing they serve at the bar?" Transportation services from Reno to Sky Tavern were operating daily.

The resort quickly became a destination. Ramsey's friends, casino magnates Bill Harrah and Virgil Smith, operated a small gaming operation with two card dealers. Hollywood celebrities came to the resort including Rita Hayworth, Ingrid Bergman, Gary Cooper, Robert Stack, and Andy Devine. Baseball great, Yankee's Joe DiMaggio rented a cabin for his ex-wife and son there.

Prior to WWII, Sun Valley, Idaho, was a favorite get-away for Hollywood celebrities, as well as many of the world's best skiers. But during the war, these skiers and ski instructors were looked upon suspiciously since many were German. The German-speaking staff and instructors were interrogated by the FBI and some were arrested. Others were sent to an internment camp in North Dakota or were forced to serve in the Army. The US Navy then took over the ski resort and used it from 1942 until 1946 as a rehabilitation facility for servicemen.

While Sun Valley was tied up with the military, the ski areas around Mt. Rose, including Sky Tavern, became the popular destination for the rich and famous, as well as the world-class skiers.

The ski instruction program at Sky Tavern has been a huge success in teaching so many Renoites to ski. It was started in 1948 by Marce Herz with Hal Coddling as the ski school director. Herz convinced Ramsey to offer reduced lift ticket prices and instruction fees to Reno kids. She raised enough donations to hire a bus for 50 kids in 1949 and the next season she arranged for 3 buses to transport 150 kids. The junior ski program became one of the top ski schools in the nation.



Early days of skiing. Date unknown. Photo courtesy Sky Tavern.



Hal Coddling with unknown skier.
Photo courtesy Sky Tavern.

In 1952, a new Constam T-bar lift was installed. The original lift had skiers exiting the lift on a steep slope and “wrestling matches between skiers and lift bars were not an uncommon sight at the end of the up-hill side,” so the new lift was moved back 200 feet over the crest of the mountain. Not only safer, this helped open up new terrain. The Constam T-bar was one of the first ski lifts in the world.


A year later in 1953, Ramsey’s partner George Tett sold his portion of ownership in Sky Tavern to Harry F. Linnecke, an electrical contractor from Reno. Keston Ramsey retained his partial ownership and continued

as general manager of the resort until 1959. At this time, the 700-acre resort consisted of the hotel that served up to 50 guests with a cocktail lounge and coffee bar, one Constam T-bar and three rope tows. That same year the lodge was increased and improved with amenities and a ski shop, plus a ski jumping hill outside.

Elsewhere around the Tahoe basin, ski resorts were popping up. Reno Ski Bowl opened on Slide Mountain a few miles up the road overlooking Washoe Valley (currently the East Bowl of Mt. Rose). The resort connected to the Sky Tavern area by the old “Ringer Chair” over “Bum’s Gulch” to the base of the Reno Ski Bowl. Remnants of the lift can be seen today along Mt. Rose Highway.

As big new ski resorts opened up all over the Tahoe basin—Heavenly Valley, Squaw Valley, Slide Mountain, Ski Incline—the competition meant it became more difficult to attract the same clients as in the past. As a result, Ramsey sold the ski area in 1959, and Sky Tavern then became used exclusively for teaching kids to ski. And in 1968, Reno and Washoe County bought the 149-acre property and the Washoe County Fair and Recreation Board put in a new lift to help increase capacity. The price for students was reasonable at \$1.74 per student per day (the program ran on Saturdays). It was so successful that a Sunday program was added at a price of \$12.50 per student for the entire winter season. With 120 volunteer instructors teaching over 1,500 students, the hill’s five lifts and one rope tow were kept busy, as it has ever since.

The Sky Tavern Junior Ski Program achieved non-profit status in 1991. More improvements happened in the ‘90s and new millennium. The area became a PSIA Ski School in 1994. The Sky Ridge Chairlift was installed in 1994 and the America Chairlift was installed in 2001. The Sky Ridge Chair is a triple chair installed to not only increase capacity and terrain, but also allow skiers with disabilities to access the hill. With this, the Adaptive Skier Program began that same year.

Sky Tavern is a treasure for area youth and many locals have fond memories of learning to ski there. Their mission is to get kids outside. The program is gearing up for their 2022 winter season with memberships on sale. And they are always looking for adult volunteers to help with the program...hint, hint, for those of you who appreciated the time you spent there as a kid learning to ski! 

Information for this article came from the *Nevada State Journal*, *Reno Evening Gazette*, *Reno Gazette-Journal*, websites for Mt. Rose and Sky Tavern, and 2018 interviews with Al Ramsey and Todd Torvinen.

Jill Richardson is a member of HRPS, Nevada Historical Society, and a volunteer history researcher and Board member for Truckee Meadows Parks Foundation.

Principals in Sky Tavern

- Marce Herz was a Nevada state champion for the combined slalom and downhill in 1950. She won the Silver Dollar race (a downhill and slalom combination). She believed that sports were good for everyone, especially children. Over the years, it is estimated that her ski instruction program at Sky Tavern was responsible for teaching tens of thousands of kids to ski. Herz died in 1964. A new middle school on Arrowcreek Parkway was named in her honor.
- Hal Coddling was chosen for the US Ski Team for the 1938 FIS World Championships in Engelberg, Switzerland, but was unable to go. He was then given the honor of being on the 1940 Olympic ski team, but again was unable to go in 1940 due to the war. He lived in Sun Valley, Idaho, before the war but moved to Reno in 1946 after the war where he helped start the first ski school at Sky Tavern. Keston Ramsey built Hal a cabin near Sky Tavern.

Historic Reno Preservation Society

2nd Tuesday 2022 Speaker 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.

Programs will run from January through April.

Zoom links for these programs are on the HRPS website at historicreno.org and will be emailed the first of the month to HRPS members through our email newsletter. After editing, they will be available on the HRPS website historicreno.org under Tours & Events / Speakers.



Tuesday, January 11, 2022, 5:30 pm

Topic: The Lear Theater (First Church of Christ, Scientist)

Presenter: Dr. Alicia Barber

It would be difficult to identify a building in Reno with greater architectural, historical, and cultural significance than what we know today as the Lear Theater. Completed in 1939 as the First Church of Christ, Scientist, the elegant structure has graced the north bank of the Truckee River at 501 Riverside Drive for more than 80 years. Paul Revere Williams, widely recognized as the most important African American architect of the 20th century, designed it. And yet the building's story has become one of repeatedly dashed hopes for its renovation and revitalization. As ownership of the building transfers from Artown to the City of Reno, this seems an opportune moment to increase community awareness of what makes this building so significant, what protections are in place to preserve it, and what any new plans for it should keep in mind.

Dr. Alicia Barber is a writer, historian, and educator 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. She is the author of *Reno's Big Gamble: Image and Reputation in the Biggest Little City* and an e-newsletter about Reno city development called The Barber Brief.



Tuesday, February 8, 5:30 pm

Topic: Saints, Sinners and Sovereign Citizens

Presenter: John Smith

John Smith discusses his new book about the grazing rights battle between Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy and the federal government that resulted in a tense, armed standoff between Bundy's supporters and federal law enforcement officers. It places the Bundy conflict into the larger context of the Sagebrush Rebellion and the long struggle of the use of public lands in the American West. While examining the complex history of federal public land policies, Smith exposes both sides of this story. He shows that there are passionate true believers on opposite sides of the insurrection, along with government agents and politicians in Washington complicit in efforts to control public lands for their wealthy allies and campaign contributors. With the promise of billions of dollars in natural resource profits and vast tracts of environmentally sensitive lands hanging in the balance, the West's latest range war is the most important in the nation's history. This masterful exposé raises serious questions about the fate of America's public lands and the vehement arguments that are framing the debate from all sides.

John L. Smith is a longtime journalist and the author of more than a dozen books on some of the most significant characters in Las Vegas history. In three decades as a daily columnist with the Las Vegas Review-Journal, he garnered many state and national awards for his work. In 2016, Smith was named to the Nevada Newspaper Hall of Fame and was part of a group of reporters to receive the Ancil Payne Award for Ethics from the University of Oregon, the Society of Professional Journalists award for Ethics, and the James Foley Medill Medal for Courage in Journalism from Northwestern University.



Tuesday, March 8, 2022, 5:30 pm

Topic: Ghost Trails of Reno

Presenter: Frank X. Mullen

Starting in 1844 and through the Gold Rush, emigrant wagons left their marks on the Truckee Meadows. Most of those vestiges now are erased, but some ruts still exist and the routes of the vanished trails are known. Journalist and author Frank X. Mullen knows where those are and will trace the routes in a Zoom presentation. From the Truckee River Canyon in the east, to the Comstock-era ruts near Hidden Valley, to the still-visible pioneer trail above Verdi, he will take participants on a virtual walk along those ghost trails.

Mullen, the author of the “Donner Party Chronicles,” is a veteran newspaper reporter and the current editor of the Reno News & Review. He is also a nationally-known Chautauqua performer and an adjunct journalism instructor. In 2021, he was inducted into the Nevada Journalist Hall of Fame and also named Robert Laxalt Distinguished Writer, a program of the Reynolds School of Journalism and Nevada Humanities.




Tuesday, April 12, 2022, 5:30 pm

Topic: What is Rodeo?

Presenter: Dr. Michael Allen

What is Rodeo? Is it a sport? Is it a performance, a circus, or “wild west show”? Is it a historical re-enactment?

Rodeo, in fact, contains elements of all those things, with a bit of Indian Pow Wow and *Charrería Mexicana* thrown in. Michael Allen will show that rodeo is a North American equestrian folk festival that was commercialized and professionalized during the 20th century. If rodeo is a “sport,” it is a highly unusual sport, in which participants re-enact elements of the American past exhibiting historic skills with direct ties to the 19th-century North American “cattle kingdom” and ranching frontiers.

A Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Washington, Tacoma, Allen’s books include “*Western Rivermen, 1763-1861: Ohio and Mississippi Boatmen and the Myth of the Alligator Horse*,” “*Rodeo Cowboys in the North American Imagination*,” published by the University of Nevada Press, and the co-authored (with Larry Schweikart) “*A Patriot’s History of the United States*.” In 1997, he helped found the Ellensburg (Washington) Rodeo Hall of Fame Association and currently helps create museum displays at the Western Culture and Arts Center in Ellensburg. 

Previous Speaker Programs Available on HRPS Website

Check out these wonderful programs at HRPS website:
<https://historicreno.org/>

- **Hebrew Cemeteries in Northern Nevada** *with Sharon Honig-Bear*
- **Suffrage, Women’s Rights and Historic Preservation in Nevada** *with Dr. Alicia Barber and ZoAnn Campana*
- **The Archaeology of Burning Man: The Rise and Fall of Black Rock City** *with Dr. Carolyn White*
- **The U.P. House** *with Loren Jahm 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*
- **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*



Ira Libby's Story

by Brett Banks

This Cabinet Card of Ira Libbey was found on Ebay and is the only known photo of him. A cabinet card was a style of portraiture photography primarily done after 1870, consisting of a thin photo mounted to a card. It was called a cabinet card as its rigid structure allowed for display, as in a cabinet.

In the fall of 2017, while researching my own family history, I was drawn to Hillside Cemetery and its adjacent cemeteries. Having lived next door to it for the better half of a decade, I had seen the complex change immensely in such a positive way over that time. It is the final resting place of much of my family but also much of Reno's history and legacy. After meeting non-profit founder and lead volunteer, Frances Tryon, the cemeteries and I were inseparable. Now, as the president of Hillside's non-profit and additionally a weekly and dedicated volunteer, it is my passion to continue researching and identifying the history of those lost to time.

Recently, when browsing Ebay for antique photographs, I stumbled upon a cabinet card of a Grand Army of the Republic soldier taken in Reno, Nevada. The photo was unidentified but the details were clear to see, so I began to research. After identifying his badge number, I was able to trace this image to being Ira Libby, Union Civil War Veteran. This was such a special find, as I clean and maintain his plot on a regular basis in the Grand Army of the Republic portion of the cemetery

complex. This is the only photograph known to exist of him and it likely has gone unidentified for decades.

Ira Libby was born December 31, 1832 in Parsonsfield, Maine to father Ham Libby and mother Sarah Batchelder on the Batchelder homestead. The family had been in the state since the creation of York County in 1636. Ira had four brothers and four sisters and was a middle child.

When Ira was just two years old, the family relocated from Sarah's father's homestead in Parsonsfield to Effingham, New Hampshire. The move was a

distance of four and one-half miles, but was a major move with horse and wagon. The eldest children were enrolled in schooling at the Effingham Academy, then the first and only Normal School in the New England territories.

The Effingham Academy building still exists today and is home to the Effingham Historical Society. The Academy was founded on June 18, 1819 and opened in 1820. A normal school for the training of teachers was established on the building's second floor in 1830. After 1945, the building became a district schoolhouse.



Ira Libby is buried in the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) Cemetery, one of the cemeteries at Hillside Cemetery. GAR was established in 1890 to be a lasting resting place for comrades-in-arms during the Civil War, 1861-1865.

On the left, Nevada State Marker 79 commemorates the cemetery.

Photos courtesy Bill Mardon.



On the left, the Effingham Academy, the first normal school in New Hampshire in 1830, where Ira Libby and his siblings attended school. On the right, the building today houses the Effingham Historical Society.

Effingham is a well-preserved 18th and 19th century rural village, listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places as Lord's Hill Historic District.

Ira came from a family of farming so it is not surprising that after finishing his education at the Effingham Academy, it was understood that Ira would begin his career in the agricultural industry until the start of the Civil War.

In 1860, Ira was still living at home helping his father Ham run the family farm when he met his first and only wife, Nancy Young Matthews. They were promptly married on July 24, 1860 in Edgartown, Massachusetts—a city on the Eastern side of Martha's Vineyard.


On September 15, 1862, Ira joined the Union army, serving as a private for 11 months in the Company K 50th Massachusetts Infantry. Ira was discharged on August 2, 1863, serving just shy of a year. Alvah, Ira's elder brother, was a Captain in the Massachusetts Infantry during the Civil War. Their father, Ham, was a soldier in the 9th Massachusetts Regiment during the Revolutionary War (1775-1783).

After being discharged in the fall of 1863, Ira went back to farming. The couple moved from Massachusetts to Maine and later to Michigan, where in 1879 they had their first and only child Jason Mariner Libby. When Jason was three years old, the family relocated to Verdi, Nevada and Ira purchased land adjacent to the area's Chinese community and began farming.

Ironically, in 1886, Ira joined the Anti-Chinese Club of America alongside his friends Patrick Flanigan, Henry Orr, and other important local businessmen. In addition to this political interest, Ira was involved in many Veteran groups in the City, primarily being the Grand Army of the Republic O.M. Mitchell Post No. 69, a national benevolent organization composed of ex-Union veterans of the U.S. Civil War.

Ira and Nancy's son Jason was a prospector and famous for being one of Tonopah's pioneer miners, later for being the director of an ore mill in Reward, California. Jason married Ida Lamb and together they had five children. One of those children passed away of a communicable disease in 1905 at her grandmother Nancy's home in Reno. The baby girl was interred in the

Lamb family plot in Hillside Cemetery, which is adjacent to the Grand Army of the Republic Cemetery.

On February 21, 1898, Ira died at his home in Verdi, Nevada of natural causes at 65 years of age. By this time Jason was already living in Reward, California. Nancy sold the farm and purchased a modest lot at 743 Lander Street, where she lived until the time of her death on January 26, 1915. At his death, Ira was interred in the Grand Army of the Republic portion of the Hillside Cemetery complex. Later, Nancy was buried alongside her husband. By the 1960s their stones had been vandalized and no longer existed and a replacement military stone was placed for Ira, but Nancy's grave remains unmarked. Jason is buried in Tucson, Arizona alongside wife Ida. 



Ira's elder brother, Alvah Libby, who served as a Captain during the Civil War.

Information for this article comes from Ancestry.com, Newspapers.com and ebay.com.

Brett is a 7th generation Nevadan who became interested in local preservation after researching her genealogy and realizing how important the forgotten stories of her own pioneer family members are to her community and state. She is a seamstress for a living, a student focusing on a degree in History, a HRPS Board member and volunteer and President of the Hillside Cemetery Preservation Foundation.

It's in the Sauce: The Wigwam Coffee Shop

by Sharon Honig-Bear

Adapted from a story written by Sharon for Fall 2020 *ediblerenotahoe* magazine

Reputations have been built on “secret sauce”—think McDonald’s and the Big Mac—but Northern Nevada’s claim to fame was the buttery sauce served over hot apple pie at Les Lerude’s Wigwam Coffee Shop. Reno old-timers still swoon at the mention of it and recipes to recreate the sauce have circulated for years. As we head into winter, warm apple pie sounds delectable and the time is ripe to highlight the Wigwam and its famous topping.

Lerude was called the “restauranteur who turned apple pie into an art form” in his obituary in the *Reno Gazette-Journal* on April 25, 1984. From 1934 to 1972 he operated the Wigwam at Sierra and Second Streets, creating one of those landmark eateries everyone visited in Reno. This was the era when independent dining establishments ruled downtown since casinos didn’t serve food. Police and firemen were regulars. As his son Warren, Professor Emeritus at University of Nevada, Reno, wrote in the *Reno Evening Gazette*, “In those busy retail days, almost everyone stopped by the restaurant.”

The restaurant’s name came from its next door neighbor, the Wigwam Theater. The decor featured, perhaps politically incorrect by today’s standards, Native American items such as Indian baskets and kitschy items such as headdresses and dolls in full Native regalia. There were booths and a long counter, old brick, dark wood panels, and animal mounts.

Who knew there could be rules for apple pie? At the Wigwam,



Exterior view of The Wigwam at Second and Sierra, circa 1945, Courtesy UNR Special Collections.



Restauranteur Les Lerude, standing on Sierra Street in front of his Coffee Shop. Found on [pinterest.com](#).

it had to be served warm and it had to be served with rich butter sauce. Lerude stuck to his guns. One day, when a customer ordered the pie cold, without the sauce, Lerude served it the “Wigwam way,” saying that if the customer didn’t like it, he didn’t have to pay for it. The customer ate it and happily paid. According to Les, only one person got away with eating cold pie: Lawrence Gulling who worked in City Hall. Gulling called ahead to reserve a piece, in case the restaurant had run out by the time his work day was over. By the time he arrived, the pie was cold and ready to go.

Lerude was born in Heron Lake, Minnesota. As a young man, he rode the rails and worked in restaurants from Seattle to Chicago to New York. He developed his famous sauce recipe in the 1940s, saying “When I was a kid in Chicago, they had something similar. Years later, I decided to make my own sauce and began experimenting.” *The secret was using top quality vanilla and butter* and carefully following the cooking instructions. He kept his recipe secret for years before finally releasing it (see sidebar, page 13).

Other items put the Wigwam on the map. An often repeated sign said, “Not recommended by Duncan Hines,” spoofing on the then-popular restaurant critic. Or one that went, “Our slot machines pay more for Les than all the slot machines in



Johnny Blanchard, Reno Police officer, a Wigwam waitress, and an unnamed Reno Police officer, inside The Wigwam, ca. 1945. Courtesy Nevada Historical Society, Neal Cobb Collection.



The Wigwam interior, with all their wonderful pie and dessert selections on display. Can you imagine fresh ground coffee at 10-cents a cup? And with fresh cream!

Reno.” In between the signs for wheat cakes, banana splits, chili, and a Denver sandwich, there was a simple one that read, “Good Food for Good Health.” His outsized personality made him popular enough to consider a run for Mayor and was elected to the Nevada State Assembly in 1953.

The Wigwam closed on Feb. 8, 1972. Among the signs in the restaurant was one that read, “We close Sundays and go fishing” and Lerude certainly earned the break. We, at least, can spruce up our apple pies with a recipe that links us to this bygone landmark.

This is a copy of the recipe used by Les Lerude, compliments of his son Warren. There are many recipes floating around the internet but this is the official one! Looking at it, I thought it was very custardy but Warren prefers the term “buttery.” I edited my work to reflect that terminology.

Enjoy! 🍷

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.

Wigwam Pie Sauce

From Warren Lerude

This is the “official” (and a bit old-fashioned) recipe for the famous sauce, sometimes called Butter Sauce or Butter Cream Sauce. Les Lerude signed the recipe himself to indicate its authenticity. There are imitations that use cornstarch, more sugar, and no half-and-half. Reheating in a microwave will be easier than using a double boiler!

Step 1:

Place on stove and heat to 180 degrees F (do not boil):

2/3 cup milk
1/2 cup half-and-half
1 cup water

Step 2:

In a separate pot, melt 1/3 cup butter over slow fire. Slowly add, stirring well after each ingredient:

1/4 cup flour
2/3 cup sugar
1 large or 2 small egg yolks

Step 3:

Turn up fire and add Step 1 mixture [to Step 2 mixture] slowly. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly. When it starts to boil, remove from heat and put in another container to cool. When it's cool, add 1 teaspoon good vanilla.

Store in refrigerator until ready to use. To serve, heat in double boiler, not on direct heat. DO NOT BOIL as boiling will cause mixture to break. You may substitute brandy instead of vanilla for use on hot mince pies.



Does this plate from The Wigwam really need an explanation? It just begs you to get that wonderful piece of Apple Pie with the delicious Wigwam Pie Sauce. From catladydi.blogspot.com



Message From Your HRPS President

Carol Coleman

Hello HRPS Members and Friends,

It's a New Year and let's hope for a better one for all!

How are you faring during these months with COVID? I hope you have protected yourself by getting vaccinated and are wearing a mask when you are out and about. I know it's been a tough two years for everyone, HRPS included.

Up until COVID, HRPS concentrated on our in-person events, Speaker Programs, Walking Tours and our Home Tour, and all of a sudden everything changed. We turned to virtual events that I hope you have been able to enjoy, either as they were offered or after we edited them and placed them on the HRPS website, historicro.org.

Winter-Spring Speaker Programs

To be safe, we are going to continue to offer our January to April Speaker Programs as virtual events. You can read about them in this issue of FootPrints; you will receive the link each month in your HRPS email newsletter that arrives the first of the month; and you will find the link for each program on the HRPS website.

We hope you enjoy these excellent, timely programs covering Reno and Nevada history. Let's give a big thanks to Shery Hayes-Zorn and Susan Mullen for the work they do to bring you these presentations.

We are Planning Walking Tours

We are excited to be planning our first in-person events — Walking Tours! In January, we'll meet (probably virtually)

with our Tour Guides to plan and schedule walks. We start with scheduling the July walks as the Artown deadline comes early. We'll tentatively schedule May and June, while keeping an eye on COVID numbers. Hopefully we'll have a full schedule of Walking Tours this year!

But, we need some help from you. First we need a couple of Walking Tour Co-Chairs. Alexis Thomas, who is Walking Tour Chair, is an Architectural Historian for NDOT. Alexis' work schedule can conflict with the actual Walking Tours, so we need "boots on the ground," so to speak. The Co-Chairs would arrange for equipment to be on site to start each Tour, schedule volunteers and work with volunteers to use our website for registration. Additionally we need people to work the registration table for check in, on-site registration and to be the caboose. Can you help us get HRPS Walking Tours going in 2022? Send me an email or give me a call please.

Looking for a Manager

When I became President back in 2016, Cindy Ainsworth decided to retire as Administrator. She had held that unofficial position as a volunteer and in later years with some reimbursement, for most HRPS Presidents. So I became President and Admin. Crazy. As I'm termed out according to our Bylaws on June 1, 2022, it's important to bring in an Administrator or Executive Director who will stay with HRPS and handle the "managing" part of this wonderful organization.

Until 2014, our publicity for Walks, Programs and the Home Tour was as simple as sending a Press Release to the *Reno Gazette-Journal*, our hometown newspaper. It is no longer a local paper, as I'm sure you are aware. HRPS needs to move into the world of on-line calendars and social media in addition to FootPrints, HRPS website and our new email newsletter. We need a manager to facilitate getting the information in and getting the word out.

To begin with we are looking at 1/4 time or 10 hours a week. That is flexible,

could be more hours some weeks and fewer others. It would be great to have a HRPS member take on this task, someone with knowledge of what we do. We need a person with great computer and organizational skills, someone to keep the organization ship-shape. Are you that person? Send me an email or give me a call and let's talk.

Looking for a Couple Board Members

No, we don't have missing Board members, but we'd like to find a couple of new Board members. Libby Cook, who was on the Board for just about a year, has taken a job in Idaho, so has resigned. And, come June 1, 2022, both Sharon and I are termed out, so we need replacements. Our Board meetings are first Mondays and we like each Board member to be a working member, to take on a task to support HRPS programs. Does this sound like something you could do? Please call or email me.

Is it Your Membership Renewal Time?

If you join HRPS in 2022, your membership renewal date will be one year from when you joined. But for the majority of our members, your renewal date is January 1, reflecting the years when we had a pre-set renewal date. When it's time to renew, our Membership Management System, Wild Apricot, will send you an email message indicating it's renewal time.

Another way to find out your renewal date is to check the mailing label of your FootPrints. If you are not an email user, do check that date. Page 15 of every FootPrints has a Membership Form and we still gladly accept checks sent to our Post Office Box.

We appreciate your support and belief in this organization — we are a membership based 501 (C)(3) non-profit and are totally dependent on your membership and donations.

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

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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:

- ☐ \$15.00 Student
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My Additional Donation:

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

I'D 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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HRPS Phone:
775-747-4478 (775-747-HIST)
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Alexis Thomas

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HRC Liaison: Debbie Hinman

Email Newsletter: Joy Orlich

RHF Administrator: Cindy Ainsworth

FootPrints Managing Editor:
Debbie Hinman, 322-9400

Editorial Staff:
ZoAnn Campana, Joyce Cox

Photographer: Open

Editor Emeritus &
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Double Click Design
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