



The Burke Brood, c. 1929, Charles and Daisy are front and center, with Charles holding his first grandchild.

THE BURKE FAMILY OF STEWART STREET

Article by Debbie Hinman · Burke Collection courtesy of Jim & Sue Smith

Early settlers in Reno came from many places; some from the eastern or midwestern U.S. with romantic visions of an untamed land and fortunes to be made in mining and ranching. Others, even very young men, came across the ocean seeking adventure. One such adventurer was Charles Hamilton Burke.

Born in Liverpool, England in 1868, Charles was the son of an Irish father and English mother. At a very young age, he signed on a Navy ship as cabin boy and sailed to Los Angeles, California. There he left the ship and sometime later made his way to Needles, California where he found work. By 1890, he had found his way to Reno and here he would spend the rest of his life; with hard work, ambition and a wise and supportive wife, Charles

would achieve a status he likely never imagined as a boy.

In Reno of 1891, which had only become a town 23 years earlier, Virginia Street was a dirt road. Over the Truckee River was an iron bridge and heading toward town on the east side of the road were a few ramshackle structures that in early years housed a “carriage repository” and a blacksmith’s shop. Local blacksmith Bob White took on young Charles as an apprentice, giving him board and \$4.00 a week pay.

Charles next rented a barn at Second and Center streets and partnered with Frank Oar but the partnership was dissolved in early 1895, when Oar returned to Fallon.

However, a new partnership had been formed in early 1895 when Charles

married Lucy (Daisy) Holcomb, daughter of Grove Holcomb, early Reno settler and owner of the Holcomb Ranch, south of Reno. The couple had met sometime earlier when Daisy was waiting to have her horse shod at Charles’ shop. The horse Charles was working on kicked him; he let out a string of epithets learned during his short stint in the navy and looked up into the eyes of the young woman standing there. Apparently unperturbed by colorful language, Charles and Daisy soon became a couple and after a courting period, were married at the family ranch. Reported the *Nevada State Journal*, “Charlie is a sterling young man and his bride is a charming young lady.” Their first child, daughter Emily “Peggy,” was born in December of 1896. In March of 1898 the couple’s first son,

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Burke Family

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Donald Richard, was born. Two more sons would quickly follow, John Robert (who would die just before his fourth birthday) and Leslie Arnold in 1901.

In 1902, a windstorm blew down the rear wall of the shop. Always opposed to borrowing, Charles was finally coaxed by Daisy into taking out a loan to purchase a lot on the northwest corner of First and Center streets, the site of the old Pavilion. In 1903, he erected a brick building on the lot and leased it to the City of Reno for the Justice Court, with the privilege of purchasing the property in September.

Charles next purchased three entire blocks in the Ryland Addition. These transactions marked his entry into the business of real estate. He created the Burke's Addition from a section of farm and pasture land in the southeast portion of the city. Daisy gave birth to another son, Charles Hamilton Burke, Jr. that year and Charles Sr. had two two-story houses built in his new addition; one for his family at 501 S. Center, and another to sell.

Pressed by Daisy, Charles donated a large lot across from their home to the city for a new elementary school. The south side of the city was growing rapidly and there was no school nearby to accommodate all the children that would soon be of school age, including the Burkes' own brood. The school was called Southside and was an impressive two-story brick building with a basement.

Also in 1903, Charles created a great innovation in local home buying. He

organized a company to build residences that could be paid for in monthly installments. From that time on, his ads read "easy terms." Newspapers of this era were filled with notices of homes for sale in the Ryland and Burke Additions. Charles' property ads became more imaginative; one such ad read: "A MAN WITHOUT A HOME is like a ship without an anchor. Payments are the same as rent."

As his business grew, Charles became a respected figure in Reno society. He was elected as a School Trustee and was secretary of the County Central committee of the Silver party. He circulated a petition for a firehouse on the south side of the river and donated land in his addition for it. It was built on the site of today's Washoe County Library. He initiated the Southside Improvement Club which was instrumental in providing sewers to the southside neighborhoods. Charles and S. H. Wheeler were granted a franchise for a street railway to serve the same area.

As his reputation grew, so did his family; daughter Lyell in 1905, son George William in 1906, Kate Alicia in 1908 and Thomas Valiant in 1910. The Center Street home had become too small to accommodate the Burkes. In 1907-1908, Charles moved the house to a corner of the lot and had a stylish and much larger home constructed on the site. He then moved the original house down the block. The new house was a beauty, a two-story Colonial Revival with Queen Anne elements. A porch spanned the front of the home with paired columns supported by paneled pedestals. Upstairs dormers faced east and west with Palladian windows. The entry hall featured Corinthian columns hand carved by Charles. A massive dining room easily accommodated the growing family and assorted relatives who would attend the traditional Sunday night dinner. There were eight rooms on the ground floor, a



Charles Burke's Blacksmith Shop, corner of Center and Second Streets, c. late 1890s.
Courtesy of Nevada Historical Society.

small study on the first landing where Charles conducted his business, then four bedrooms and a bath at the top of the stairs. The address of the lot and home changed to 36 Stewart Street about this time. Daisy, with her passion for gardening and a green thumb, set to work creating a flower garden to surround the house that would remain the envy of all passing Renoites for the next 45 years.

Charles developed an interest in automobiles about this time. In 1914, Reno received a shipment of new 1914 Buicks, the demand for which was so heavy that Daisy Burke helped out in the sales room. Billie Mabel was born in 1912, the same year the Burkes lost son Thomas, then Frances Hennessey arrived in 1913 and the final Burke child Thad Albert, in 1915.

Thad was a fragile child and suffered a heart attack during a bout of pneumonia at age 17; he recovered and was thrilled to be named manager of the Reno High football team. A year later, on a game day, Thad suffered a second heart attack. Realizing his end was near, he urged his mother to tell the coach not to cancel the game. He then collapsed and died. Through her grief, Daisy spoke with the coach and informed him of Thad's last wish. Despite the terrible news, the game went on as scheduled and Reno beat Lovelock, 8-0. The remaining nine Burke children lived to adulthood.

WWI arrived and Charles Jr. entered the service. He was wounded and earned a distinguished service cross. Upon returning to Reno, he taught a free radio class to prepare local boys for the radio corps. Eldest child Peggy Burke married Robert Farrar at the Holcomb Ranch and wore her mother's wedding gown.



The Burke House, 36 Stewart Street, built in 1908.
Photo courtesy Rob Crosswell.

About this time, Charles, who still had his hand in local real estate, began a new career as quarantine officer for Washoe County, as well as becoming a director of the Truckee River Water Users Association chaired by Patrick McCarran.

Continuing her involvement in local education and remaining a member of the Southside Mothers Club, in 1925 Daisy led the club in demanding that a new junior high school be built on the south side of the river as the existing one was overcrowded and quite a distance from the south neighborhoods. She added that crossing the railroad tracks to get to the present school presented a danger to students from this neighborhood. The Mothers' Club demands were heard and a new junior high, named for longtime local educator Benson Dillon Billingham, was built on Plumas Street in 1930. Daisy joined the executive board of the Reno High PTA and became involved with the Garden Gate Club, an association that would continue the rest of her life.

By this time, the Burke children were growing up and pursuing their own lives. Charles Jr. became a master plumber and started a business. He would later be a longtime member of the Washoe County School Board. Daughter Kate left Reno for nursing school in San Francisco, and Billie became a teacher and married well-known city engineer, Elliott Cann. They had a daughter, Gayle, who later came to live with her Burke grandparents when Billie's marriage ended. She would live with them until she was a teenager while her mother taught school throughout Nevada. Billie would return to Reno holidays and summers to reunite with

her family. Frances married Charles Barnes after graduating from the university and brother George graduated from Tulane University Medical School in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Charles Sr. resigned his position as quarantine officer in 1941. According to an account written by a family member, he enjoyed visits from his large family and their offspring but was not good at recalling names so would refer to them as "My dear girl," and "My dear boy." Charles passed away in 1944 of bronchial pneumonia.


Daisy devoted even more time to her community activities, such as the victory garden plan she began in 1942. Many of the vegetables from the gardens were canned and used for school hot lunches. In 1946, she received a great honor, being chosen as State Mother for Nevada for that year. The following year she was invited to travel to Chicago where she attended a convention of Goldstar mothers from all over the United States. In 1946, Billie married Jerome Donovan, member of a pioneer Comstock family. Though she loved her grandparents, Gayle would once again live with her mother and a stepfather she grew to love.

By the early 1950s, Daisy's health was failing, and she was confined to her bed most of the time. She passed away of heart disease in 1952; her son Dr. George Burke was in attendance and signed her death certificate. Lucy "Daisy" Holcomb Burke's obituary read, "She was a member of four garden clubs, a past Director of the Red Cross and the YWCA and an

honorary member of the Soroptimist Club of Reno." Daisy was survived by six children, nine grandchildren and one great grandchild. In 1953, the Garden Gate Club planted two Hawthorne trees at Virginia Lake Park in memory of two deceased members, Daisy Burke and Vera Lydiard. In addition to the tree, there is a lovely, small garden at Rancho San Rafael known as the Charles and Daisy Burke Memorial Garden.

George died of cancer just two years later in 1955, and Charles Jr. in 1981. A year later, Lyell, the last Burke to occupy the Burke home, passed away. Frances died in 1985. The remaining child, Billie Burke Cann Donovan, who lived her last six years in Reno's Classic Residence, passed away in 1997.

Fortunately for Reno, the lovely Burke home has been preserved, though its location and size make it undesirable for a residence. In a fine example of adaptive reuse, it has served as attorney offices from the 1980s through today. In 2005, the building was purchased by attorney Jim Smith and his wife Sue, commercial real estate agent. Both are longtime HRPS members and HRPS Walking Tour Guides. The Smiths put a great deal of effort into replacing the outdated utilities and refreshing the interior. For those of you who have accompanied Jim and Sue on their walking tours, you will be well acquainted with their passion for Reno history and historic buildings. The Burke house could not have found better stewards as it is as lovely and well maintained today as when it was first built.

Afterward Note: Two years ago in 2020, the Smiths reluctantly sold the property to an LLC who are also committed to honoring the memory of the Burkes by caring for this special property. 



Charles Hamilton Burke
(1868 - 1944)



Lucy "Daisy" Holcomb Burke
(1871 - 1952)

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

Information for this story came from newspaper articles 1890-1997, reams of materials and personal family accounts assembled by Jim and Sue Smith, and a conversation with Burke granddaughter, Gayle O'Brien.



Rancho San Rafael Regional Park turns 40!

by Jill Richardson

The Great Reno Balloon Race, courtesy Kevin Brazell.

It takes a village, and a few million dollars, to make the dream of a regional park come true. Or so that's how it happened to Rancho San Rafael Regional Park, which celebrated its 40th anniversary this year, having gone from a ranch for raising cattle to raising hot air balloons!

The history of Rancho San Rafael is extensive and complex, especially in determining who owned the land through the years. This is due to various parcels being bought, sold, repurchased and resold. The local Native American tribes likely were the first inhabitants before the early European pioneers arrived and claimed the land for agriculture. While an obituary for Charles Fran Heinz claims he was born on the ranch in the year 1885, the first non-native settlers believed to own the property and put it to use for agriculture were the Pincolini brothers.

The Pincolini Brothers

This Pincolini family consisted of five brothers who came to Reno from Italy between the years of 1897 and 1904. The oldest brother Guiseppe (Joe) worked a variety of jobs when he came to Reno, including ranch laborer, railroad track crewman, and owner of the Depot Hotel (purchased in 1902)

where he operated the Owl Bar. Joe and his brothers accumulated many parcels of land around Reno including the land that would become the park, as well as land in the south Truckee Meadows area. The brothers raised cattle, hogs and eggs on the ranch, which they sold to the hotels in downtown Reno.

In 1919, some of the ranch began to change hands. The Pincolini brothers sold land to Martin Pradere, who then sold a portion of the land to Russell

Jensen for raising sheep. Jensen built the first structures on the site—a five-room house for the ranch manager plus several other buildings.

Dr. Raphael Herman and Family

The name of the ranch, now the regional park, comes from Dr. Raphael Herman who purchased the farm in 1927, with his brother Norman Herman and sister-in-law Mariana.



Aerial photo of Reno in 1920s looking southeast with Rancho San Rafael on the bottom right. In the center is Mary S. Doten School. The photographer was John Sanford. Photo courtesy of Nevada Historical Society.

Sometime during the seventeen years when Dr. Herman lived in Reno, the land became known as Rancho San Rafael. Dr. Herman apparently did not mind the change in spelling from Raphael to Rafael.

Dr. Herman was an interesting man. He came to the United States in 1890 where he earned his living in the publishing business in New York, after having been born in Konigsburg, Germany in 1865. He also served as president of a company that manufactured steam products. While Dr. Herman received his education in Germany, he did receive honorary degrees from other institutions, including the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.

He arrived in Reno with his brother and sister-in-law around 1927, but the Herman family split their time with their other homes in Beverly Hills and Hollywood, California. Old-timers contend the Hermans did not spend much time in Reno, visiting only a few weeks each year. But apparently Dr. Herman spent enough time in Reno to be named one of 47 Nevadans in "Who's Who in America" during 1932.

Dr. Herman served the community in many ways; for example, in 1940 he sponsored a tea dance for senior boy scouts and girl scouts as a reward for advancement work. Norman and Mariana were active socialites in the community. In 1938, they hosted one of many cocktail parties at the ranch before leaving for their home in Beverly



The Herman House, designed by Paul Revere Williams, was built in the 1936. A front view of the house as seen in 2022, showing how nicely it lays on the landscape. Courtesy Alicia Barber, Reno Historical.

Hills; they were expected to return for the holidays.

Upon his death in 1946, Dr. Herman bequeathed large sums of money to many Reno charities and individuals, but the largest recipient of his \$720,000 estate (\$11 million in today's dollars) was his brother Norman Herman. Norman died in 1961, and subsequently his wife Mariana only spent a few weeks each summer at the ranch as its sole owner.

Keeping to its agricultural roots, purebred horned Hereford cattle were raised on the land, and there were 130 head at the time the ranch was acquired by Washoe County in 1980. Washoe County continued to graze the land with cattle until the late 1990s when the grazing area was replaced with a dog play area.

The main ranch house on the property was built in 1936 by the Hermans and

still stands on the property today; the County rents it for social gatherings and meetings. The Hermans hired renowned architect Paul Revere Williams to design the home.

Besides the main ranch house, there were several smaller buildings, including one called the Foreman's House. It had a basement which contained an incubator for chicken eggs when the County bought the ranch. A third building adjacent to the ranch house was eventually moved to the area by the Visitors Center and expanded. A dam and pond sat on the ranch, both built by the Hermans in 1955.

After the death of Norman Herman in 1961, proposals surfaced for purchasing the land for park facilities but it wasn't until 1976 that Mariana Herman officially put the ranch up for sale. The land was attractive to developers because it was the largest single-owner acreage near Reno. Citizens and legislators got behind the idea of purchasing the land for a park, and discussions took place on how to finance the purchase.

Process towards a Washoe County Park

In the end, the Nevada Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) saved the day (and the park) by coming forward to purchase the 408 acres of land (over time additional land was purchased or donated to total 570 acres as of 2021) for Herman's asking price of



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Rancho San Rafael

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\$7.5 million in late 1978. The ranch was then bought by Washoe County with a \$9 million general obligation bond issue approved by the voters of Washoe County on June 5, 1979.

An all-volunteer citizen Steering Committee, comprised of over 20 citizen advocates, was formed to help guide the park improvements, as well as the planned use and management of the site. Ultimately, this citizen advocacy effort resulted in the development of a far-reaching Master Plan for the site. Throughout the planning process, the County offered many opportunities for the public to provide suggestions to the plan.

The development of the park got off to a good start when in 1980 the Max C. Fleischmann Foundation gave the Washoe County Parks and Recreation Department \$1 million of the \$3 million needed to complete the first phase of park development. In this first phase, physical improvements such as parking lots, entry roads, playground, and walking paths were among the initial projects.

The park was dedicated in May 1982 and opened in July of that year. The grand celebration opening on July 3, 1982, took a circus theme, including the parade of elephants and horse rides, hot air balloons, games, ranching demonstrations, a running race and food offerings.

Some of the original features of the park included a picnic area, tree plantings and a playground. The playground was sunken to help keep the look of the land as a ranch, and the ponds were built for irrigation. A par fitness trail course was one of the early improvements. Renovation of Mrs. Herman's ranch house was a big project in the original master plan. The road into the park had to be fixed when Ronald Reagan came to Reno on his re-election campaign tour and visited the park—Reagan's staff insisted that the road be resurfaced so it wasn't so bumpy!

Great Reno Balloon Race

Since 1982, one of the many great activities which occur at Rancho San Rafael Park is the Great Reno Balloon Race (GRBR). This annual event began in 1982 with 20 balloons and has grown to include close to 100 balloons. Due to its philanthropic focus, the event helps to raise funds to finance many local scholarships.

The park would not be what it is today without the help from several influential citizens and monetary donors:

Max C. Fleischmann Foundation

This foundation (1951 to 1980) provided Reno with monetary gifts for 29 years, including Rancho San Rafael Park. Born in 1877, Mr. Fleischmann made his wealth from his family's business in the production and sale of yeast, margarine, vinegar and gin for the United States and Canada. He sold the business to J.P. Morgan in 1920, then moved to Nevada with his wife Sarah in 1930.

Besides Reno, he had ranches in Carson City and Yerington, plus a home in Glenbrook. He had no children or heirs when in 1951 he committed suicide in Santa Barbara, CA, by shooting himself (he was dying of cancer). Before he died, he instructed his trustees to give away all his money within 20 years of his wife's death. Many organizations benefitted from the \$63 million (which



Max C. Fleischmann



Wilbur May

grew to \$192 million over the years) he endowed to the Foundation established in his name, primarily the University of Nevada, Reno.

Wilbur May Foundation

The Wilbur May Foundation donated \$1 million in 1983 for the park to have a 15-acre arboretum, botanic garden, and a museum of natural history containing artifacts from the late Wilbur May's collection. The Wilbur May Foundation brought in experts to incorporate Mr. May's artifacts into realistic dioramas, and to this day the foundation continues to fund the renovation and maintenance of the exhibits.

Financed in part by the May Foundation, the Great Basin Adventure was a prominent feature of the park for many years. The Junior League of Reno was instrumental in fiscally supporting this feature. It contained a flume ride, an area for kids to ride ponies, and a mining exhibit. The flume ride, developed in the late 1980s, was the most controversial addition since many people wanted to keep to the ranching theme and not become an amusement park. But the May Foundation realized that kids loved the ride and didn't want it to be shut down when the park was short on money to do maintenance and repairs, so they contributed to its upkeep. Eventually it became too difficult to maintain the ride and it closed.

Wilbur D. May was the third son of David May, who founded May Company Department Stores in 1877 in Leadville, Colorado during that state's silver rush. Today, the May Company is part of Federated Department Stores (Macy's).

Wilbur was expected to be employed in the family business, but he had other interests and preferred being outdoors. Although only 16 years old, he became an ambulance driver with the expeditionary forces in WWII. After the war, he dabbled once again in the family business but found that retailing was not his passion. He learned to fly his own planes and he got the travel bug. He enjoyed being a big game hunter and traveled around the world on hunting trips. During one of his hunting trips to Africa, the stock market crashed in the United States, but fortunately he had sold his shares before he left; when he returned he bought back the same shares at a huge discount, making him quite rich. He added to his wealth with good investments in several other companies, such as the oil industry.

One Sound State

Around that time California was in financial trouble and began taxing personal income. Nevada seized the opportunity to attract millionaires to the state with the "One Sound State" campaign promoting Nevada's lack of state income tax, corporation tax and inheritance tax. This campaign brought many wealthy people to Nevada, Fleishmann and May among them along with Redfield and others who have benefited the state immensely.

So in 1936, Wilbur came to Reno and bought 2,600 acres of land in southwest Reno. The Double Diamond Ranch was named for Wilbur's initials stacked on top of each other which look like two diamonds, and the ranch became well-known for raising winning thoroughbred horses, as well as prized Black Angus cattle and Boston Bull Terrier dogs. Wilbur continued travelling, painting, writing songs, and even served as a reconnaissance pilot during WWII.



The Basque Monument is a large 22-feet tall sculpture depicting a Basque shepherd carrying a lamb over his shoulders under a full moon. Courtesy May Museum.

Back in Reno, he was a generous supporter of many causes which benefitted children. When he died in 1982, he left plans for a museum and arboretum to benefit children, which are evident today in the Wilbur D. May Center and the Arboretum.

The Pagoda Pavillion

Another early park feature was the Pagoda Pavilion, funded with generous donations by local businessmen including Henry Fay Ott Yup. This Chinese architecture style, known



Pagoda Pavillion

as 'Fly Eaves,' is common in Chinese construction and meant to ward off evil spirits. Mr. Fay Ott Yupp was always involved in the community until his passing away in 2013.

The Laxalt Family and The Basque Monument

The Basque Monument is one of the wonderful contributions to the park. Bob Laxalt was instrumental in this attribution to the Basque people and their importance to Nevada's history. Bob, who passed away in 2001, was an accomplished writer and was important in overseeing the Basque studies at the University of Nevada, Reno. His brother Paul was a governor of Nevada (1967 to 1971) and a United States Senator (1975 to 1987).

Friends of Rancho San Rafael

During the period when it became known that the Herman land was going up for sale and until the bond measure passed, a dedicated and energetic group of citizens, business leaders and influencers of the day, known as the Friends of Rancho San Rafael Park spearheaded the effort to promote the project to the community in advance of the vote for a \$9 million bond issue. The group was organized by W. Clark Santini, and included Virginia (Ginnie) and Bob Kersey, Rabbi Abraham L. Feinberg, and Patricia Blanchard. These people donated their time and passion to the project because they wanted to preserve the land for the benefit of the community and future generations. 

Information for this article came from newspaper articles (1900 through 2020) from the *Reno Gazette-Journal*, *Nevada State Journal*, *Reno Evening Gazette*, Washoe County Parks website, plus interviews with Karen Mullen-Ehly, Julie Conway, and Virginia Kersey.

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

Historic Reno Preservation Society *with* Washoe County Library System
In the Downtown Library Auditorium

HRPS Speaker Programs

2nd Sundays 2023, Noon

PLEASE NOTE: In April and May we switch to first Sunday!

Co-Chairs: Sheryl Hayes-Zorn and Susan Mullen

Historic Reno Preservation Society's free programs offer topics related to Reno's history.
Programs are held at 301 S. Center St.



Date: Sunday, February 12, 2023 at noon

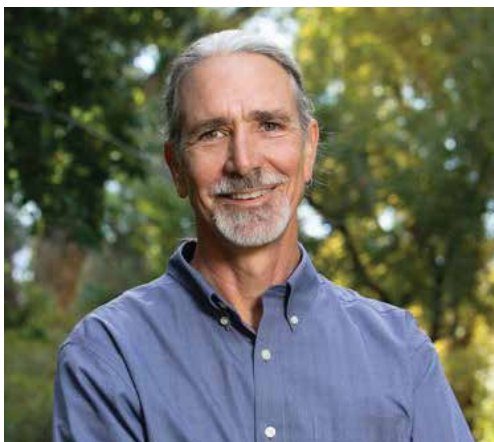
Presenters: Anne Simone with ZoAnn Campana

Topic: The Life and Works of Frederic J. DeLongchamps

This video program by Anne Simone and ZoAnn Campana highlights the work of Frederic J. DeLongchamps, who had a long career as an architect in Reno and the surrounding area. He designed seven county courthouses, six of which are still in use.

Anne moved to Reno in 1998 and immediately joined HRPS and became a Walking Tour guide three years later, focusing her research on the architects who designed our historic buildings, including Frederic DeLongchamps, Edward Parsons and Russell Mills.

ZoAnn Campana is a professional architectural historian, and is responsible for the Newlands Historic District being placed on the National Register of Historic Places. She researched more 600 properties in the process.



Date: Sunday, March 12, 2023 at noon

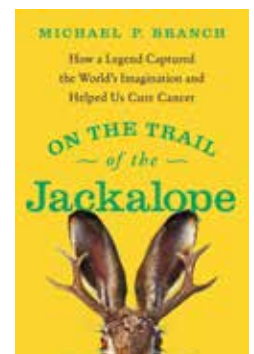
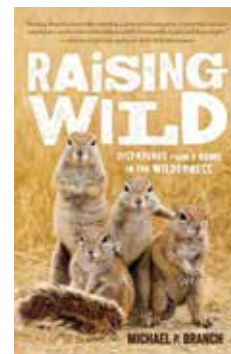
Presenter: Michael Branch

Topic: Raising Wild

Local author and educator Michael Branch gives a lively presentation featuring his place-based creative non-fiction, including *"Raising Wild: Dispatches from a Home in the Wilderness"* and *"On the Trail of the Jackalope."*

Michael P. Branch is a professor of literature and environment at the University of Nevada, Reno, where he teaches creative nonfiction, American literature, environmental studies, and film studies. He served for 16 years as the book review editor of the peer-reviewed, Oxford University Press journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in*

Literature and Environment, during which time he edited more than 850 reviews. He is co-founder and series co-editor of the University of Virginia Press book series *Under the Sign of Nature: Explorations in Ecocriticism*, with 36 titles to date. He has published nine books and more than 200 articles. An award-winning writer and humorist, Michael is a recipient of the Silver Pen award from the Nevada Writers Hall of Fame.



Date: Sunday, April 2, 2023 at noon

(Note: This is the first Sunday in April)

Presenters: Midtown merchants: Larry DeVincenzi, Christian and Kasey Christensen, Eric and Monique Baron

Topic: Surviving Midtown: A Panel Discussion



The owners of three businesses discuss the challenges of keeping their businesses going during major street construction and redesign on South Virginia Street, followed by the Covid pandemic, which forced business owners to change how they operated facing restrictions, construction barriers and customer health and safety concerns.

Larry DeVincenzi and his family came up with the idea for Rum Sugar Lime during a family vacation in Mexico. The idea was to introduce Reno to an upscale, tropical bar experience.

Christian and Kasey Christensen opened Sup restaurant in Midtown in August 2007. With their combined 40 years of restaurant service and ownership, they focus on healthy homemade recipes made daily from scratch.

Eric and Monique Baron of the Melting Pot World Emporium in Midtown got their start vending fashion and lifestyle items at outdoor West Coast music and arts festivals. They've traveled to many countries to source unique products for the shop.



Date: Sunday, May 7, 2023 at noon

First Topic: Short Annual Meeting

Second Topic: How to preserve the costumes and entertainment: When Hollywood Came to Reno!

Presenter: Karen Burns

When the world-famous "Hello Hollywood, Hello!" show opened in Reno's fabulous new MGM Hotel and Casino in 1978, it was billed as The Biggest Show in the World, on The Biggest Stage in the World, appearing in The Biggest Little City in the World--Reno, Nevada. In other words, it was a BIG deal. Karen Burns was a professional dancer who had appeared in other productions but to have a role in this extravaganza was the golden opportunity of a lifetime.

Karen's story did not end with the final curtain of the show in 1989, however.

Following the show's close, and with what Karen terms the "serendipity of life," she received the chance to purchase "a piece of history" of over 1,250 of the original spectacular costumes from this show. These costumes help to tell the story of art, culture and entertainment in Reno, when it was once one of the Entertainment Capitals of the World.

Karen Burns has been a Nevada resident for over 60 years. She is a graduate of the University of Nevada Reno with a Bachelor of Arts in English, German and Physical Education with Dance Distinction. She has maintained a State of Nevada Educational License. Karen is currently the producer/director/owner of Karen Burns Productions LLC, an entertainment company.



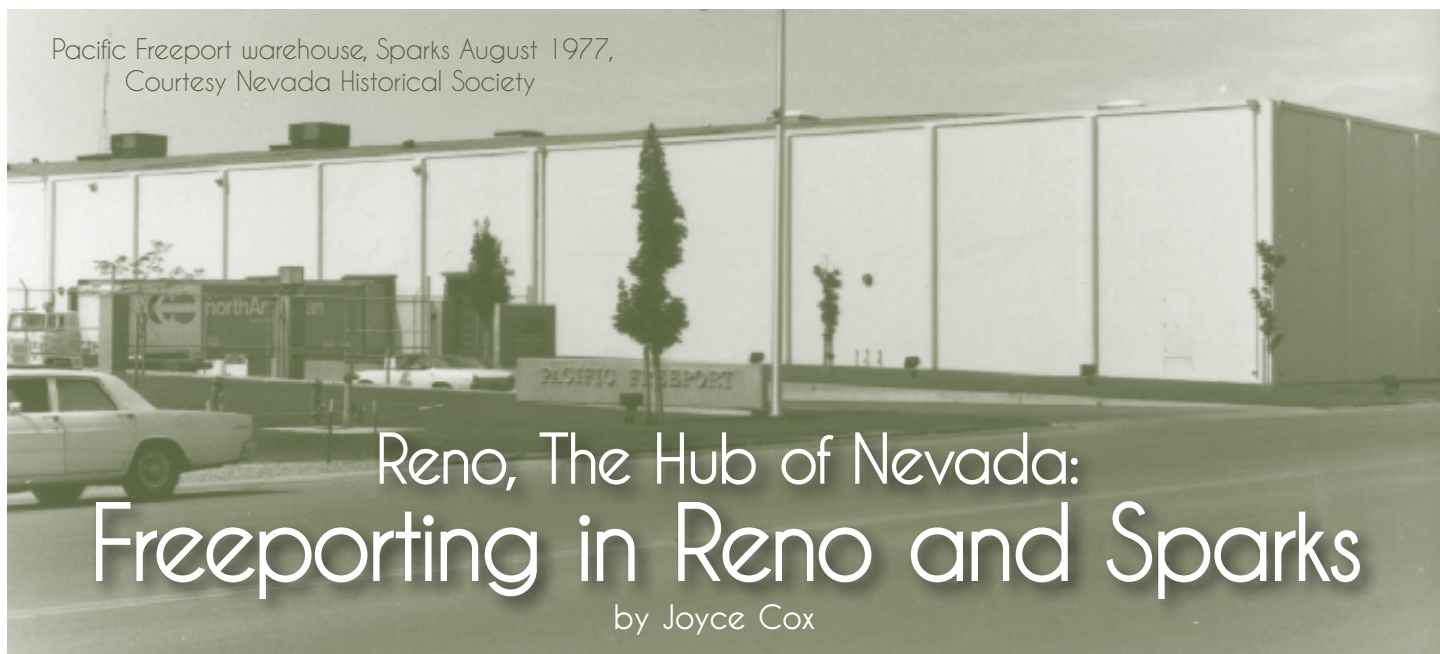


HRPS presents this list of historic properties not to point fingers or to raise alarms, but to generate awareness and appreciation. We want their owners, whether public or private, to know that we care about these places and that we consider them highly significant to Reno's history and worthy of preservation. Lastly, we want to offer our support to help ensure that they can remain safe and protected for years to come. You can find full entries for each property listed below on Reno Historical at <https://renohistorical.org/>.

1. **Benham-Beltz House** (likely 1868/1869), 347 West Street
2. **Nystrom Guest House** (1875), Formerly in 300-block on Ralston Street, now up on blocks off 4th Street, between Washington and Vine Streets
3. **I.O.O.F. Lodge/Reno Savings Bank** (1877), 195 N. Virginia Street
4. **Reno National Bank** (1915), 206 N. Virginia Street
5. **Howell/Sinai House** (1916), 448 Hill Street
6. **Piazza Building** (1925), 354 N. Virginia Street
7. **Southern Pacific Railroad Depot** (1926), 135 E. Commercial Row
8. **Freight House** (1931), North side of Greater Nevada Field on Evans Avenue
9. **El Reno Apartment Homes** (1937), 1461 Lander Street
10. **Solari Building** (1938), 1052 S. Virginia Street
11. **First Church of Christ, Scientist/Lear Theater** (1939), 501 Riverside Drive
12. **Regina Apartments** (1941), 260 Island Avenue



Pacific Freeport warehouse, Sparks August 1977,
Courtesy Nevada Historical Society



Reno, The Hub of Nevada: Freeporting in Reno and Sparks

by Joyce Cox

Editor's Note: *The broader scope of this article is about transportation, about moving people and goods. Initially planners thought water was the only way to accomplish that, on oceans and rivers, and with four-legged critters like horses, oxen and mules. The railroad to the west changed that thinking, as did the Lincoln Highway begun in 1913 and the interstate highway system begun in 1956. The "vehicles" improved as railroad steam engines gave way to diesel, the four-legged critter was replaced with the automobile and truck, and then there was the new-fangled airplane.*

The path was in place, and the "vehicles" were ready, but where to put the goods, and how? What laws and regulations would happen? This article describes how Reno and Sparks and the state of Nevada approached the growing industry.

In the late 1890s and into the 1920s, the Reno area was the commercial distribution center for all of northern Nevada because of its unique location at the junction of a nationwide east-west and north-south highway along with multiple railroad lines (Western Pacific and Southern Pacific). In February 1949, the distribution industry was given a boost from a new and unusual law passed by the Nevada Legislature that made Nevada at that time the only Freeport state in the United States.

How was this remarkable law conceived? Edwin S. Bender, often credited as the father of the law and the one to have

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A free inland port or Freeport allows goods to be brought into the state to be warehoused without being subject to state or local taxes.

.....

imagined it, owned a large commercial warehouse that was storing 600 washing machines for a California firm when he was asked if Nevada charged taxes on stored items. Bender along with the Reno Chamber of Commerce, the Reno Rotary club and other businessmen thought that making Nevada a free inland port would help to diversify Nevada's economy.

A free inland port or Freeport allows goods to be brought into the state to be warehoused without being subject to state or local taxes. Proponents of this law included the Nevada Department of Taxation, the Reno Chamber of Commerce's Trade and Industry Committee and the Reno Rotary. Washoe County Assemblyman Carl E. Fuetsch introduced the law to the Nevada Assembly in February 1949.

The bill allowed out-of-state manufacturers to store goods in Nevada for one year without paying personal property taxes. A.B. 148 was signed by Governor Vail Pittman on March 16, 1949 and the bill immediately became law. The Chamber, the City of Reno, and the state of Nevada all envisioned that a large warehousing and distribution industry would be the end result with Nevada becoming the distribution center for the west. Goods could be distributed from Reno to the West Coast, including California and to the intermountain west in three days and often within one night. After a few years and with some modifications, warehousing industry and distribution industry were up and running.

In 1955, the Freeport law was amended and expanded to allow merchandise to come into the state to be "assembled, bound, joined, processed, disassembled, divided, cut, broken in bulk, relabeled or repacked" while stored in Nevada warehouses without being taxed by the state or by local governments. This modification brought warehousing, distribution, and light manufacturing industries to Nevada and Reno/Sparks areas.

The law itself was written to be liberally interpreted to define warehousing. There were questions: Is an airport a warehouse? Are cattle and sheep coming from California fields

continued on page 12

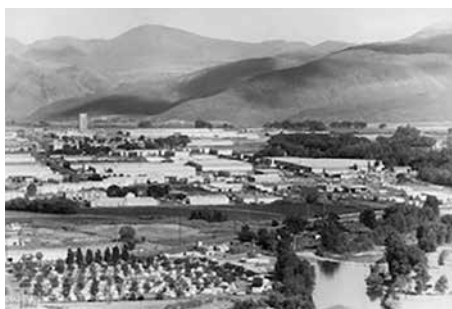
to graze in Nevada fields considered warehouses? What about mining equipment being stored in warehouses near Nevada mines? (The Nevada Attorney General ruled yes to airports and no to grazing cattle and sheep). So, the definition was set.

National recognition and promotion of the law began in 1949 when the Reno Chamber of Commerce mailed 1,000 copies of its new publication Nevada's New Free Port Law/Economic Facts on Reno to businesses throughout the United States.

A brief description of the law was included in the 1949 issue of *Facts about Reno, Sparks, and Washoe County, Nevada: A Summary of Statistical Information*. The area was promoted as an ideal location for light manufacturing and industry and as an inland free port. The Reno Chamber of Commerce plugged Reno's "transportation facilities, advantageous climate (no need for air conditioning or heating of warehouses) and labor supply."

An article "State Taxes" in the September 1949 issue of *Business Week* said about the Freeport Law, "It is an obvious invitation to corporations doing business anywhere in the west to use Nevada for their warehousing." As in a similar article in the 1939 *Business Week*, Nevada received a favorable rating with only having a property tax. Articles appeared in several newspapers touting the tax savings from the use of the law.

An Associated Press (AP) article in June 1949 did mention that it would take time for "the law to begin to pay off" because Nevada did not have warehouses big enough to accommodate all of the new businesses



Warehousing Industrial Park



J.C. Penney's warehouse move in 1970s, Courtesy Chamber of Commerce.

coming to the state. Another article in the June 3, 1949 *Sacramento Bee* reported, "It is hoped that with the tax freedom incentive, manufacturers will find it profitable to put up their own warehouses. That is when the law will begin to pay off. Nevada will reap the taxes from the real property, plus the added benefits of payrolls for warehousing staffs."

Businesses were coming. General Motors was thought to be the first company to take advantage of the new law when it signed a contract with E. S. Bender in December 1949 to store Frigidaire products that were destined for its San Francisco and Los Angeles divisions. The contract brought 125 to 200 carloads of merchandise to the Bender warehouse each year after that.

Local newspapers reported that Gear Works of Muncie, Indiana was the first nationally known company to make use of the law when it shipped 500 outboard motors to a Reno warehouse. Apparently Gear Works had begun shipping its products as the bill was moving through the Nevada Legislature.

In order for this warehousing and distribution industry to expand in the state, the Reno Chamber continued their ever-present goal of reducing railroad freight rates and tariffs for shipping goods into and out of Nevada. Edgar Walker, considered a freight rate expert, worked at the Chamber from the 1920s through the 1960s monitoring freight rates and in the 1940s, the Chamber was able to save shippers thousands of dollars through reduced rates. By 1950, haulers on rail and truck lines shipping from San Francisco to Reno saved 35 cents for every 100 pounds of freight. So in 1965, it was cheaper to ship commodities from Oakland to Reno than from Oakland to San Francisco.

Interstate truck lines quickly provided terminal facilities for distribution service. Thirteen motor common carriers (like Wells Cargo and PIE) serviced the area, but were limited by regulations as to what they could carry and where they could pick up and deliver. Ten freight forwarders (Railway Express Agency (REA) and Air Express) arranged transport and delivery.

In the 1970s, deregulation of the trucking industry made the movement of all types of goods less complicated, opening a new era for the industry and allowing for its overall expansion in many areas.

Warehouses were being built using a new tilt-up concrete construction method. The first concrete tilt-up warehouse in Reno may have been a 10 by 16-foot addition added to the E. W. McKenzie Construction's private warehouse on Kietzke Lane and Mill Street.

The tilt-up industry required a lighter weight concrete in order to lift/tilt the walls upright, sparking a new mining industry: light-weight aggregate. Early players in this industry were Bruno Benna and CB Concrete.

John Dermody came to Reno in 1950 and needed a warehouse for a property at Valley Road and Timber Way. He planned to build the first tilt-up structure for warehousing. Dermody and E.W. McKenzie signed a contract in 1953 for a 25,000-square-foot warehouse. The two went on to build many more using this technology.

Tilt-up buildings, sometimes called prefabricated concrete warehouses, were made by pouring concrete in a wall panel on the ground, and then letting it cure. A crane would lift the finished wall in place. McKenzie advertised his Tilt-up buildings as costing less and taking less time to erect. Local newspapers reported that a tin warehouse of the same size was \$14,000, a brick warehouse, \$15,000 and a tilt-up \$12,000. This became a perfect way to construct the hundreds of warehouses.

By 1952, Frigidaire division of General Motors, Nash-Kelvinator, Proctor Electric of Pennsylvania, Johnson Outboard Motors and Evinrude Outboard Motors were using Nevada warehouses. In 1954, McKenzie Construction added 25,000 square feet

of space to the Osborne & Dermody, Inc. warehouse on Valley Road. The warehouse costing \$135,000 had a sprinkler system for fire protection and seven doors next to railroad spurs allowing products to be transferred quickly to the building. Products stored included Johnson Motors, Deraef Powdered Milk, Poto-Hoe sprayer Co., Kelvinator, and Derby Food Company.

McKenzie Construction added an addition of 40,000 square feet in 1948-49 to the Bender Warehouse on North Valley Road in the Vaughn Mill area that would make it at that time the largest warehouse in the Reno area at 80,000 square feet. Vernon M. Meiser of Meiser Construction built over 200 tilt-up buildings in Sparks.

The Reno Chamber and the Trade and Industry Committee surveyed the Reno Sparks area for industrial sites and industrial parks and warehouses sprung up. In 1953, Walter H. Sullivan and Sons purchased 50 acres of the C. J. Christensen ranch on Glendale Road and Stanford Way in Sparks to build warehouses that were meant to lease long-term to companies taking advantage of the new law. These tilt-up buildings were to be 800,000 to 1,000,000 square feet and would rent for approximately 60 cents a square foot.

The law was additionally protected when its statutory provisions were added to the Nevada Constitution in 1960. This gave longer-lasting protection and made it more difficult to be revised even if the State or local governments were in need of funds. Businesses coming to Nevada did not need to worry about taxes being added.

The Reno Chamber declared of Nevada, "For the space loving individual... America's last frontier. For the space needing industry... America's new frontier."

The blue light special that you bought in a Los Angeles K-Mart was cheaper because of being warehoused and distributed from the gigantic S. S. Kregel K-Mart warehouse in east Sparks (thought to be the largest in the State).

Baker and Taylor, the largest book distribution center in the country, opened at 380 Edison Way in the Sierra Pacific Lands of Sierra Industrial Park in 1966.



Frank Bender, of Bender Group and the son of Edwin Bender, built 80,000 square feet for public warehousing on North Valley Road and later added 40,000 square feet to that.

Ski & Sky opened a beautiful Frank Lloyd Wright-like warehouse first on Valley Road and then the Sierra Industrial Park in 1967.

Other major companies followed:

- Monsanto
- Gardner-Denver
- Westinghouse
- Allis-Chalmers
- Montgomery Ward
- Sears Roebuck & Company
- Pitney-Bowers
- Eljer Plumbing
- Brown & Williamson Tobacco
- Chemstrand
- Norge
- Lionel Toy Co.
- Bixxel Corporation
- Bigelow-Wanford
- E. T. Barwick Mills
- Ithaca Gun Co.
- Standard Knitting Mills and
- Rubbermaid Corporation.


Warehouses used little water, were environmentally friendly and brought a much-needed diversification of industry in Washoe County, Reno, and Sparks.

When Stead Air Force Base was decommissioned in 1966, it became known as Stead Airport, a General Aviation Airport, a public-use airport that does not have scheduled service. In 1979, the J. C. Penney Catalogue Distribution Facility, occupying 1.6 million square feet and employing 1,500 opened (NHS Chamber Collection) nearby. The

Lear Warehouse opened in the Parr Industrial Park.

Pacific Freeport first stored goods in the Southern Pacific Railroad Machine shops, then opened a large warehouse near East Greg in Sparks. E. T. Hermann, president of Pacific Freeport, reported that he liked the climate, "lack of humidity, excellent transportation in and out of the area and the stable labor force." The Pacific Freeport warehouse in Elko housed jumbo refrigerated railroad cars.

There was estimated to be 8 million square feet of warehouse space in Sparks-Reno in 1975. The Viet Nam War brought a diverse collection of products from Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Southeast Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. Dog chow was being manufactured and distributed from a warehouse in East Sparks.

In May 1977, Norman Cardoza wrote in the *Nevada Evening Gazette*, "The Truckee Meadows continues to have appealing advantages, location in the geographic epicenter of a vast marketing area, excellent transportation facilities, offer attractive living conditions, and do not suffer the congestion and crime problems of the bigger cities." 

Information for this article came from numerous newspaper articles and "Plans for the future, Reno Chamber of Commerce," 1949; "Bonanzaland for Distribution Handling and Shipping: A Report on Reno-Sparks-Washoe County, Nevada," 1960; "Behind the Arch," Cox, Joyce M.; "The Story of Reno, Nevada's Unique Chamber of Commerce and The Making of the Biggest Little City in the World," Cox, Joyce M.

Thanks to Jerry Aaron and his book "Nevada's Teamsters, Truckers and Truck Stops" for his assistance.

Joyce Cox is a retired research librarian and the author of the *Arcadia* books, Washoe County (2011) and Sparks (2017). Soon to be published is a history of the Chamber of Commerce.

Message From Your HRPS Board

Dear Members and Friends,

Many Thank Yous

The last three years have been tough, difficult, concerning for all of us – for you and for HRPS. We want to thank you all for your support as we tried to offer programs through Zoom and this year 2022 as we brought back our Walking Tours and Speaker Programs. They say it takes a village and we thank you for joining us as we rebuild our village. You know that we don't ask you for financial support very often. We try to operate as a relatively low-budget non-profit. But when we do ask, we are always surprised and thankful for your support. Everyone's donation is a plus and we appreciate your support. I want to thank a few members (including families) specifically: Dana Bennett, Leslie Brenneke, Rob and Debbie Crosswell, Jean Green, Jacquie Foundation, Pat Klos, Mark Paloolian, Thomas Paxson, Mona Reno, Jo and Sandy Sanborn, and Reg Willison.

A FootPrints Founder Passes

HRPS *FootPrints* long-time editor and supporter Sharon Walbridge has passed away. Sharon was a Charter member of HRPS, listed as a Director on the Articles of Incorporation that were filed February 20, 1998. Sharon and Pat Klos produced the first issues of *FootPrints*, beginning with a two-page mailing. Sharon was the



Editor of *FootPrints* for the first ten years of HRPS. In 2004, as Editor of HRPS *FootPrints*, Sharon Walbridge was given the 2004 Advocate Award by the City of Reno Historical Resources Commission at the May 12 Reno City Council meeting. The Reno Historical Resources Commission (HRC) was established by the city's historic preservation ordinance by the Reno City Council in 1993 and since 1997 has recognized owners and

preservation advocates through the historic preservation awards program. In giving the award, Councilwoman Sharon Zadra said "Sharon Walbridge is the founding editor and current editor-in-chief of *FootPrints*, the newsletter of the Historic Reno Preservation Society (HRPS). Since its inception in 1998, *FootPrints* has grown into a first-class publication that promotes awareness of and generates interest in historic preservation and local history."

Sharon's husband Bill Walbridge was the Treasurer of HRPS during the early years – until 2008. The Walbridges contributed greatly to HRPS and we honor them both.

A 2023 Home Tour

It's that time of the year to begin work on our Harvest of Homes Home Tour! That's assuming that COVID and such hold off and we have enough volunteers. The first things that need to happen are to pick a date and select the homes to be on this year's Tour. Right now, the best date looks to be September 23, that's after the Rib Cook Off, the Balloon Races, the Camel Races and the Reno Air Races, and there is no UNR Football game that date! Interested in helping this year? Give Carol a call at 775-560-0602 or email board@historicro.org. We'll need your help to make this happen.

Walking Tour Seminar

Saturday, February 4, 10 am to noon
Nevada Historical Society

It's time to refresh our Walking Tours, add some new Tours, and add some new Tour Leaders. It's been ten years since we gathered at the Nevada Historical Society for a "Walking Tour – 101" Seminar and it's time to do it again. A number of Tour Guides have moved and/or retired during the COVID years. Fortunately, we have scripts and videos for many of the Tours we hope to replace. We invite anyone interested in possibly being a Tour Guide to join us at the Nevada Historical Society for presentations and discussions on

being a HRPS Walking Tour Guide. We encourage current Tour Guides to join us for a refresh and to help out. Please RSVP to Carol Coleman, 775-560-0602 (text is good), or board@historicro.org if you'd like to join us for this seminar.

Welcome Pat Cantwell as a Board Member

Pat Cantwell has been a HRPS member for a lot of years, and this year he volunteered to help with the Walking Tours. He definitely showed organization skills and dedication. We are pleased to welcome him as a new HRPS Board Member. He brings experience as an account executive at KTVN and we look forward to his help in communicating with you and with the media.

HRPS Annual Meeting Sunday, May 7, noon

Our Bylaws require that we hold an annual meeting. We'll do just that in May, at our last Speaker Program for 2022-2023. We'll also have a great presenter—Karen Burns. We've asked her to talk about saving the costumes from the MGM and Hello Hollywood Hello. We usually think of historic preservation in terms of properties and buildings, but Karen is involved in the historic preservation of our culture and entertainment. Hope you can join us.

Need a Membership Chair

ZoAnn Campana has been doing yeoman duty as Membership Chair even though she's moved to Las Vegas! But especially in December, our biggest renewal month, it's too difficult to keep up and Carol Coleman has taken over the duty to stay abreast. We really need a local person to be responsible for Membership. That person needs to have computer technical skills and work in Wild Apricot, the membership management system we now use. Does this sound like something you would be interested in? Contact Carol Coleman, 775-560-0602 (text is fine) or board@historicro.org to discuss this.

HRPS Lifetime Members

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 Sandi Bitler
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 Lynn Bremer
 Holly Walton-Buchanan
 Florence Ann Burgess
 George Burke
 Linda Burke
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 Jan & Phil Chik
 Press & Delores Clewe
 Karalea Clough
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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
☐ \$25.00 Individual
☐ \$45.00 Family
☐ \$100.00 Supporting
☐ \$200.00 Business
☐ \$250.00 Preservation Patron
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☐ \$1,000.00 Lifetime Member

My Additional Donation:

\$ _____ Pat Klos Annual
 Volunteer Award Fund
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HRPS Quarterly *FootPrints* Preference (Please check one):

☐ Hard Copy ☐ Email Only

Name(s) _____

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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 historicro.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

Visa/MasterCard Credit or Debit Card # _____

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