

Historic Reno PRESERVATION SOCIETY

FootPrints

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Bethel AME: The Oldest Surviving African American Church in Nevada

by Mella Rothwell Harmon

Editor's Note: *FootPrints continues its series on Reno churches 1870-1950. The houses of worship allowed people to celebrate their faith as a congregation. These religious organizations also provided a social outlet for their membership. Bethel, in addition to the above, provided a place for congregants to share their African American culture, address civil-rights reforms and, at times, provided housing.*

African Americans have long been an enduring, albeit small, component of Nevada's population. In 1860 the black population totaled 44 in the part of Utah Territory that comprised what would soon become Nevada. It peaked at 396 in the late nineteenth century, and by 1910, the census reported 513. At the turn of the twentieth century, Reno was Nevada's largest town and home to the majority of the black population.

Reno's small African American population had few social institutions to champion causes or to provide continuity with social life. Despite extreme social restrictions, blacks in Reno strove to maintain their dignity and sense of community. In 1907 they joined together to improve their lot by organizing Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and in 1910, the Colored Independent Political Club.

Bethel AME Church has fostered social equality through its active role in the community, maintaining a direct link with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and demonstrating an abiding dignity in the face of conspicuous and unrelenting discrimination.

When Reno's AME church was organized, there were 225 blacks in town and the congregation anticipated a membership of about 50. In spring 1910, the California Conference of the AME Church sent Reverend William Solley to Reno to facilitate the construction of a church building.

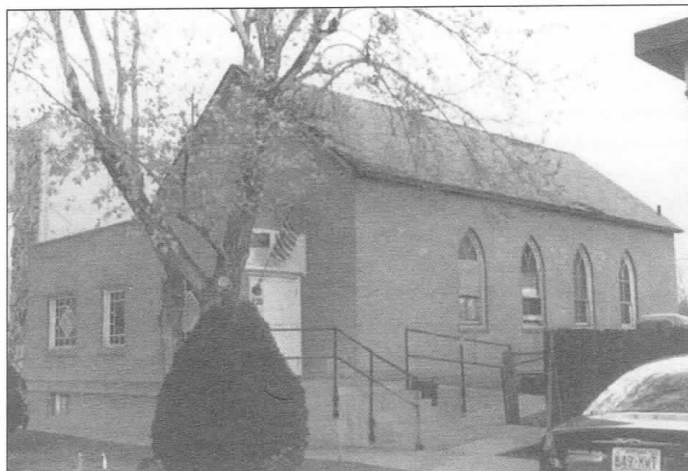
On March 16, 1910, Reverend Solley reported, "We obtained a permit today to build our church in Reno on the lot on Bell Street, just back of Sheriff Ferrel's home. The lot had a

house on it, Mrs. Hamilton's, but that was moved off to make room for the church. We will put up a simple little frame church at first, but a good little building. The Reno church will be built at once. I hope we can start on it tomorrow. At any rate we will get under way some day this week sure."

Good progress was made on the church, and the dedication ceremony was held May 29, 1910. The church building, located at 220 Bell Street in Reno, was a tiny building on a tiny 1599 square foot parcel, located just south of

the railroad tracks that run east and west through town. The clapboard building was small, rectangular, gable-roofed, with a centrally-placed, enclosed, hipped-roofed vestibule, and a single entry door. The most prominent features of the little church were the four Gothic pointed-arch stained glass windows.

The Bethel AME church was Reno's first black church, only the second structure built by blacks in Nevada to house



Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. The arched side windows are part of the old church built in 1910. The brick exterior and front renovation were done in 1941. Courtesy of Nevada State Historic Preservation Office.

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their social activities, and is clearly the oldest surviving black institution in the state.

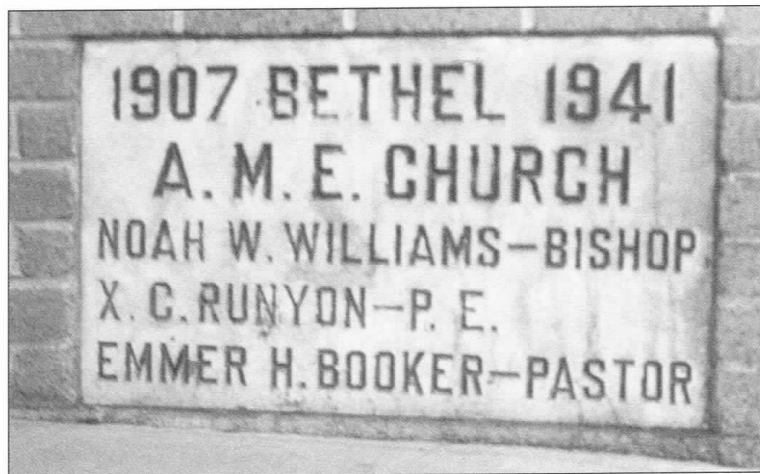
It is the remodeled version of the church, undertaken in 1941, which stands today. The 1,782-square-foot building encompasses the original sanctuary and an enlarged vestibule. A full basement houses a kitchen, furnace, and an air conditioning unit. Additional space on the north side provides a parlor, library and study, choir room, and the pastor's office. A simple wooden cross adorns the peak of the gabled roof. At one time, the cross was outlined in neon, but only a small section of tubing remains.

Bethel AME was not only the seat of religious observance, but also a center of social interaction. For the 31 years between initial construction and the 1941 remodeling, church members sought to promote equality for blacks through the example of good citizenship. It is not surprising that when in 1919, Reno blacks, along with several prominent whites, formed the first Nevada chapter of the NAACP, a majority of the founding membership was affiliated with Bethel AME Church. Many of the names on the Application for Charter submitted to the NAACP Board of Directors listed their addresses at 226 Bell Street, a boardinghouse adjacent to the church that catered to black residents. The NAACP chapter held its executive meetings at the AME church.

By early 1941, the presiding pastor at Bethel, Reverend E.H. Booker, sought

to find new quarters for the congregation, which wanted to expand its facilities to include a kitchen and space for a social hall.

Members of Bethel AME raised money for their church by serving meals to the public Friday nights. Since a number of the members worked as domes-



*The cornerstone of Bethel AME's original church at 220 Bell Street.
Courtesy of Nevada State Historic Preservation Office.*

tics in the homes of wealthy and prominent white families, the level of culinary skill was high, and the church dinners were popular with the white population. It was also an acceptable way for the whites to support the black community.

To further the expansion goals of church, Reverend Booker made an offer on an existing building, Dania Hall, at Seventh and Sierra Streets in northwest Reno. At the February 24, 1941 Reno city council meeting, however, a large group of property owners from the neighborhood appeared and demanded that the church be prevented from taking possession of the building. The protesters asserted that property values in the neighborhood would suffer if the congregation were allowed to buy the hall.

Hence, on March 29, 1941, the Nevada

State Journal reported that Reverend Booker had relinquished the contract to purchase Dania Hall and had made the decision to remodel the existing church building instead.

The remodel entailed construction of a basement with a kitchen and dining room, the addition of three Sunday school rooms, and a brick veneer on building's exterior. A \$5,000 fund drive for the construction was undertaken, but by the end of May only \$852 had been raised. Ultimately unable to secure the needed funds, the church obtained permission from district court to borrow the full \$5,000. The opening of the remodeled church was held on August 15, 1941.

During the 1950s, Bethel AME Church continued its role as arbiter for race relations. In 1954,

Brotherhood Week activities were held at the Church, and speakers from various denominations and organizations stressed the "immediate need for concerted action by all Reno groups in improving local conditions for minority groups."

Bethel also maintained its position within the NAACP, serving as the official meeting location for the local organization, and contributing many of its congregants to the group's membership. During an "action-packed two hour meeting" at the AME church in January 1958, the NAACP voted to endorse the area's first low-cost public housing development proposed by the Reno housing authority and approved by the Reno city council.

The January 1958 meeting also set the

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branch's agenda for the coming year to include the "study and development of proposals to be presented to the 1959 session of the state legislature." The Reno-Sparks branch filed a resolution of its opposition to State Senate Bill 177, which proposed to abolish the state welfare department and transfer welfare activities to the county level.


Although not formally legislated, segregation was practiced in Reno until the 1960s. Blacks were restricted in their housing and employment options. They were not served in white restaurants and bars. Nor could they enter white casinos, or seek accommodations in white hotels. Such practices were common across Nevada, resulting in the state being compared in some circles to Mississippi.

Prior to the 1960 winter Olympics, held at nearby Squaw Valley, California, the branch also petitioned the members of the Reno and Sparks city councils, and the Washoe County Board of County Commissioners: "... to make it mandatory upon the operators of all of our places of public accommodation, including hotels, motels, restaurants, taverns and places of gaming and amusement to offer equal service and facilities to any well behaved, respectable person or persons who may desire same, regardless of his or their nationality, color or race."

Also in 1960, the local NAACP branch picketed the Woolworth store in Reno, presumably to protest the company's discriminatory practices in the South. The NAACP newsletter admonished members to continue to "withhold your patronage from this store. This program has been very effective in many areas. Remember a dollar spent in this Woolworth Store denies a Negro a seat at a Woolworth lunch counter in the South."

Legislative relief from discrimination was slow in coming to Nevada. The first political action came in 1958, when a Reno judge declared Nevada's anti-miscegenation law unconstitutional. In 1959, the Nevada legislature repealed the anti-miscegenation law, and other racist holdovers from the nineteenth century and from 1919. In 1960, the legislature banned discrimination by public agencies, contractors for the state, and apprentice programs. It was not until 1965, a full year after the federal Civil Rights Act, that Nevada passed enforceable civil rights legislation, though Nevada did not outlaw housing discrimination until 1971.

The latter half of the twentieth century saw the AME congregation grow to such an extent that by 1993 it sought to acquire a larger church. The congregation now worships in a facility in Sparks. The older church was sold to a private party, who converted the building into a shelter for homeless veterans. In the past few years, however, Bethel AME repurchased its historic church, and despite a recent fire, plans to convert it to an African American cultural center.

Reno's Bethel AME Church is arguably Nevada's most significant building associated with the history of its African American population. 

Mella Harmon is a historic preservation specialist with the State Historic Preservation Office, past chairman of the Reno Historical Resources Commission, and a HRPS member. Ms. Harmon holds a master's degree in land use planning and historic preservation from the University of Nevada, Reno.

AME, Reno & Nevada Timeline

- 1846 Donner Party rests in Truckee Meadows
- 1848 United States acquires Nevada by virtue of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo
- 1849 California Gold Rush begins
- 1850 Congress establishes Utah Territory, of which Nevada is a part
- 1850 Jim Beckwourth, a black trailguide, discovers what is known as the Beckwourth Trail from today's Reno to Marysville, CA.
- 1859 Silver miners discover Comstock Lode
- 1859 Virginia City springs up over night
- 1860 Black population 44 in Utah Territory
- 1861-1865 Civil War over slavery
- 1864 Nevada becomes the 36th state
- 1868 The Central Pacific RR auctions off 400 lots in a neatly laid out town site, now downtown Reno
- 1878 Mineral production in Nevada begins to decline
- 1880 Nevada's population: 62,266
- 1889-1890 100 inches of snow, 95% of livestock die
- 1890 Nevada's population: 47,355
- 1895 University of Nevada moves from Elko to Reno
- 1905 Las Vegas auctions townsites
- 1907 Bethel AME establishes congregation
- 1908 Reno's Chinatown burns in arson fire
- 1910 Reno's black population 225, Nevada's 513
- 1910 Bethel AME Church built
- 1910 Colored Independent Political Club forms
- 1910 Colonization of Black Springs
- 1914-1918 World War I
- 1919 NAACP forms in Reno
- 1931 Legalization of gambling and reduction of residency requirement for divorce in Nevada
- 1941 AME tries to buy Dania Hall at Seventh & Sierra
- 1941 Brick expansion built around original church
- 1939-1945: World War II
- 1950s Reno's AME arbiter for race relations
- 1958 NAACP endorses area's first low-cost public housing
- 1958 Reno judge declares Nevada antimiscegenation law unconstitutional
- 1960 Nevada legislature bans discrimination by public agencies
- 1960 Local NAACP pickets Woolworth
- 1964 Federal Civil Rights Act passes
- 1965 Nevada passes enforceable civil rights legislation
- 1971 Nevada outlaws housing discrimination
- 1993 AME moves its large congregation to Sparks
- 1993 Old AME church a shelter for homeless veterans
- 2001 Bethel AME repurchases old AME church for a cultural center
- 2004 Suspicious fire at Bethel AME

Edward Parsons, Architect

by Anne Simone and Alice Parsons

Edward Parsons had a long and successful career as an architect and as a preservationist, despite his very rough early years. His father died when Ed was only ten, his mother four years later; he graduated from college just as the depression hit, and once he did get his feet on the ground in Reno and had begun to make a name for himself, he was drafted into the army! In spite of all that, he had a career of which anyone would have been proud.

Edward Shier Parsons was born in 1907 in Tonopah, NV. After his father died, the family moved to Salt Lake City to be near his fraternal grandfather. Edward attended schools there and then in Reno, where he and his brother Bill lived with their aunt after their mother died. Ed graduated from Reno High School in 1912. Noted teacher Dr. Effie Mona Mack saw a drawing project he had done and suggested that he might think about a career as an architect. During summers in his high school years, he worked for architect Frederic DeLongchamps.

Ed's parents had made financial provisions for their sons to attend college. After a year at USC, Ed transferred to the University of Pennsylvania, studying the Beaux Arts school of architectural design that emphasized symmetry and ornamentation. Only a few years later a transition was made to modern architecture, which emphasized a-symmetrical and functional design driven by the economics of the times. Throughout his career Ed wrestled with the desire to create the designs of his academic training versus the functional design and minimal adornment of modern architecture.

Upon graduation, Ed returned to Reno and went to work for Frederic DeLongchamps, one of several architects Ed credits with influencing his career. Other local architects who influenced his career were Dan Kirkoff, George O'Brien, and Russell Mills. He worked with those four men, as well as with Monk Ferris, and partnered with architects Lockhart and Casazza on various projects.

Ed met Helen Steinmiller at a bridge-playing evening in Reno, and they were married in 1938. After World War II began, he was drafted just at the time he had finished his hundredth

architectural project on his own. He served in the army for a time and left with an honorable discharge as soon as it was possible.

Upon returning to Reno, he launched his career as the fourth licensed architect in the State of Nevada. Some of his first homes had a Colonial influence, inspired by the beautiful houses he saw during his years in Philadelphia. The styles he had studied in school, along with more modern ones, enabled him to fit any kind of house to the client, offering them a variety of styles.



Edward Parsons (1907 - 1991).
Courtesy of Alice Parsons.

Besides many homes in the area, he designed schools, libraries, additions to many buildings, banks, churches, state hospitals, office buildings, a fraternity and a sorority, swimming pools, apartment buildings, Indian Colony buildings, a mortuary, a gymnasium, fire stations, prison buildings, and several UNR buildings.


His oral history, which is in book form, is exceptionally interesting. His descriptions of what was entailed in order to save historic buildings and restore them to their original design was a labor of love requiring extensive research. He approached restoration work with determination and surrounded himself with contractors who were equally as

passionate about the projects' historical significance. His sense of humor and his passion for his discipline shine through in his oral history.

He was understandably proud of restoration work he directed: Morrill Hall on the UNR campus, Piper's Opera House in Virginia City, Bowers Mansion in Washoe Valley, the First Methodist Church in Reno, Virginia City's court house, the old courthouse in Genoa, Fort Genoa, the Nevada State Capitol Building in Carson City, Lakeshore House in Glenbrook, and the Lake Mansion, among others.

On the UNR campus, he designed the Agricultural Administration & Life Science Building; Orvis School of Nursing; Health Science Building; and three phases of the School of Medicine. There he successfully met the challenges of integrating the design into the steep hilly site and achieved continuity of design – although each was built at a different period in time.

Parsons' deep commitment to furthering the architectural profession garnered him the first award in Nevada from his peers as a Fellow in the American Institute of Architects (AIA). He was the State Preservation Coordinator for Nevada AIA, an active member of the Comstock Historical District Committee, the Nevada Historical Preservation Review Committee and the Washoe Landmark Preservation Committee.

Ed and Helen had two children, Ed, Jr. and Alice, who is married to Charles W. McGinley, III. Ed died in 1991, and Helen passed in 2000. They are survived by their son and daughter and three grandchildren, Kate and David Parsons, and Elizabeth Tobin. 

Editor's Note: Sources for this article are Parson's oral history, the architectural designs on file in UNR's Getchell Collection, the microfilm at Nevada Historical Society and the memories of Alice Parsons McGinley.

Anne Simone is a HRPS Tour Guide and Researcher. Alice Parsons is the daughter of Ed Parsons.

2004 HRPS Historic Preservation Award 93 Bell, A Real Adaptive Reuse Success !!!!

The HRPS annual dinner held on Wednesday, October 27 was also the occasion for the organization to present its 2004 Historic Preservation Award. The winners this year were Steve and Linda Atcheson, owners of 93 Bell Street. Presenting the award was HRPS Board Member Jack Hursh, Jr. "One of HRPS goals is to recognize those individuals who have improved the quality of our neighborhoods by preserving a historic structure and in this case an adaptive reuse of a historic structure – 93 Bell Street," said Hursh. The Atchesons gratefully accepted the award plaque to an enthusiastic round of applause.

The Bell Street house occupies a tract in the Powning Addition, which has been the area of HRPS' focus. Built in 1912, the Victorian-style home had fallen into disrepair by the time the Atchesons purchased it in the 1980s. The first floor had been abandoned and the upstairs was being used as housing for impoverished single men.

The Atchesons' contractor replaced the old foundation in a creative and cost-

effective manner, by using Bevilacqua Movers to punch timbers through the foundation and jack the house up about 6 feet. The rubble foundation was then dug out and replaced with a block foundation.

Fortunately, most of the original exterior and much of the interior walls were salvageable which qualified the new owners for a special IRS tax credit. They were also able to save most of the exterior gingerbread and columns. Because Dr. Steve Atcheson was renovating the property to be used for his medical practice, everything was done with an eye to bringing it up to commercial code, with all new plumbing, wiring, heating, air-conditioning and windows. However, the Atchesons were careful to preserve all of the original woodwork and took great pains to restore the home, rather than simply modernize it.

Said Dr. Atcheson about those who advised him to tear down the property and build a block office building "I think those people have no soul. I grew up in a circa 1890 Victorian on Center Street... our patients love our offices. They have told us it feels like they are going into someone's home, rather than a doctor's office."


The concept of restoring and entering into reuse can be expanded to include "adaptive" reuse. Old buildings often outlive their original purposes. Adaptive reuse is a process that adapts buildings for new uses while retaining their historic features.

We have many examples of adaptive reuse in Reno, some of which are quite creative. A former church on Wells Avenue



The renovated 93 Bell in 1989. A new block foundation was installed under the house and extended out to the right where a one-story addition to the house was built. Photos courtesy of the Atchesons.

and Vassar Street had a brief fling in the 1980s as a dance hall/spaghetti restaurant and has now assumed a new and more dignified identity as a bank. The more common examples of adaptive reuse in our area, however, are the homes that are too large and too close to commercial areas to be desirable as private residences. But these structures often make wonderful law or medical offices, as in the case of our award winner.

The Atchesons' loving restoration of 93 Bell Street is a shining example of restoration and entering into reuse a beautiful old building that most likely would not have survived at the hands of someone less mindful of Reno's history. 

Editor's Note: An article on 93 Bell was featured in FootPrints Vol. 7 No. 1.

Debbie Hinman and Carol Coleman wrote this article from information provided by Steve and Linda Atcheson. Debbie Hinman is a HRPS Tour Guide and a member of the FootPrints Editorial Board. Carol Coleman is Managing Editor of FootPrints.

Steve Atcheson is a Board Certified Rheumatologist. He and his wife Linda operate his medical practice from 93 Bell Street.



The front of 93 Bell in 1987. There was originally an L-shaped porch on the right of the house but they had neglected to put a foundation beneath it, so it was sagging and unsalvageable.

Memories of Teaching in Frandsen

by Dr. Anne Howard, UNR Professor Emerita of English

Editor's Note: The historic campus surrounding the University of Nevada, Reno quadrangle has been a National Historic District since the mid-1980s. Thanks to efforts by Professor Don Fowler and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), buildings like Frandsen have been preserved and renewed. Without the historic campus being a "designated" district it is very possible Frandsen Humanities would have been razed or gutted.

Built in 1918, converted many times, threatened with destruction – the Peter Frandsen Humanities Building has come a long way from the "biological building" university officials had sought as classes in agriculture doubled over a decade. Through the efforts of the newly chosen President Walter E. Clark, and the Dean Charles S. Knight, the sciences, animal and domestic, bloomed in the brick building by what was then called "the pond."

In 1998, the Peter Frandsen Humanities Building celebrated its 80th birthday by taking a breather and emerging all renewed.

Frandsen Humanities echoes a history of the university in its own way – subtle and obvious changes make some parts smaller, others larger; occupants change, interiors mutate as the University itself develops. The building stands now carefully restored to a modern version of its original period: the classrooms are all "electronically smart," the air is cool or warm as the season demands; computers join the campus network; the terrible orange carpet of the eighties has given way to neat floors; the furniture is modern in the classrooms and attractive in the offices.

Frandsen began its life as a temple to agriculture, the label proudly engraved over its entry in 1918 when the legislature appropriated \$80,000 and the building was completed in a year. It housed an

agronomy museum and laboratories; but it included as well, a university historian noted, "space for the work in home economics, training girls in sewing and baking excellent bread in preparation to teach the domestic arts in high schools." At Frandsen, while students took a class in sewing or biology, the blood of animals ran under metal floor plates.



The UNR Agriculture Building, built in 1918. In 1961 the building was renamed Frandsen Humanities. Today it is known simply as Frandsen. Photo from Samuel Bradford Doten's 1924 "History of the University of Nevada."

By 1961, new buildings had taken over the functions of both the agriculture and the home economics faculties. A student union wanted space for truck deliveries and the structure was briefly slated for destruction before it became home to three departments: English, Foreign Languages and Literature, and Philosophy.

The name then became Frandsen Humanities, after a well-remembered teacher of biology, thus uniting the past and its present. Peter Frandsen was an alumnus of the University of Nevada's Class of 1895. He left Nevada to attend Harvard which led to an appointment as an assistant in zoology at Harvard and Radcliffe. He returned to Nevada near the turn of the century, where he was to remain an integral and respected member of the faculty for many years. In 1924 he was one of only two alumni to receive

an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from President Clark. Noted Reno physician, Dr. Fred Anderson, who graduated in 1928, referred to Frandsen as his idol and "the ideal teacher."

In 1963, when I arrived to teach in the Department of English, only the first floor of the building and a few classrooms were ready for new

occupants. Changes over the years had added old-style tiered classrooms on the first floor with lecture halls much too large for most humanities classes.

The atmosphere was very male. Upstairs in Foreign Languages, a few women taught; downstairs, only emergency fill-ins were women – "housewife help" in Dr. Robert Gorrell's term. I found it hard to believe I was the only regular staff member who was female in a discipline that granted a healthy portion of its doctorates to women. By 1970, the department doubled its female faculty by hiring a second woman, Dr. Ann Ronald, confusing many a student, since by

that time first names became acceptable practice when addressing faculty.

By 1964, the three departments that made up the humanities department were united in the building, with some offices quite fine and others clearly makeshift. Remodeling seemed constant, but superficial. I remember standing sideways in a flimsy doorway during one rather impressive earthquake, listening to the rattling of the windows and watching the tree outside move.

Privacy in the crowded teaching assistant offices was achieved with moveable partitions. Even the furniture spoke of previous times, earlier tenants, different neighbors. Large library tables had migrated from the Clark Administration building which had

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Memories of Frandsen (cont.)

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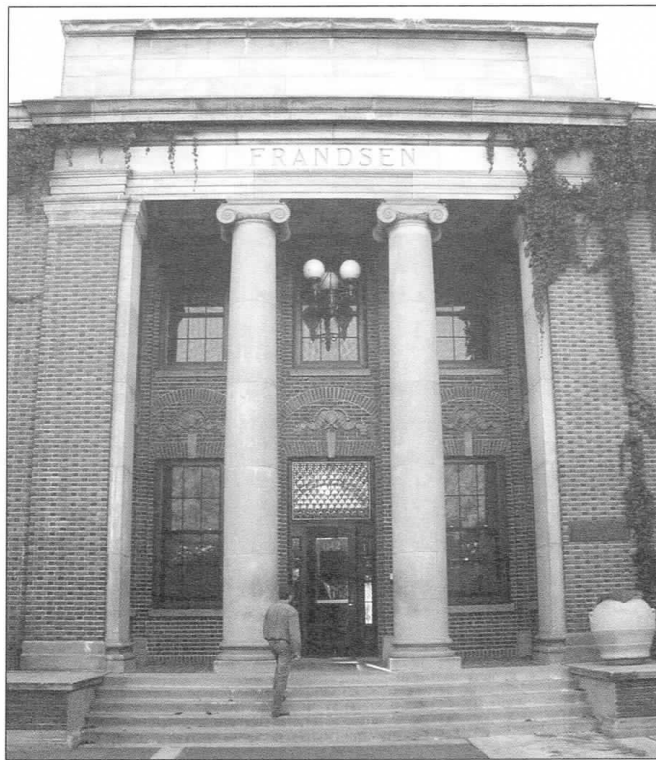
served once as a library, along with some rather distinguished chairs and many serviceable lab desks complete with lockable drawers for students' dissecting tools and for the shared microscope. In the basement rooms, steel plates still covered the one-time blood gutters and offered commodious accommodations for rats.

There was no air conditioning, of course, making the eastside basement classrooms attractive in the morning and the warmer seasons; the west classroom, blessed with the smells of the student union garbage area, still offered afternoon sun. In every classroom, the battles of the windows continued — the early morning teacher closed them; the afternoon professor raised them; sometimes they were up and down during the same class periods. A heating system as old as the building meant continual adjustments of the ancient pipes. In warm weather, the roar of lawn mowers would bring angry professors to the windows shouting for silence.

Most of us, however, preferred the building to the more modern structures around the campus. When an effort was made (the administrative passive voice hides the perpetrators) to move all three departments to the new business building, a unanimous protest allowed them to remain, whatever the drawbacks. Certainly there were disagreements. Some objected to Maria Jaramillo's feminist mural, but it remained until the last remodeling; faculty successfully lobbied to retain the central staircase. Comforts were the more abstract pleasures of tall ceilings, morning light, and windows that actually opened, wonderful vines growing over the windows in some parts.

Spring in the 1960s, Frandsen's first floor newly draped with Virginia Creeper, clinging as it did each year, to the dark bricks — that was a lovely sight from inside and outside.

But along with the new green leaves were new little bugs, slipping around the edges of the tattered screen, renewable insects that reappeared each day. The buildings and grounds man outside the open window brushed at them and offered me advice: "You know, you ought to call Grant." "Grant? What Grant?" "Grant Sawyer, of course." Sawyer was the governor of the state and I was getting yet another lesson about Nevada — complain to the governor about an obsolete window screen!




*The front of Frandsen today.
Courtesy of Terry Cynar.*

I didn't call the governor, but I did meet him a year or so later at a party convention — a real change from New Mexico where I'd labored years before I even dreamed of going to a county convention.

When the three departments who had occupied Frandsen moved out in 1998 to allow for the rejuvenation of the building, Dr. Stephen Tchudi, his students, and some others put together a history of the building and the people in it. Most of them reminisced about the established

myths: changing the inscription above the door from Agriculture to CULTURE, the snake (or snakes, depending on the source) in the classroom, the plumbing disasters, the constant moving and refurbishing of rooms and the efforts to maintain classrooms. Safe in the passage of time, a number remembered drinking parties in Room 111, liquor stowed in particular desks — and, of course, various surprising discoveries of joints, of the scent of marijuana in the crowded basement cubicles and the pall of smoke over classrooms where students and professors puffed away during class.

But there were other moments: the grim gathering in Room 111 for the broadcast of the draft lottery. Many had brothers or sons who might find Vietnam as their next year's major. There was a famous argument through the open window of a basement teaching assistant's office with a state legislator. For a while, a misogynist haunted the men's room distributing printed material — one was called *Feminism is Communism* — objecting to the growing women's rights advocacy. In the 70s, militant mothers, fearing indoctrination of their children, would attend classes and take notes on the instructors' ideas.

Now the new-old building is already too small for its single occupant, English. The inscription above the doors is simplified to FRANDSEN — perhaps leaving an out for some future re-definition, a new division, as the University changes. 

Dr. Anne Howard is a UNR Professor Emerita of English, 1963 - 1999.

Primary sources for this article are Samuel Bradford Doten's "1924 History of the University of Nevada," Howard's own memories and the tales told by colleagues.

The Federated Church, A Tale of Two Churches

by Linda Sievers

When Nevada's protestant congregations couldn't face tough times alone, they merged in order to continue their good works.

It was a nationwide problem, according to Meryl Deming's history of the First Congregational Church. "During the years just before and after the turn of the 20th century, hundreds of small towns in the U.S. became 'over-churched.' Each denomination insisted upon having their own church building and organization. As a result, many had so few members that they had difficulty in supporting a pastor. During the 1920's, throughout the nation, a movement arose to consolidate weaker churches to form stronger single ones, i.e. to federate. This movement was helped along by the difficult years of World War I."

Thus was born Reno's Federated Church (Congregational and Presbyterian), the Community Church in Carson City (Presbyterian and Methodist) and Grace Community in Boulder City (Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational).

Reno's Congregational Church, founded in 1871, and the First Presbyterian Church of Reno, founded in 1902, adopted a temporary one-year War-time Federation in 1918. The Presbyterians, having struggled for 16 years to build a membership totaling 42, had just lost their pastor. The Congregationalists had a listed membership in 1912 of 31. The arrangement called for services to be held in the Congregational Church at Fifth and Virginia Street with Rev. William K. Howe, a Congregationalist, as pastor for the combined congregations. The Sunday schools would be maintained separately in each church building. Each church would retain its identity with new members given a choice of church membership. They would alternate hiring a Presbyterian and then a Congregational pastor. By 1921, both congregations were pleased with the new union and they petitioned their respective

governing bodies for acceptance of the federation. This union lasted until 1970.

Prior to the Federation, the Presbyterians held services at their own church on the corner of Ridge and Hill Street. Records indicate they maintained the Presbyterian Church until 1921.

The pressed-brick Congregational Church at Fifth and Virginia, built in 1892, was a one-story design including a full daylight basement, a Moeller pipe organ and a 20-foot steeple visible from all over town. It was designed by A.W. Price of Philadelphia. Their previous building, on Chestnut (Arlington) between Third and Fourth Streets, was a simple two-story



Congregational Church at Fifth & Virginia, built in 1892, displaying one of the two Gothic memorial windows. Photo courtesy of the Nevada State Historical Society.

affair shared with the Odd Fellows Lodge. A 450-pound bell used to call worshipers came from the state prison.

J.G. Bracking writes in the 1936 WPA Records Collection that the Congregational Church building was "without distinguished architectural features but may be classed as Gothic. The one-story building is surmounted by a belfry containing a bell. Two memorial windows are the primary architectural decoration. A baptismal font is the gift of the W.F. Dunaway family. A Roman altar cross is the gift of the daughters of Mr. and Mrs. E.L. Bacon."

The north stained glass window depicted a serene blonde maiden seated near a lakeside scene. It was a memorial to Sara Hartman, daughter of Dr. Leon W. Hartman, head of the physics department (and eventual president of the university) at the University of Nevada at the time of her death. Twenty-year-old Sara drowned in Pyramid Lake on July 4, 1928 trying to save another youngster from the same fate. Her family commissioned the window and it was installed a year later. When the present sanctuary was built in 1962 at the church's current 627 Sunnyside Drive location, architect Graham Erskine designed a space for the Hartman window inside the main entry.

In 1925, the Federated Church welcomed their fourth pastor, Presbyterian Reverend William Moll Case. He and wife Mabel served the community for 18 years and saw the membership swell to 250.

During the 1930s, Nevada became a destination for couples looking for quickie marriages. Local ministers found themselves in great demand, including Case, whose church location just happened to be a few blocks from the Court House. In Deming's opinion, however, the additional revenue opportunity for the church, for Case and his successors had an adverse affect on the church. After all, raising funds for building maintenance and other good works gave life and drive to church leaders. A

steady stream of cash from newly wedded couples took the financial heat off and parishioners saw less need to volunteer. Another problem surfaced in the early 1950s when a new pastor, upon seeing the annual total of over \$3,600 in wedding fees, decided he should receive 50 percent.

By 1948, most of the Presbyterian leadership decided to leave the Federation and formed and built St. Johns' Presbyterian Church on Plumb Lane. Sometime later, the Westminster Presbyterian Church

Continued on page 9

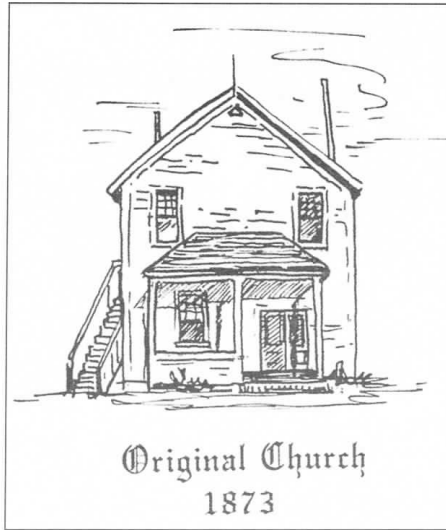
The Federated Church (cont.)

Continued from page 8

of Sparks took more members. Deming attributes the eventual split between the groups to the principle of alternative pastorates. "It was inevitable that the minister unconsciously tended to favor his own denomination and lead the congregation in that direction, with resentment by the other group."

Reno was in a boom cycle after World War II and the little church on Virginia Street found itself caught in the middle of a traffic jam and a major grocery store. "The traffic on North Virginia Street was so heavy that during the warm weather when windows and doors had to be open, the noise was so bad that Felix (Manley) would have to stop preaching until it passed," Deming says. A strategy committee was charged with looking at the options.

In 1957, the grocery store owners made a \$150,000 offer on the property that also included a lot on Sunnyside Drive. The congregation accepted and were given two years to move. A new complex with three separate buildings — sanctuary, social hall and education center, were built over the next five years.



The original Congregational Church, built on Chestnut (Arlington) between Third and Fourth Streets. The congregation held services on the first floor and the second floor was occupied by the Odd Fellows Lodge. The building later became a boarding house and then was torn down. Courtesy of the Nevada State Historical Society.

In May 1963, the new sanctuary was dedicated, missing the massive bronze doors that separated the Chism Memorial Chapel from the sanctuary. Made in

Mexico City, they were being held hostage by U.S. Customs for duty payment. It seems if they had been bound for a Catholic church, there would have been no duty. After paying, the church protested to one of Nevada's U.S. Senators without result.

In August 1970, the congregation voted unanimously to defederate and church leaders took steps to sever the long relationship. The Congregational United Church of Christ of Reno was formed, later to be renamed the First Congregational Church of Reno.

Sources for this article include the Nevada Historical Society Papers, 1913, First Congregational Church of Reno 1871-1986 "Highlights" by Meryl Deming, and "Tough Little Town on the Truckee, Reno", John M. Townley, 1938.

Linda Sievers is a retired copy editor who worked 20 years for the Anchorage Daily News. In addition to co-editing FootPrints, she is currently working on a family history of her Lothrop and Stoddard relatives.

Works Progress Administration 1936 Survey a Find for Researchers

by Mella Rothwell Harmon

President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies resulted in an alphabet soup of federal agencies intended to ameliorate the devastating effects of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Three of the more familiar are the CCC, PWA, and the WPA. The Works Progress Administration (WPA), organized on May 6, 1935, offered the greatest diversity of activities. The WPA built outhouses, roads, lakes (Virginia Lake), golf courses (Washoe County Golf Course), dug wells, made mattresses, cut meat, grew vegetables, put on plays, sponsored art works, produced tour guides of the states, and conducted historical records surveys—to mention just a few.

The WPA Historic Records Survey was inaugurated in Nevada on March 23, 1936 with the goal of locating and cataloging manuscript collections within the state. One of the projects undertaken by WPA workers was the "Inventory of the Church Archives," which collected data and historical information on Nevada's churches. The efforts resulted in the production of two books—one on the Roman Catholic Church and one on the Episcopal Church. The project gathered a variety of information on both major and minor denominations in the state, and a significant amount of research was completed for the Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran and LDS churches. Eventually, WPA headquarters in Washington D.C. cooled

toward the project and no further work was conducted.

The Nevada Historical Society has in its collection 38 boxes of records from Nevada's Historical Records Survey and the Federal Writer's Project, which produced the tour book, *Nevada, A Guide to the Silver State*. The collection, MS 278, was the source of much of the information in *FootPrints'* articles on Reno's houses of worship. This collection offers researchers unexpected historical delights and comes highly recommended. Two fine search aids are also available to guide the adventure.

From Your HRPS President

Fall was busy for HRPS. Our annual fund raising dinner was a terrific success with over 136 old and new friends of HRPS attending. Once again, we appreciated being in the McKinley Park Arts and Cultural Center; it serves us well and feels like a home to our membership. Your Board worked diligently to get all the details right. Jack Schroeder, Phyllis Cates and Felvia Belaustegui, the master planners, were responsible for the terrific meal from caterer Elegant Herb. Decorations were so very western and fun, particularly the decorated boot centerpieces. Katherine Wishart (and Ed) with Fritz Grupe did a great job with our auction...such variety! Thanks to Double Click Design for eye-catching invitations. And special thanks for the two cases of wine donated by Silver State Liquor & Wine Inc..

But the program was the special treat. Jan Loverin tailored her slides and narration to our group, sharing information and



eliciting laughs with her slides of fashion through the years. The story of the evolution of Levi jeans delivered by Mr. Frank Davis from Marin County was fascinating. He related the history of his great-grandfather Jacob Davis who came to Reno and hit upon the innovative idea of utilizing rivets to make work pants more durable. Nevada Archivist Guy Rocha placed this

all in context by targeting the location of Jacob Davis' storefront. Indeed it is an historical site and a good candidate for a future marker. It was a great combination of speakers. Thanks so much to Program Chairman Felvia Belaustegui for putting all of this together.

October was a Walking Tour month also. There was a good turnout of attendees, especially for the newest offering, the October 30th Ghost Walk.


We have sent a letter of intent to VSArts Nevada to rent office space in the Lake Mansion, now on Flint and Court Streets, when the building is ready early next year. Finally we will have a home!

Our new Program Director Jack Hursh will offer great evening sessions for 2005 at our Mount Rose School location—see you there!

—Joan L. Dyer, President

A Walk Through Time Booklet Available

A *WALK THROUGH TIME: The Historic Pawning's Addition in Reno, Nevada* is available at Sundance Bookstore and the Nevada Historical Society for \$5. To date more than 500 copies have been sold to very solid approval from readers and reviewers.


The publication and sale of *A WALK THROUGH TIME* continues HRPS mission. It is anticipated, that with perseverance, HRPS will be instrumental in obtaining national recognition for this architecturally and historically diverse neighborhood. 

Joan Dyer, HRPS 2004-2005 President

A belated but no less sincere welcome to our new 2004-2005 HRPS president, Joan Dyer! Joan was raised in San Francisco, attended the University of California at Berkeley and moved to Reno in 1965.

Joan's focus in Reno has always been in the arts, with a special interest in arts-related programs in the public schools. She has had an enduring influence on many local agencies as a community volunteer, including 27 years of work with the Sierra Arts Foundation. Currently Joan also serves on the UNR Foundation Board of Trustees and is active with KNPB Channel 5, where she is a past chairman.

In 1990, the Nevada Women's Fund honored Joan with a Volunteerism award and in 1997, she was honored at the 18th Annual Governor's Arts Awards for her support of the arts.

Joan says she likes the feel of the downtown area, with our beautiful river as the main focus, and the interesting and varied mix of people. She was drawn to HRPS by the devotion of its members, as well as the wonderful programs and the newsletter. She is looking forward to leading the organization in continuing to promote our historic architecture and fostering citizen interest through the sharing of information. 

Thanks to Our Auction Donors

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HRPS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please check your mailing label! Renew your membership and help HRPS preserve historic Reno!
Please make checks payable to **Historic Reno Preservation Society**, and mail along with this application to:
P.O. Box 14003, Reno, NV 89507

☐ New Member
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Annual membership includes: Footprints (HRPS Newsletter) • Free participation in walking tours

☐ Student \$10.00 ☐ Individual \$15.00 ☐ Family (Children 18 yrs and younger) \$20.00
☐ Business Contribution \$50.00 ☐ Supporting \$100.00 ☐ HRPS Angel \$250.00

Additional donation: _____

Thank you for joining HRPS. An organization is only as strong as its members. There are many areas in our organization where your enthusiasm, skills, and dedication will be invaluable to historic Reno and future generations. The goal of the Historic Reno Preservation Society is to preserve the historic resources of our community. What would you like to contribute to HRPS?

**FOR OFFICE
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PAID: ☐ Check ☐ Cash Amount: _____ Membership # _____ Renewal Date: _____

RV 05.27.04/FO

Bulk Rate Mail

Footprints is now being mailed using a Bulk Rate Mail permit. If your address changes, please send a note to HRPS, POBox 14003, Reno NV 89507, with your address change. Bulk Rate mail is not forwarded.



HRPS wishes to thank Promenade on the River for allowing HRPS to hold its Board Meetings at the Promenade.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Renewals August 3 - November 22, 2004

Lynn Allen	Susie & George Kapahee
Betty Jo Baker & George Gadda	Maude Loewenstein
Joanne Botsford	Larry & Cheryl Martin
Joe & Anna Bridgman	Doug Marx
Bonnie & Richard Bryan	Sue McDowell
Dawn Bunker	Helen Hardy Mills
Linda Burke	Sue Moore-Fry
Treat & Patty Cafferata	Robert & Mia Morrill
Craig Chapman	Larry & Nancy Oakley
David Colborn	Jenny Brekus & Armando Ornelas
Joan Collins	Peggy Palmer
Ralph & Barbara Courtney	Marilyn Paradis
Gordon Douglass	Jan Pederson
Katie & Larry Dwyer	Glenda Price
Joan Dyer	Drucilla Richardson
Tim & Joan Luchetti-Elam	Cathy Ringer
Don & Kay Fowler	Jack & Lyndi Cooper-Schroeder
Joan & Bob Gardner	Carolynn Shamberger
Lois Graves	Jennifer & Joel Sherman
Winnie Herbert	Linda & Wayne Sievers
John & Liz Howe	Edward Spoon
Marilyn Johnson	Roger & Luanne Steininger
Keith Jourdin	Ann Weiss

New Members August 3-November 22, 20

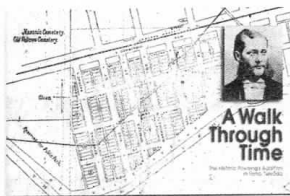
Robin Andrews	Kim O'Reilly
Alison Benson	Anne & Roger Pelish
Lane Bernardi	Joyce Pors
Tom Bittker	Millie Quinn
Robin Blair	John & Mary Ryczkowski
Estella & John Brown	Jan & Lloyd Shanks
Betty Akert Brown	Jane Sunday
John & Andra Carter	Mrs. H. L. Trengove
Terry Meadows & Patrick Ditton	Thomas Walker
Daryl Drake	Diane Smith & Edward Waselewski
Jerry Fenwick	James Zuber & James Wolf
Alan R Golbov	
Dori Goldman	
"Thomas J Hall, Esq"	
Denise & Ron Jahn	
Martti & Anni Kantelo	
Bill & Judy Lindquist	
Toni Lowden	
Ralph & Nancy Manfredi	
Loy McCrosky	
Rita McCune	
Rose Meredith	
Dan Noyes	

A Correction and Apology:

In FootPrints Vol. 7 No. 4, page 7, the picture of the First Baptist Church should be credited to University of Nevada, Reno Special Collections.



P.O. Box 14003
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A WALK THROUGH TIME: The Historic Powning's Addition in Reno, Nevada is available at Sundance Bookstore and the Nevada Historical Society for \$5.00

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WINTER PROGRAMS 2005

Jack Hursh, Jr. – Program Chair: 746-3252

All program events are on the 4th Wednesday of the month at 7 pm, at Mt. Rose School (Lander Street between Taylor and LaRue, just off Arlington), unless otherwise noted.

Wednesday, January 26: Nevada Barn Heritage/Truckee Meadows Remembered. Photographer Jack Hursh will offer a poetic and photographic tour of our local historic barns and will highlight the project "Truckee Meadows Remembered," a preservation project that relocated several historic ranch outbuildings to Bartley Ranch Park for interpretive display. Jack Hursh is a native Nevadan, graduate of Michigan Technological University and works as a cartographer/graphic artist for the Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology at the University of Nevada.

Wednesday, February 23: Virginia Street and the Truckee River: Reno's Most Historic Intersection. On the 100th Anniversary of the Virginia Street bridge, Alicia Barber will discuss the intersection where Virginia Street crosses the Truckee River. As the physical and symbolic heart of the city, this intersection has been graced by some of Reno's most significant architectural and civic structures. Alicia Barber is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Nevada, Reno, where she teaches courses on American culture, tourism, and cities. She is working on a book about the impact of Reno's reputation on its urban development.

Saturday, March 19: Sparks Heritage Museum Appraisal Fair and Vendor Show. 9am–4pm at Sparks Recreation Center, 98 Richards Way, Sparks, NV. Email sparksmuseum@gbis for details.

Wednesday, March 23: The work of prominent early Reno architect Edward Parsons. Alice Parsons and Anne Simone will offer a photographic tour and history on the Reno buildings and homes designed by Edward Parsons. Alice Parsons is the daughter of Edward Parsons and Anne Simone is a historian whose passions include the work of Parsons.

HRPS Web Site: <http://historicro.no.org/>

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