

## Historic Reno PRESERVATION SOCIETY

# FootPrints

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

VOL. 9 NO. 1 ❖ WINTER 2006

## Hillside Cemetery, 1875–2005

by Debbie Hinman

“On account of the location, and other advantages, the Hillside Cemetery will, within a short time, be the handsomest burying ground in the State,” proclaimed a *Nevada State Journal* writer in 1880. Nearly 100 years later, a headline in the same newspaper’s descendant read “Reno’s Old Hillside Cemetery: ‘Biggest Eyesore in the County.’”

How could this have happened to Reno’s oldest remaining and most historic burial ground? While other venerable cemeteries throughout the United States are being preserved and lovingly tended, why is Hillside sitting neglected on a barren patch of land, sporting tumbled and broken headstones like a mouthful of ruined teeth? The answer is complex, and part of an ongoing struggle that dates to the cemetery’s inception.

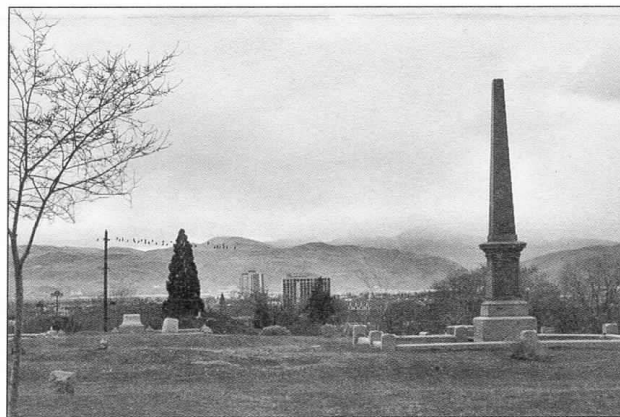
Reno had been a town since May of 1868, and presumably townspeople died—what became of them? According to John Townley in *Tough Little Town on the Truckee*, bodies were randomly placed below ground in areas considered “outside of town.” As Reno expanded its perimeters, some of these early residents unfortunately surfaced. In the 1890s, workmen excavating a foundation in the Powning Addition found a family of four in a single grave. An unofficial burial ground appeared to develop at North Virginia and Ninth Streets where there was a hill acting as a natural barrier from the town.

Wiltshire Sanders came to Reno in the early 1870s as a carpenter, but soon became engaged in making furniture. From there it was a natural step to building coffins and the undertaking business. His newspaper advertisement billed him as Funeral Director and graduate of Clarke’s School of Embalming.

Hillside Cemetery was born on April 27, 1875, when the State of Nevada granted a patent to Wiltshire Sanders on 40 acres of

land for use as a cemetery. Sanders filed a map dated 1879 for Hillside Cemetery, which was recorded in Washoe County on May 27, 1882. The first recorded burial in the cemetery was on May 10, 1877.

As owner of Hillside Cemetery, Sanders was Reno’s “one stop shop” for all the town’s burial needs, with his undertaker’s parlor in the basement of the McKissick Opera House, which was on the corner of Plaza and Sierra Streets. Undertaking was quite the lucrative business for him and the cemetery was a big contributor to his profits, as he charged \$100 for a plot.



A view of Hillside Cemetery with mountains in the background. The monument in the foreground is the Gould family plot.

Photo courtesy of [www.nevadamax.com](http://www.nevadamax.com)

Sanders’ acreage soon was subdivided to provide burial space for members of religious and fraternal organizations. In 1877, the Hebrew Benevolent Society purchased two acres from Sanders and created their own burial site. In 1882, Sanders sold the northwestern portion of Hillside to Amity Lodge, Knights of Pythias, and in 1890, sold lots to General O.M. Mitchel, Post No. 69, Grand Army of the Republic.

Hillside Cemetery has been the subject of controversy from the very beginning. As early as 1880, a letter appeared in the *Reno*

*Evening Gazette* challenging the propriety of private ownership of a cemetery. The individual wrote: “Experience has shown that cemeteries owned by private parties are not managed for public good but for personal gain.” The writer advocated the formation of a Reno Rural Cemetery Association. He continued, “Give us good men for directors, and in a short time we will have a cemetery of which we will be proud, an ornament to our town, and here we can lay the forms of our loved ones, not fearing that they will be disturbed.” This letter was in response to a story printed a week earlier under the heading of “Digging Up the Dead,” alleging that Sanders had disinterred the body of a young

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## Hillside Cemetery 1875–2005 (continued)

*Continued from page 1*

child and moved it to the Potter's Field, so that he could sell the plot formerly occupied by the child.

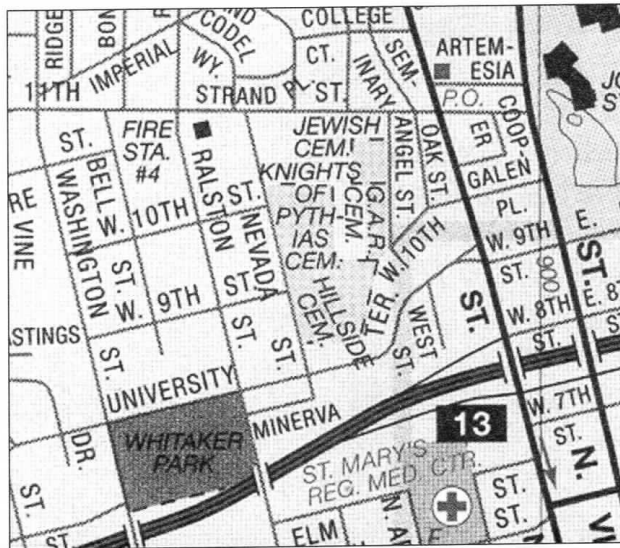
Upkeep of the cemetery was also an issue from the very beginning. There was grass, however. An early record reports that boys, tending family milk cows, let their charges graze from floral tributes and grassy graves. An angry newspaper notice appeared in 1878: "Someone, without fear of the law or the wrath of God, willfully opens the side gates of the cemetery and allows cattle to enter to pasture, as it were. The other day a lot of work oxen were let in, and they did some damage to two or three graves. The first fellow caught doing this will be tarred and feathered." Also from the *Nevada State Journal* in 1888 was the following item: "Undertaker Sanders has reason to complain of the way visitors to the Hillside Cemetery, on Decoration Day, drove carriages and horses over the graves. It will cost about \$200 to repair the damage done Wednesday." How ironic that for the next hundred years, there would be a continuing outcry about vandalism and neglect at this cemetery and that even by 2005, no practical resolution would exist.

The problem is that when the cemetery was first established, there was no state law requiring endowments for perpetual care of cemeteries. Wiltshire Sanders passed away in 1906 and his wife Margaret inherited Hillside. Over the next 50 years, the cemetery seems to have largely been tended by relatives of those buried there.

An absence of care is one thing, but willful destruction is quite another. Most accusations cite the nearby fraternity population as the biggest offenders of Hillside's ongoing defacement. Stories of wild cemetery beer bashes, cars parked on gravestones, or propped up by the stones to enable owners to work beneath the cars, motorcycles tearing through the

property, or gravestones used for target practice have persisted through the years. The missing headstones and markers are blamed on this same university segment. Some stones have been left in place, but turned backwards, or painted with various epithets. This treatment of Reno's dead offended many residents, whether

of those persons buried in the southern portion of the cemetery, re-inter them in the northern portion, and use any funds derived from the sale of the vacated land to perpetually endow the new cemetery for care, or place the area under the City Parks Department for continuing maintenance.



*Hillside Cemetery, Knights of Pythias Cemetery, Jewish Cemetery and G.A.R. Cemetery are shown with UNR to the right and I-80 to the south. Map courtesy of AAA.*

or not they actually had relatives buried at Hillside. In 1972, Reverend Ernest Troutner of the First Methodist Church wrote the following to the *Reno Evening Gazette*, "While I don't believe the place of burial of loved ones should be an idolatrous shrine of the dead—for we worship the Eternal Spirit of the living—it should not be a place of disgrace."

This letter may have prompted the dedicated effort of Reno City Councilman Clyde Biglieri who organized a committee in 1973 to investigate the facts concerning Hillside Cemetery. This committee made the most progress yet toward a satisfactory solution. Biglieri introduced Resolution No. 2786, which stated that the City of Reno was interested in restoring the cemetery and in order to proceed would acquire ownership rights or title to all of the parcels in Hillside Cemetery by quitclaim deed or state legislation. The intent was that the city would disinter the remains

While Councilman Biglieri had good intentions of doing something positive with the property, there was much disagreement over what precisely should be done. Local resident Prudence Gould Muran wrote a compelling Letter to the Editor, detailing her connection to and feelings about Hillside. Three generations of her family are interred there, and she was tremendously saddened by its decay. Ms. Muran wrote, "Hillside Cemetery is disheveled... vandalized... disgraceful, but it is not forgotten." She was not in support of Biglieri's plan for the property. She felt that the cemetery itself could be turned into a park.

Biglieri's resolution was passed and approved. Biglieri also had a piece of legislation introduced in the Nevada Legislature known as the Hillside Cemetery Act. The Act passed and was signed into law by Governor O'Callaghan. The County quitclaimed its interest in the property to the city for delinquent taxes and the future of Hillside Cemetery suddenly looked promising.

But then something occurred which negated all of the Councilman's hard work, and caused the city to back away from the whole project. An attorney who represented heirs of Margaret Sanders claimed that no notice had been given to these heirs of the County's intent to quitclaim the property and in fact the heirs were entitled to retain the property, as he had paid their delinquent taxes. Later on this attorney would himself acquire the property, which he deeded to the University of Nevada. Admitting they were at a loss to know what to do with the property, University officials sold the property to John Lawton in 1996.

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## Hillside Cemetery 1875–2005 (continued)

*Continued from page 2*


Lawton is the current owner of Hillside Cemetery. When he purchased the cemetery, he only owned the paths between the grave plots, as the plots had been sold to the families who buried their loved ones in the cemetery. But due to efforts on his behalf by Vivian Freeman, former Assemblywoman, a bill was passed in 2001 giving cemetery authorities the right to relocate human remains when there is no perpetual fund or descendants to take care of the graves. His original plan was to build student housing for university students. Lawton, owner of Sierra Memorial Gardens, says he is not opposed to preserving the cemetery, but would like to see city involvement in the project, as assistance is needed to provide water to the site.

The few scattered headstones dotting the rocky ground today belie the fact that there are actually 1,434 people buried at Hillside. There are family plots, individual graves, well-known Reno names such as

Peckham and Plumb, and obscure ones. A portion of the cemetery was used as a "Potter's Field" for indigents, and those whose families could not afford a plot.

From the 1870s and into the early 2000s, protests would from time to time surface, decrying the condition of the cemetery, and just as quickly die down when nothing happened. Susan Voyles of the *Reno Gazette-Journal* did a series of stories in 2003, which included some poignant recollections from descendants of those buried at Hillside. Even their pleas and anger have prompted no action. The cemetery was finally fenced, which has protected it to some degree from further vandalism and from being used as a dumping ground for discarded furniture and defunct appliances; these days the unwanted offerings are left outside the gates.

An RGJ Opinion submission from Joseph Galata earlier this year quoted Benjamin Franklin in expressing his own feelings with regard to the Hillside issue.

Franklin said "You can tell how a city cares about its people by the way it takes care of its public cemeteries." Rather than see this as a criticism of Reno, we should take it as a challenge; here is our chance to preserve some very early and important history, to honor those early residents who contributed to what Reno is today, and to beautify a neglected but very special spot on the side of a hill overlooking our city. 

*Information for this article came from: John M. Townley, Tough Little Town on the Truckee, Nevada State Journal, Reno Evening Gazette, research paper by Cindy Southerland, dated April 13, 1998, inter-office memo from Robin Bogich to Del Rice, Property Management, and copies of Resolution No. 2786 and Assembly Bill 942.*

*Debbie Hinman is on the HRPS Editorial Board and is Director of HRPS Walking Tours.*

## A Night of Not-So-Living History

The setting was Reno's earliest remaining burial ground, Hillside Cemetery, the evening of Saturday, October 15th. The moon was full and the usually deserted cemetery was aglow with lanterns, illuminating eleven ghostly figures, dressed in 19th century garb. Shadowy groups of local residents made their way carefully over the uneven terrain, gathering by lantern light to hear Reno pioneers tell stories of their lives. The glowing cityscape in the distance formed a stunning backdrop to the spectacle.

Thanks to the support and assistance of owner John Lawton and his son Drew, HRPS was able to present this event, a departure from the usual walking tour format, at a locale with great historic atmosphere.

The evening was the inspiration of tour guide Tammy Buzick. Having attended a similar event in Genoa, Tammy set to work creating a Reno version—recruiting a cast, reviewing burial rosters to find possibilities for



*Joan Collins and Mark Taxer as the Bickering Becks.  
Photo courtesy of Kinsey Brown.*

characters and providing notes to the recruits on their chosen characters. It was up to each actor, however, to create his or her own script.

In spite of the chilly temperature and brisk autumn wind, the evening

was a success. HRPS members Cindy Ainsworth and Patty Downs admitted 104 visitors through the cemetery, and Terry Cynar worked to help direct visitors and to keep the lanterns filled. HRPS participants included:

Mac Wieland as Wiltshire Sanders  
Jeremy Wright as William Blanchfield  
Kinsey Brown as Alice Bristol  
Jack Hursh as Peleg Brown  
Anne Simone as Ella Lund  
Joan Collins as Wilhelmine Beck  
Mark Taxer as Mr. Beck  
Debbie Hinman as Mary S. Doten  
Ed Wishart as George Peckham  
Dave Davis as George Warren  
Lora Richards as Dorothy Hughes

Thanks to all who participated, and all who supported this event!

We particularly want to thank Reno Little Theater ([www.renolittletheater.org/](http://www.renolittletheater.org/), 775-329-0661) for the loan of costumes for the event.



## Architect Russell Mills

by Anne Simone

From storybook houses to graceful public buildings, architect Russell Mills enriched Reno with his eclectic style and architectural vision.

The son of Sgt. Major Russell Mills and Alma Lamanche Mills, he was born in Chicago in 1892. They lived in various locales during Mills' youth, including the Philippines, eventually settling in California's Bay Area.

Mills attended Oakland public schools and was enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley for a time. He went to work for Pacific Gas & Electric, and it was there that he met Grace Culp who was working as the Executive Secretary for the Vice President. The young couple came to Reno often to visit Mills' aunt and uncle, Catherine and William Wagner. In 1924, they married in the Wagners' home. Two years later the Mills family moved to Reno and Russell went to work for his uncle in the heating and plumbing business. The couple had one son, Rusty, who went on to a stellar career in the Air Force after studying at the University of Nevada, Reno. He is married and lives in Reno with his wife.

Mills began his career in architecture working for Frederic DeLongchamps but as soon as he could, he went out on his own. In 1928, Mills designed the first of his many beautiful homes, 803 Nixon Avenue, where his family lived until 1979.



Mills' first design, on Nixon Avenue, where his family lived until 1979. The home was purchased by HRPS member Ann McCarty in 1979. Photo courtesy of Debbie Hinman.

This home shows his favorite form of design work: a single-family home in the English Cottage Style, with distinctive brickwork and fascia cuttings. Many of his homes have the English cottage and/or Tudor influence while many of his non-residences are in the Moderne style. Mills owned several kinds of saws and power equipment and did much of the houses' decorative wood trim himself.

His second house was built in 1932 for his aunt and uncle, on beautiful Marsh Avenue. Today the home is owned by the Wagners' grandson and family. Three blocks away, also in 1932, he designed the Emil Bofinger house, another English cottage style with lots of interesting, charming bits of trim. In 1937, Mills designed the Hugh Herd house on Manor Drive, with a little more Tudor and less English cottage style.

In 1937-38, he designed the Hart House, featured this year in Channel 5's "House With a History." The program described the home as "a pagoda in the desert that beckons with intrigue." Read about the house at <http://www.knpb.org/productions/house/hart.asp>


Mills did not confine himself to the design of private residences, however. Some of his public structures include Our Lady of Snows Catholic Church (1939); Sparks City Hall (1940); Bishop Manogue gymnasium; the Brown Elementary School; the Veterans Memorial School (1949); and several schools and public buildings in other Nevada cities.

Russell Mills was also an active member of the community. Over the years he lived in Reno, from 1924 until his death in 1959, he served on many boards and commissions. Among them: the local advisory board for the National Housing Administration;



Russell Mills 1892-1959  
Photo courtesy of Rusty Mills

the Reno Control Board, and the city's Board of Adjustment.

Mills was very proud of the local effort with the legislature to enact laws to license architects in Nevada. In June, 1949 he was appointed to a 4-year term on the State Board of Architecture, which had been formed earlier that year. In 1952, he was elected president, and remained on the board for many years. In March, 1955 he was elected to the Reno City Council. In April of 1959, he chose not to run again, and in August after leaving the Council, he died suddenly of a ruptured aorta, in spite of his otherwise excellent health. Russell Mills' funeral was widely attended by a large cross-section of admirers, including the Mayor and entire City Council, fire and police departments. All came to celebrate the life of this talented and popular citizen, and to mourn his passing. 

Information for this article came from issues of the Reno Evening Gazette and the Nevada State Journal as well as from conversations with Russell Mills' son Rusty Mills.

Anne Simone is an enthusiastic researcher of Reno history and is a HRPS Tour Guide.

## Reno's Catholic Churches, A Trial by Fire

by Sharon Walbridge and Carol Coleman

**Editor's Note:** In the last issue of *FootPrints*, Vol 8 No 4, on pages 6 and 7 there was a map and timeline of religious structures in downtown Reno. Item #3 is incorrect and #16 is incomplete. A corrected timeline follows this article. In 1870, the land at Chestnut (now Arlington) and Second Streets was vacant. The story below will explain Catholics' journey to that location.

Catholic development in the Truckee Meadows in the late 1800s was different from that of other parishes in Nevada. Reno did not experience the boom/bust economy characteristic of Nevada's mining camps nor of their parishes. The Truckee Meadows was a rich valley with ample water close to the Comstock. Its destiny lay in agriculture and transportation. In Reno, the growth of both city and parish was slow and steady from the beginning.

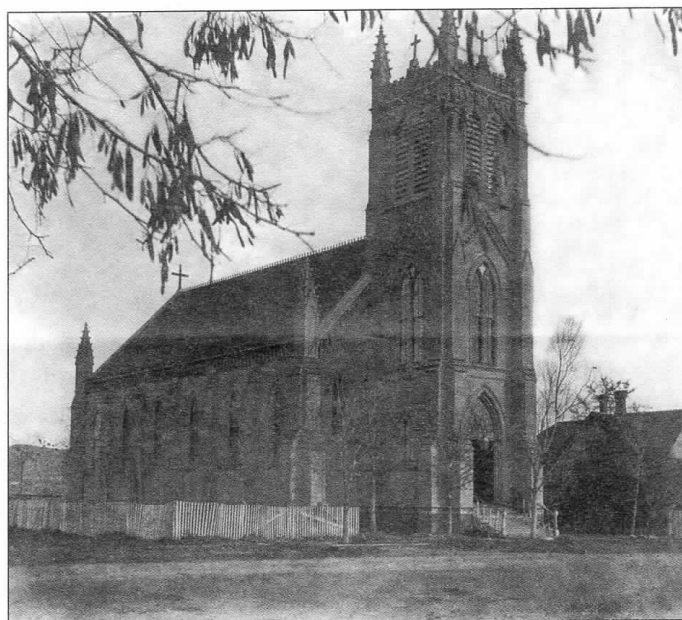
In early church registers, Reno was known as St. Mary's Washoe Mission. During the 1860s, spiritual care for Catholics in the Truckee Meadows was sporadic. Sacraments were provided by the priests of St. Mary's in the Mountain at Virginia City.

A look at 1870 census records shows Virginia City a booming 11,319 and Reno a mere 3,093. But enough of these 3,093 were Catholic that an independent parish was established under the leadership of Father Merrill. By 1871, a small wooden structure had been erected on Lake Street between Plaza and Fourth. Mass was celebrated on three Sundays each month. There were 70 children in Sunday school and 250 members in the parish. That was about eight percent of the population – quite phenomenal when one considers the highly masculine and transient nature of Reno's population.

Early on Sunday morning, March 2, 1879

of 1879, struck the city of Reno. The *Reno Evening Gazette* reported, "For twenty-four hours, a southwest gale had ripped and torn at Reno with speeds unknown even to pioneers of the 1850s." Fire fed by this great windstorm destroyed half of the town structures. Ten blocks, three hundred-fifty buildings, and six lives were lost. Reno's only Catholic church was gone.

It fell to Rev. James J. Callan to replace the destroyed building with a new church. A site was secured on the northeast corner of Sixth and Lake Streets near what was, at that time, the main entrance to



St. Mary's Church, Sixth and Lake Streets, 1879–1905.  
Photo courtesy of Neal Cobb.

the University. Reno's second Catholic church, a larger structure, was known as St. Mary's Church. It was a comely, imposing edifice. (see photo above) The pastor of St. Mary's Church had the daunting task of serving all of northern Nevada and northern California east of the Sierras to the Oregon line. Pastoral fatigue must have been a constant companion of faith.

By 1905, the parish and district had grown enough that it had been divided several times, leaving only the city of Reno and immediate environs to the care

of the pastor. This was fortunate, because yet another trial by fire lay ahead. On November 14, 1905, St. Mary's Church was destroyed by fire.

This tragic turn of events led the parish to purchase a site at Second and Chestnut (Arlington) Streets in the area known as the Powning Addition. The site was purchased for the sum of \$10,000. On this premier location, the parish erected a fine, brick building at a cost of \$75,000. The cornerstone was laid in July, 1907. The new building was solemnly dedicated on June 21, 1908 by the Bishop of Sacramento who consecrated the church in honor of St. Thomas Aquinas.

However, the church you see at Second and Arlington today is not the one consecrated in 1908. On December 21, 1909 a fire broke out in an adjacent building known as Wheelmen's Hall and spread to the new St. Thomas Aquinas. The community was stunned. The recently consecrated church was gutted and ruined.

Once again, the parish confronted reality with hard work and determination. By 1910, the church had been rebuilt at a cost of \$100,000 and rededicated. The structure is a grand and imposing design that has dominated downtown Reno's skyline for many years.

On March 17, 1931, Pope Pius XI established the Diocese of Reno and named the Most Reverend Thomas K. Gorman its first Bishop. St. Thomas Aquinas Church was elevated to the dignity of a cathedral.

The brick structure utilizes Renaissance, Classical and Baroque architectural motifs in its design. The base of the façade is Renaissance Revival in theme with its rusticated stone, corner quoins and keystone arches of brick. The second floor expresses a variety of strongly Classical motifs. The pedimented windows of the corner towers are

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## Reno's Catholic Churches, A Trial by Fire (continued)

*Continued from page 5*

also Renaissance Revival themes. The central pediment that caps the design contributes to the classicism and dignity of the image. The other façades are also expressive of Classical design imagery and express a restrained and handsome elegance. The tower design is more fanciful, and departs from the more restrained classical modes of expression.


Nevada copper, embossed by Gordon Newby, graces the front doors. Inside, Nevada aragonite from an early bishop's family was used for the altar and altar rails. Images of St. Thomas and St. Francis flank the entry doors; paintings called Stations of the Cross surround the large open nave. All are by local artist Bill Lutz. In the sanctuary, an enormous mural features figures from the Old and New Testaments. This was the first mural painted by Hungarian exiles Edith and Isabel Piczek in the 1950s. Their stained glass windows from the 1960s depict sacred and secular themes. Isabel's work now can be seen in nearly 500 buildings throughout the world.

The design of the rectory compared to the cathedral is understated. The two-story rectory stands to the west of the cathedral and is simpler in plan and style than the cathedral. It is roughly T-shaped, the hipped roof is tiled and two chimneys project from each side. The corners are dramatized by a quoin motif in white. A tiled roof projects over an angled first floor bay. The arched entrance and base are outlined in white, and windows are ornamental casement. The simplicity of the facade forms an interesting counterpoint to the richness of the cathedral design.

The brick school on Arlington is three stories tall with a hipped tile roof. The school structure is a straightforward institutional design whose only departure from a very restrained format is the flamboyant over-scaled entrance. It is made even more dramatic through its contrast with the very simple and unadorned façade of the school behind it. In considering the overall design of the eastern façades of the school and cathedral, the essential simplicity of the school refrains from overpowering the design of the cathedral.

The St. Thomas Aquinas complex is important both culturally and architecturally. Both the rectory and the school were designed by prominent Nevada architect Frederic DeLongchamps.

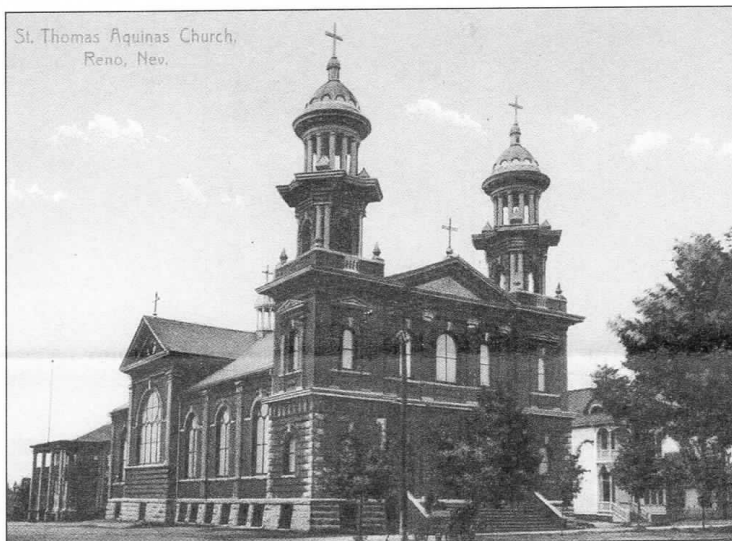
From a small, struggling mission in the heart of a vast territory, the present cathedral parish has developed, bit by bit, into the largest Catholic center in Nevada (prior to the recent growth in Clark County) and the center of administration for the Diocese of Reno. The journey from St. Mary's Washoe

Mission to St. Thomas Aquinas Cathedral has truly been "trial by fire." 

*Information for this article came from:*

David W. Tol, *Commitment to Caring: A History of Saint Mary's Hospital, Reno*; Nevada Academic Press, 1983. William D. Rowle, *RENO: hub of the Washoe Country*. Woodland Hills: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1984. Most Reverend Thomas K. Gorman, D. D., D. Sc. History. *Seventy-Five Years of Catholic Life in Nevada*. 65-7. John M. Townley, *Tough Little Town on the Truckee*, Reno: Great Basin Studies Center, 1983. *Nevada State Historical Society Papers 1923 - 1924*, Reno: Nevada Historical Society. 156. U.S. Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form, *Saint Thomas Aquinas Cathedral*, 1983.

Sharon Walbrige is the Editor Emeritus and Founder of HRPS FootPrints. Carol Coleman is Managing Editor of FootPrints.



*Postcard of St. Thomas Aquinas, circa 1908. The building to the rear of the church is probably Wheelmen's Hall. Postcard courtesy of Debbie Hinman.*



*St. Thomas Aquinas in ruins. December 21, 1909. Postcard courtesy of Neal Cobb.*



## Churches in Downtown Reno 1870–1950

Revised from *FootPrints* Vol. 8 No. 4

#	Year Built	HRPS Vol.	Church Name	Address & Details
	1868	7#4	all denominations	Riverside Schoolhouse (First & Sierra)
2	1870	8#2	First Methodist	First & Sierra (moved to back of lot in 1900)
3a	1871	9#1	St. Mary's	Lake St. between Plaza and Fourth (burned in 1879)
3b	1879	9#1	St. Mary's	Sixth and Lake St. (burned November 14, 1905)
4	1873	8#1	Congregational	Chestnut between Third & Fourth (shared with Oddfellows)
5	1876	7#4	First Baptist	Second between Virginia & Sierra (burned in 1879 fire)
6	1877	8#4	Chinese Joss House	First & Center (burned in 1878)
7	1879	7#4	Chebra B'rith Shalom	Odd Fellows Hall, Chestnut between Third & Fourth
	1879	7#4	Trinity Episcopal	Second and Sierra (burned in 1879)
9	1880	7#4	First Baptist	Second between Virginia & Sierra (burned in 1889)
10	1890	7#4	First Baptist	Second & Chestnut (torn down in 1917)
11	1892	8#1	Congregational Church	Fifth & Virginia (until 1918)
12	1899	8#4	Chinese Joss House	First & Lake (torn down in 1957)
13	1900	8#2	First Methodist	First & Sierra St (until 1925)
14	1902	8#1	First Presbyterian	Ridge & Hill (maintained until 1921)
15	1907	8#1	Bethel AME Church	Second & Bell
16a	1908	9#1	St. Thomas Aquinas	Second & Arlington (burned December 21, 1909)
16b	1910	9#1	St. Thomas Aquinas	Second & Arlington (standing today)
17	1914	8#2	St. Luke's Lutheran	W. Second & Bell (torn down in 1970)
18	1918	7#4	First Baptist	Second & Chestnut (until 1956)
19	1918	8#1	Federated Church	(Congregational/Presbyterian) (Fifth & Virginia) (torn down in 1950)
20	1921	7#4	Temple Emanu-El	426 West Street (torn down in 1970)
21	1925	8#2	First United Methodist	First & West Sts. (standing today)
22	1929		Trinity Episcopal	Island & Rainbow (standing today)
23	1939	6#2	Church of Christ Scientist	Riverside Dr. (held services until 1998) (standing today as Lear Theater)
24	1941	8#1	Bethel AME Church	Second & Bell (expanded) (used until 1993) (standing today as a cultural center)


### Volunteers Needed for Lake Mansion

**M**ary Ellen Horan, Executive Director of VSA arts of Nevada, is looking for loving hands to assist at the Lake Mansion for a few hours Monday–Friday 9 am–5 pm. One or more people are needed who enjoy carpentry work for several woodwork–ing projects plus miscellaneous

repair/construction/handyperson work throughout the year. A retired carpenter would be ideal!

Another person or two who “enjoy” carefully cleaning/dusting for one or two hours a week would help the mansion shine. You can determine your own hours.

Once the mansion is open, additional volunteers will be needed for tours and special events.

Please call VSA arts at the Lake Mansion at 826-6100 if you are interested in carpentry work, cleaning or general volunteering opportunities. 

## A Street by Any Other Name...

by Debbie Hinman

What's in a name—a street name, that is? Plenty, if you live in Reno! We have streets named for significant Nevada people, trees, famous writers, Ivy League schools, other states, Nevada towns and counties, and an increasing number of Spanish words and phrases, just to categorize a few.

In the beginning, Reno's small downtown core bore very utilitarian and unimaginative names. Front Street (now First Street) was so named because it fronted on the Truckee River. Virginia Street led the way to Virginia City; West, East and North Streets described their location in relation to the center of town. Running parallel to Front (First) Street were Second, Third and Fourth Streets, which you will find in just about any city in the United States. Another significant street was Commercial Row, which was home to hotels, bars, supply stores and other—you guessed it—commercial buildings.

As Reno grew, "additions" were added to the city. An addition was a block of land that had been subdivided into lots. The additions were generally named for the developer, such as "the Powning Addition," and "the Lake Addition," named for C.C. Powning and Myron Lake, respectively. Within these additions, street names became a bit more creative, depending on the fancy of the developer. These additions were very often small, self-contained microcosms within the city of Reno. Many had a market, beauty salon, or other small shops that catered to the residents of that addition. Cars were not common; if residents needed items that were not to be found within walking distance, there were always the Reno trolleys, in operation from 1905 to 1926. Renoites would walk or ride to the market and either purchase only what they could carry or, in some stores, they could place an order that would be delivered to their homes. Later on, "additions" gave way to "tracts," a term that is still used today interchangeably with "subdivisions."

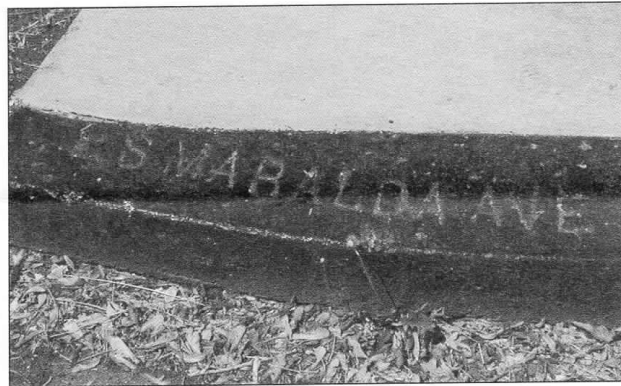
Through time, many of the additions lost their individual identities and melded into one another. Unfortunately, when this happened, the symmetry and thematic aspect of many of the additions were lost. A small street in one addition might be put through to a larger, more significant street in a neighboring addition. Most often the small street name would be lost and the name of the larger street adopted for the entire span.

An example of this is Arlington Avenue. The portion of this street north of the river was once known as Chestnut Street. It was part of the Ward's Addition, which bore tree names; within this addition were also Elm, Maple and Walnut Streets. Chestnut Street, however, ended at the

been Arlington. Once the Lake, Heights and Marsh additions began to blend together across California Avenue, the longer Arlington Avenue swallowed up little Belmont, and then Chestnut, once the Arlington Bridge came into existence in the 1930s.

Just parallel to this, the same thing was happening to Sierra Street only in reverse. This time the name of the street north of the river prevailed, and Granite Street was consumed by Sierra, as it marched southward. This, however, interfered with the symmetry of the "earth and mineral" theme of that addition, as Granite was in good company with Flint and Clay Streets, and blended well with Hill and Ridge Streets. To the east, Alameda Avenue ran in front of the race track, today's fairgrounds, then became Truckee Street on the other side of the river until it came to the Wells Addition, becoming Wells Avenue as it headed south, and then Morton Avenue as it crossed Vassar Street. Today the entire stretch is Wells Avenue.

Some of the small additions with shorter streets have lost nearly all of their identities. For example in the Sierra Vista Tract, Tonopah Street still exists, running north off of Mt. Rose Street (formerly Monte Rosa, to tie in ethnically with Pueblo, Arroyo and Caliente, its parallel sister streets). But Tonopah's original parallel streets of Goldfield, Manhattan, and Rhyolite have been lost to Haskell, Watt and Forest Streets, encroaching from the north. While these Nevada city street names are gone, some of our counties are still represented, with Lander and Humboldt Streets holding firm in the old southwest. Oddly though, Elko and Eureka streets are found some distance away, to the northeast of the city. Of the Victoria Park Tract, which used to occupy that triangular portion of land sandwiched between Wells and Virginia Streets, and Vassar Street and Plumb Lane, only Vassar and Vesta Streets remain. Long gone are Violet, Viola and Volna, and Visalia disappeared somewhat more recently as Holcomb Street pushed



*Esmeralda Avenue is now known as Gordon Avenue, but the curb still reminds us of its original name. Note the misspelling of Esmeralda Avenue on the curb.*

river because there was no bridge at that location. The street roughly in line with Chestnut on the south side of the river was named Belmont Street, after a mining town in Nevada. A vestige of this name still exists with the Belmont Apartments, located at the corner of W. Liberty Street and Arlington Avenue. The street most closely in line with Belmont on the south side of California Avenue was part of the Marsh Addition, and had been named "Arlington" when it was only a country road leading to the Arlington Nursery, established in 1876 near present-day Mt. Rose and Patrick Streets. The Chapins, who founded the nursery, named it after their child who died prior to their move to Reno. His first name had

*Continued on page 9*



## A Street by Any Other Name... (continued)

*Continued from page 8*

its way southward. What a creative mind was at work there, basing this nomenclature on the letter "V"! And Vassar wandered so far east that it ties in nicely along the way with Harvard, Radcliffe, Princeton and Purdue, crossing but not terminating at Terminal Way.

Some street names don't change in their entirety, they just become shortened or otherwise modified. As mentioned above, Monte Rosa Street became anglicized to Mount Rose, and Neuschwander was understandably shorted to Swan Circle. La Rue Avenue remains one of the few names with a French heritage. As its meaning is somewhat nonsensical, "The Street Avenue", it may have been named for someone with the surname "La Rue." Today's Valley Road began life as Surprise Valley Road, Terrace Drive became University Terrace, and Ross Skyline Drive is now just Skyline Drive. And sometimes customs of the day change that render a formerly acceptable name now politically incorrect, as in the case of Asylum Road, now Galletti Way.

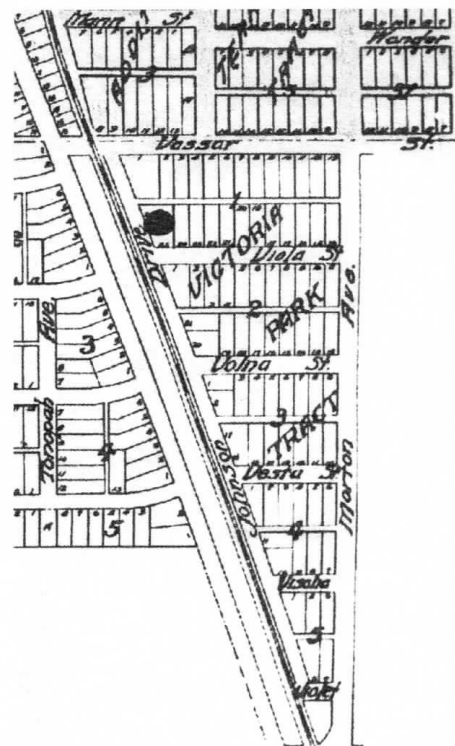
The outskirts of early Reno were made up of ranches, which was a very common means of arriving at a street name. Significant ranches in the area were the Peckham Ranch, Kietzke Ranch, Holcomb Ranch, Plumb Ranch, Mayberry Ranch, and one that was actually a community of about 300 people — Huffaker Ranch,

or simply Huffaker's. The ranches have given way to housing tracts or commercial property, but the names remain to recall the past.

Gordon and Nixon Avenues have such a long history that it was surprising to see them on a Reno map of 1900 bearing the names of yet two more counties, Esmeralda and Ormsby respectively. And heading west in parallel succession are today's "famous writer" streets of Mark Twain and Bret Harte Avenues; on this same map they are noted as Maryland and Delaware Avenues, followed by Dakota and Ohio Avenues. In this same Newlands neighborhood we find another "famous writer" street, Joaquin Miller and two explorer-named streets, John Fremont and Donner.

As Nixon Avenue was named for U.S. Senator from Nevada George Nixon, other well-known local people lent their names to our Reno Streets. Francis Newlands not only has a circle, but an entire neighborhood bearing his name. Myron Lake is still recalled by Lake Street, LaVere Redfield, who once owned enormous tracts of land in Reno is memorialized by Redfield Parkway and Marsh Avenue bears the name of Lake Mansion builder Washington J. Marsh. Of Nevada's past governors, the following have streets bearing their names: Charles Stevenson, Frank Bell, John Jones, Denver Dickerson, Tasker Oddie, Frederick Balzar,

and Richard Kirman. In Sparks, you will find streets bearing the names of Edward Carville, Vail Pittman, Charles Russell and Mike O'Callaghan. Judges Cheney, Moran, and Bartlett are also represented by Reno Streets, as are State Senator Sharon, banker Ralston, Mayor Roberts, Dr. Thoma, contractor and real estate magnate Ryland and Comstock tunnel builder Sutro. Even famous national personages are represented, unwieldy as the names may be: Benjamin Franklin,



1927 map of the Victoria Park Tract. The diagonal lines represent from west to east So. Virginia St., the V&T tracks and Holcomb Ave. Morton Ave. is now Wells. Note all of the "v" streets: Vassar, Viola, Volna, Vesta, Visalia and Violet. Only Vassar and Vesta remain.

Alexander Hamilton, Daniel Webster, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison are street names found in a southwest neighborhood off West Plumb Lane.

Most of us are cognizant of the history that exists in so many of our local neighborhoods, downtown area, city parks and larger recreation areas, but many of us probably do not think much about the history inherent in our street names. However, each time a street is extended and a larger street consumes a smaller street, we are losing a little piece of our local history, and our neighborhoods lose a little piece of their identities. Growth and change may be inevitable, but those of us who love our city and its colorful past still feel a twinge of regret when these losses occur.

Debbie Hinman is on the HRPS Board of Directors, the HRPS Editorial Board and is Director of HRPS Walking Tours.



LaRue Avenue — does it really mean The Street Avenue? Photos and map courtesy of Debbie Hinman.

## From Your HRPS President

October was once again a busy month for HRPS tour guides. Attendance on the walking tours was great, a bit lower than summer, but the crisp, pleasant autumn weather was a welcome respite from the Artown triple-digit heat. The new Hillside cemetery event was very well received, despite it occurring on the coldest night of the season. That contributed to a blustery setting for this unusual theatrical presentation with lots of focus on the people resting on site. There were many historical and amusing stories to describe early Reno. The post-civil war graves were of particular note, with its special section for the Army of the Republic. Thanks to all the guides for a wonderful season of Walking Tours.

Our Fall dinner program was a fun-filled evening with 135 in attendance. The Rails



Tales theme was well represented by the two speakers. Larry Hersh's slides displayed fascinating vestiges of the Central

Pacific Railroad in our local area and attendees enjoyed hearing about plans for the new Virginia and Truckee Railroad project. It is exciting to see this icon of the Comstock being restored to its former glory. Thanks to Marilyn Turville and committee for a memorable night. Kudos to Jack Hursh for arranging the wonderful program. Special thanks to Mark Taxer and Cindy Ainsworth for a fruitful silent auction, and to all who generously donated items. Over \$2500 was raised which will greatly benefit HRPS projects and programs.

Our fourth Wednesday evening programs resume in January.

Have a good winter and I hope your holidays were special.

—Joan L. Dyer, President

## HRPS Annual Fundraiser Party

by Linda Sievers, HRPS Board Member and Editorial Board member

HRPS members did not let a little fire stand in the way of having a good time. The annual fundraiser, held this year on October 26, originally scheduled at the McKinley Arts and Cultural Center, was moved to the spacious California Building after an attic fire closed McKinley the week prior. HRPS President Joan Dyer assured attendees that the damaged building would be hosting events again in just a few months.

This year's gathering took a Rails Tales theme with lanterns, miniature trains and track decorating the room and tables. About 130 members and guests sipped red and white wine donated by Silver State Liquor and Wine Inc. and munched on mushroom-stuffed phyllo triangles and bacon-wrapped scallops. Elegant Herb Catering dished up a hearty meal of stuffed salmon fillet, steak, salad, mashed potatoes and steamed carrots plus warm caramel-topped pies and cream puffs.

Cindy Ainsworth and Mark Taxer made sure the crowd had pencils to write up

their bids on 30 items available during the silent auction. Popular items included a tour of the Thunderbird Lodge plus a Lake Tahoe cruise, a weekend at a Napa Valley B & B, an intricately woven pine needle basket, several framed vintage and modern photos, a school desk from Virginia City's Historic Fourth Ward School and Loren Jahn's V & T Railroad



Jack Hursh, Jr. and Cindy Ainsworth at the October HRPS Fundraiser.

print of locomotive No. 25. Newsletter editor Sharon Walbridge donated a complete set of FootPrints for the occasion.

Jack Hursh was the evening's host, conducting the event along with introductions, announcements, and how to behave when rushing up to the buffet line. The Old Melodeon Minstrels (Darla, Chris and Danita Bayer), provided entertainment, singing several tunes popular during the mid-19th Century. They even got strong vocal help from the crowd during "I've Been Working on the Railroad."

After dinner, Larry Hersh provided a slide presentation on the Central Pacific Railroad. And Ted Short updated the group on the progress being made in rebuilding the V & T Railroad.

Phyllis Cates won the door prize while five lucky HRPS members got a bonus gift, a metal V & T lapel pin etched by 84-year-old engraver Robert Fontana. The evening closed with winning bidders happily carting off their spoils into the night.

## 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:

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*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?*

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## Membership Report (Aug. 15–Nov. 20, 2005)

### Renewals:

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Karen Benna  
Lane Bernardi  
Valerie Berry  
Jan Bishop  
Robin Blair  
Sarah Britt  
Kevin & Susan Browning  
John & Andra Carter  
Mary Chadwell  
Al Delmue  
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Daryl Drake  
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Joe McKenna  
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### New Members:

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P. J. Juhrend  
Maureen Kody  
Philip A McDonand  
M. Hope Meek  
Bill & Judy Metscher  
Pam Norvino  
Marcie Sheld  
Cheryl Vukelick  
Penny Whalen



*Looking west on Second Street towards Chestnut Street (Now Arlington Avenue), circa 1920. Note the trolley and the First Baptist Church in the distance. Photo courtesy of Neal Cobb.*





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## **WINTER PROGRAMS 2006**

**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.*

### **January 25, 2006**

"Native Nevada." Join award winning photographer Mark Vollmer, in a splendid photographic journey that will bring us closer to the meaning of being Nevadans.

### **February 22, 2006**

Patty Cafferata features her new book "Mapes Hotel and Casino: The History of Reno's Landmark Hotel" with a history of the lot at the southeast corner of N. Virginia Street and First Street, including the Mapes Hotel with its grand opening, central role in Reno, little known facts about the owners, floods, fires, construction and design, furnishings, entertainment, sporting events, and gaming.

### **March 22, 2006**

"20 Years on the Backroads of Nevada." Join Emmy award winning videographer Jack Sutton on a celebration of his 20 years filming the people and places of the Nevada outback.

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