

Historic Reno
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FootPrints

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

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Nevada's Early Mental Health History: The Buildings

by Kim Henrick

This article is not about how the "language" of the state's mental health history has changed over the last 127 years, so a quick summary might be useful. The physical facility has been called various names, some official and some not: Nevada Insane Asylum, Nevada State Hospital, Nevada Hospital for Mental Diseases, Nevada Mental Health Institute, and the current title, Northern Nevada Adult Mental Health Services (NNAMHS). The people receiving help from the facility have been inmates, patients, clients, and are currently called consumers. The street running along the Truckee River west of the hospital has been called Asylum Road, Hospital Road, Coney Island and is now Galletti Way. NNAMHS is within boundaries of the City of Sparks. The terms "patient" and "hospital" will be used generically in this history with no intention to offend.

We begin with the story of the buildings. In a future issue of FootPrints we will cover the people who lived and worked in the buildings.

On November 17, 2005, a 330L Caterpillar tractor's huge claw slammed down onto the second-story roof of a handsome brick building designed by Frederic DeLongchamps in 1927. The first pull of the claw tore off a section of the exterior brick wall and revealed two empty powder-blue rooms on the second floor. Eventually, bricks, windows, bays, doors, concrete and iron lay in a huge twisted mound. The last component to be destroyed was a glass door with large red letters painted on it: KEEP OUT. There was no fanfare. The demolition took two weeks—Mr. DeLongchamps designed his buildings to last. This article is written in memory of this building known as Building No. 6.

The story of Nevada's mental health history can be told in two parts: the people and the facilities. In reality, however, the two

parts have always been totally reliant upon each other. In a constant dance of mutual survival, doctors, administrators, staff, and patients have depended on the vast complex of buildings at Glendale Avenue and Galletti Way to support a certain standard of mental health care, and the buildings—often victims of hard use and short-sighted planning—have relied on administrators and politicians for adequate funding to support satisfactory, if not exemplary, maintenance and expansion.



The original hospital building, built in 1882, designed by Morrill J. Curtis. This photo was taken in the early 1900s. The building was demolished in the 1950s. Photo courtesy of Nevada Historical Society.

Outpatient services are the contemporary trend in the industry so there is little need for the number of buildings still standing on the property. Several buildings have been demolished in the last few years and on the recent Nevada State Public Works Board's Project C12 plans, seven more buildings are scheduled to be demolished. Fortunately, for now, three remaining historic buildings on that campus are not on that list. Their future remains in question and this article is about those buildings and the original hospital building.

The first hospital building opened on July 1, 1882, when 148 patients (Nevada residents) were transferred from Stockton, California. (Prior to the opening of this hospital, the State of Nevada paid to have its mentally ill patients housed at California facilities at a very high cost.) Morrill J. Curtis designed the hospital building and you will see a great resemblance between this building (see photo) and Morrill Hall on UNR's campus, which he also designed. The new hospital, which housed all of the patients and the entire hospital staff, was a grand, three-story F-shaped brick building of the Second Empire style. Facing Glendale Avenue to the south, it fanned out east and west from a tall central tower and had a smart, patterned Mansard roof. The second floor of the central north wing had "hardwood maple floors," a "dance hall," and "movie projector booth," according

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The Buildings (continued)

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to a drawing of the building made by architect Frederic DeLongchamps in the 1920s. An editorial in the *Weekly Nevada State Journal* on December 24, 1881 sums it up, "...it is a subject of wonder that so fine a structure could have been produced for a sum of \$60,000." In the next several decades, as other buildings were built to accommodate the hospital's expanding operations, this building was pulled down piecemeal; first the entire third floor and the far east end of the main building were razed, then the north wings were torn down, and finally the main building on the west side was demolished sometime in the 1950s.

The so-called Stone House, built in 1890, is the oldest remaining building on the hospital grounds— its existence is due to an embarrassing legislative blunder that cost the Nevada taxpayers approximately \$90,000. It was built (most likely with patient labor) from the remains of a partially-constructed massive stone wall built to surround a planned new prison on the site. In 1873, Democratic Governor Lewis Rice Bradley and the Democratic legislature wanted the new state prison to be built just north of the present hospital buildings, closer to Kietzke Lane. According to John M. Townley's account in *Tough Little Town on the Truckee*, "The wall enclosure was to measure 450'x 500' with foundations nine feet deep and seven wide, topped with twenty-six foot high walls, five feet thick at the base and three feet at the peak. Towers at each corner would be connected with walkways." Townley reported that the wall's foundation was built with stone blocks quarried from east of North Virginia Street, about one mile north of what is now McCarran Avenue and, ironically, the upper wall sections were built with sandstone blocks brought in from the old Nevada State Prison's quarry in Carson City.

A change in political power occurred in 1875 when only three sides of the "Great Wall" were complete. The new Republican legislature, along with powerful Republican supporters such as C.C. Powning, wanted the prison to be built in Carson City (where the existing prison was) and refused to allocate any more money to finish the wall. The unfinished prison wall cost 1½ times what the beautiful new hospital building cost seven years later. Between 1875 and 1890, the wall crumbled and neighbors walked off with many of the stones but enough sandstone remained to build the Stone House.



The so-called Stone House, built in 1890 with stones from the abandoned state prison wall (1890 to present). Photo courtesy of Kim Henrick.

The Stone House is a boxy, two-story structure built of huge, hand-hewn stones, each one with unique tool marks, a testament to the fine craftsmanship used in their making. The building (like most of the buildings at the hospital) served many functions over its lifespan. The Stone House has two hefty iron hooks that stick out from the front of the building about head height, one near the front door and another down the porch to the east. One story (and it may only be a story) goes that the hooks were used in the very early days to *secure* "inmates" or "patients" until hospital staff arrived in the morning to admit the hooked people into the hospital. The stone building has

been boarded up for many years now, but it can easily be seen from Galletti Way. It is set just north of the large main two-story brick administration building (mentioned next) facing Galletti, with the curved driveway in front.

The hospital kept growing and the state legislature approved a new building to be constructed just west of the old original hospital building. They contracted with Frederic DeLongchamps to design the large T-shaped "Administration Building" in 1920. Today, it is called Building No. 1 and it faces Galletti Way. It is the handsome, rectangular, two-story

brick building set *behind* a modern brick add-on building built in the early 1960s.

(That add-on and the one in front of Building 3 were not researched for this article.) According to Mella Harmon (local architectural expert), the DeLongchamps buildings were built in the Renaissance Revival style with "horizontal aspect and the belt courses." Building No. 1 blended in well with the original 1882 building to its east.

A good example of blending in was the use of two-story bays, one on each side of the nine large archways on the front porch. (Unfortunately, the 1960s building was attached right to the

building's front and obscures all but a few of the arches.) The front lobby area was pure class, a step back in time. A drawing of DeLongchamps describes its "Floor, Columns, Pilasters, Wainscott & Cap and Base," all made of beautiful marble. Terra cotta coping was used between the floors and a band of "ornament" wraps around the outside of the building. The first floor had administration offices, a kitchen, a women's ward and the visitors' area. The second floor had a women's dormitory on the north end and a men's dormitory on the south end. On the second floor wing that was built to the east there was a large room with a laboratory, pack room, Doctors' Scrub Room, Operating Room, and a Hydrotherapy room.

The Buildings (continued)

Between 1925 and 1927, Frederic DeLongchamps designed two more buildings in the style of his "Administration Building." The first is the large, L-shaped "C Ward," known today as Building No. 3. Similar in quality and style to Building No. 1, even the stairwells were nicely designed with tile on the walls, oak handrails and plate glass entry doors. It has four two-story bays, two facing Galletti Way and two facing Glendale Avenue. Its south wing faced Glendale until, again in the early 1960s, a modern brick building with an open-brick-wall design (like you would expect to see on a patio) was built in front of it. Between Building No. 3 and the modern add-on, there is an odd white wall with red and blue squares that complements nothing around it. The 1960s add-on (Building No. 4) and Bldg. No. 3 stand vacant today.

The other building constructed around this time was the "Men's Ward," or Building No. 6 as it was called when it was demolished in 2005. It was smaller than either Building No. 1 or Building No. 3, but had the same Renaissance Revival look and had one two-story bay on the east side and one on the west side. On the drawings for both Buildings Nos. 3 and 6, Frederic DeLongchamps instructed: "Brick—all brick is to be Reno Pressed Brick Company's product or any other Nevada made brick which is equal in quality to the above named brick." According to local brick enthusiast Beth Miramon, not only did the records of the time indicate that bricks from "Reno Pressed Brick Company" were used for the hospital buildings designed by DeLongchamps, but there was absolutely nothing of equal quality to be found locally.

Another notable architect, Edward Parsons, also left his mark on NNAMHS history, when in 1949 he designed a large, two-story, flat-roofed "Male Ward Building" northeast of the other hospital buildings. A sign of the times, it was a plain affair in comparison to DeLongchamps designed buildings

Truckee Meadows ditch-lovers might want to know that besides having water rights to the Sullivan-Kelly Ditch, the hospital also filed a deed in April 1887 for the "State of Nevada Insane Asylum Flume." The English Mill Ditch also meanders through the property.

For those interested in cemeteries, recent efforts by the non-profit group, Friends of NNAMHS Cemetery, has opened a dialogue with the hospital and the City of Sparks to begin an era of respect for those who have been buried on the hospital grounds. They have plans to restore and preserve the hospital's cemetery. Their website is <http://friendsofnorthernnevadaadultmentalhealthservicescemetery.com/>.



NNAMHS around 1950 (date on photo is wrong). On the left, the large 1920 DeLongchamps Administration Building with the two bays and arches; on the far left is the Stone House. To the right of the Admin. Bldg. is the last western section of the beautiful 1882 building that was totally gone by the 1950s. Lower right L-shaped building (facing Glendale) is DeLongchamps "C" Ward (now Bldg. 3) and just to the right of that is Bldg. No. 6 that was demolished in 2005. In the upper right is the sprawling Edward Parsons "Ward" Bldg. built in 1949 and torn down in 2007. Photo courtesy of NNAMHS.

1, 3 & 6, with a modern look more like that of a contemporary sprawling high school. According to the "Survey of the Nevada Hospital for Mental Diseases, Bulletin No. 10," published in 1950, the ward was designed to accommodate 160 patients. This report indicates that within nearly two years, this building was showing signs of deterioration in the flooring and hardware and plumbing and the flat roof needed repairs due to leakage. Despite the quick decline (which mirrors complaints reported about the original 1882 building), Edward Parsons was brought back time and time again to work on other building projects, such as renovations on the DeLongchamps' buildings and the Stone House. Parsons' Male Ward Building was demolished in 2007.

I wish to thank Arline Laffery, Rosie Cevasco, Carolyn Mirich and Beth Miramon for sharing their great research materials, Mella Harmon for her architectural help, and Carol Coleman for her patience. Also, thanks to UNR Special Collections staff and the Nevada Historical Society staff for always accommodat-

ing my tedious projects. I obtained information from various Reno newspapers; government publications such as the Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau Bulletin No. 10; architectural drawings at UNR Special Collections; photographs, Sanborn maps, Nevada State and Assembly Journals, and vertical file information from the Nevada Historical Society; and online sites such as <http://nevadaculture.org/shpo> and <http://www.unr.edu/tour/mh.html>.

Kim Henrick is a volunteer at the Nevada Historical Society. She is a member of the HRPS Editorial Staff.

Creating Junior Historic Preservationists

by Barbara Courtney and Debbie Hinman

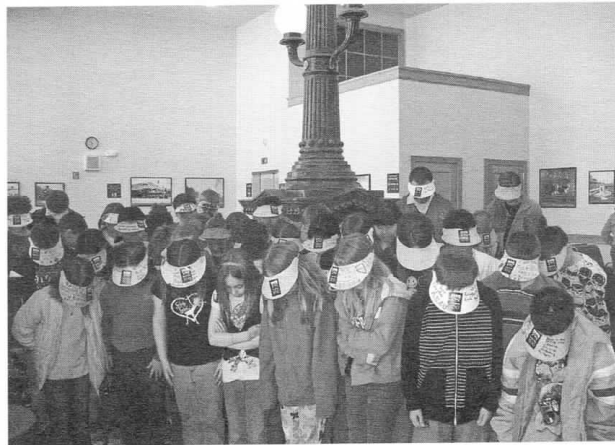
Nine and ten-year-olds enthusiastic about history and architecture? Not likely, most would think—but they’d be wrong. On April 27th, several HRPS board members entered a classroom containing both 4th grade classes of Peavine Elementary School and introduced approximately 50 students to such concepts as historic preservation, adaptive reuse, and the origins of our city, using a DVD created by Jerry Fenwick. Jerry has an amazing collection of historic photos of the area, and utilized them in creating this program. With the assistance of the other members of the Education Committee: Felvia Belaustegui, Phyllis Cates, Joan Collins and Barbara Courtney, a script was developed and the Committee created a two-day historic preservation experience for the students.

On the program’s first day, students took part in the in-class portion of the program. They were treated to early photos of Reno, and heard history of their home town. Following the presentation, students were given visors to take home and decorate, using their own Reno-related theme. “The real thrill of this whole adventure was the enthusiasm of the students,” declared presenter Barbara Courtney. “They asked so many good questions during the DVD presentation.” Students were given an additional homework assignment of finding out what the initials “WCTU” stood for—as this would be important to the following day’s activities.

On the second day, sporting their creatively-designed visors, students boarded a bus bound for many of the buildings and historic sites they had learned about the day before.

The bus slowed outside Reno’s oldest existing commercial building, the Masonic Building at Commercial Row and Sierra Street. Students were impressed to see a downtown building from the 1800s. The first stop for the students was the train

station. They were shown both the “old” and “new” sections of the station. For many of them, this was their first time in the building. A big surprise awaited them when they descended into the basement or the “train level.” The wonderfully restored WCTU Fountain captivated the boys and girls; they were particularly fascinated by the fact that not only was there a fountain for people, but a trough



Peavine Elementary 4th graders, standing in front of the WCTU fountain, dip their heads to show the visors they decorated to describe their adventures on the HRPS School History Project. Picture courtesy of Barbara Courtney.

for horses and a lower basin for dogs as well. Most of them had indeed found that “WCTU” stood for Women’s Christian Temperance Union and knew a little of the history and purpose of the organization.

Next stop was the famous corner of South Virginia and Mill streets. The historic Riverside Hotel (now the Artists’ Lofts), the Downtown Post Office, and the Washoe County Courthouse were viewed, as well as the more modern Pioneer Auditorium. The group toured the inside of the Post Office, where students were fascinated by the black marble, aluminum décor and the detail of the design elements. The 100+ year-old Virginia Street Bridge was another point of interest at this location, and students learned that this was the point of origin for the City of Reno, then known as Lake’s Crossing. They drove beneath both the old Reno Arch, now on Lake Street, and the latest

version on Virginia Street, and heard a little of the history of the Reno arches through the years.

The McKinley Arts and Culture Center was next on the agenda. Students learned about the “Four Sisters” schools of which McKinley and Mt. Rose School are the two survivors, and toured the McKinley building. They were told how these schools were saved as local residents joined together to preserve our history. At the Center, HRPS creator Pat Klos gave the students a mini-architecture lesson.

Finally, the students visited Idlewild Park, viewing the pool and the California Building. They learned about the Transcontinental Highway Exhibition, and how the building was California’s gift to Nevada. Said Barbara Courtney, “They were interested in the places we saw, and they showed exemplary behavior. All of us who participated were impressed.” These sentiments were echoed by the students. With regard to past field trips, the consensus of the class was “This trip was the best one we’ve had!”

The next school to participate in the HRPS School History Project will be Veteran’s Memorial, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. This program took place May 28 and 29. Because of the tremendous success of the pilot effort, HRPS is hoping to engage the interest of more local elementary schools. The HRPS organization covers the cost of the visors and the bus, so the program is free to the school district. The City of Reno donated the big “Reno” stickers for the visors. HRPS believes that by fostering an appreciation for local history at an early age, we are creating not only the future’s architectural historians and historic preservationists, but also a new generation of people who care about the history of their city and will work to preserve it. 

Barbara Courtney and Debbie Hinman are HRPS Board Members.

Mella Harmon Leaves the Nevada Historical Society

by Ron James, State Historic Preservation Officer



Mella Rothwell Harmon.

Photo courtesy Preserve Nevada.

There are few historians in recent years who have contributed more to Nevada than Mella Rothwell Harmon. Her focus has been to advance the study and celebration of the state's rich heritage

more than to advance herself, so some may not understand how profoundly important her contribution has been. In recent years, Mella has served as the curator of history and as the editor of the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, putting the publication back on schedule for the first time in years and elevating the professional quality of the *Quarterly*. Her extensive efforts have increased the credibility of this important publication. But this is only her most recent contribution.


Mella Harmon received her B.A. from the University of California, Berkeley's Anthropology Department in 1989. She went on to earn her M.S. from the

University of Nevada, Reno in Land Use Planning and Historic Preservation programs in 1998. In 1997, Mella began a lengthy service on the Reno Historical Resources Commission and began lecturing at UNR. In 1998, she assumed a position with the State Historic Preservation Office where she oversaw the Commission for Cultural Affairs'




Mella Harmon in the 2003 Literary Reno Tour, portraying Romona Rothwell, private secretary to Clare Booth who came to Reno in 1929 to obtain a divorce.

grants, reviewed federal undertakings and managed the State and National Register of Historic Places. In this last capacity, Mella was responsible for listing dozens of properties—increasing the state's collection of documented structures by roughly a third. Her expert research and excellent writing skills earned Nevada a reputation that continues to win commendation from the Washington, D. C. National Park Service office. Mella also turned many of her nominations into articles for the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, creating another venue where people could enjoy her work.

In 2005, Mella transferred to the Nevada Historical Society, where she continued her efforts to bring history to all Nevadans. Her exhibits, her articles, her public programming, and her editing of the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* are examples of the sort of wonderful work to her credit. Since 1998, Mella Harmon has served the Department of Cultural Affairs with dedication—greeting the public cheerfully and always giving her best effort for the benefit of everyone. 


UNR Keck Museum Tour and Reception

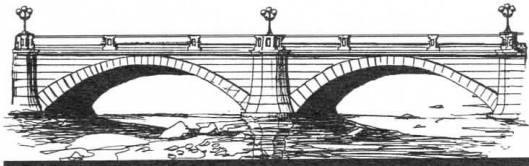
HRPS will conduct a special tour of the Mackay School facilities and the W.M. Keck Museum commencing at 5:30 PM, August 20, 2009. The tour will leave from the John Mackay statue at the north end of the quadrangle. Starting with a discussion of the historic Mackay building and statue, the tour will proceed to the seismological displays in the Laxalt building. The highlight of the tour will be the W. M. Keck Museum which contains mineral, historic mining and the Mackey silver displays. Following the formal tour, refreshments will be served in the Museum leaving time to examine the displays with leisure. A cash bar will also be available. A fee of \$35 for all participants (including HRPS members) will cover the cost of refreshments, trip materials, and a donation to the Keck Museum. The tour is limited to the first 35 registrants. A waiting list will be maintained to fill cancellations. Call Cindy Ainsworth at 747-0340 to reserve your place! 

Reno Room at Nevada Historical Society to Open

Opening Reception: Reno Room
June 12, 5:00 pm to 7:30 pm
Nevada Historical Society

On June 12, a new permanent exhibit known as the Reno Room will open at the Nevada Historical Society. The Reno Room will present the history of Reno: 19th Century Reno, Sin City, travel and tourism, ethnic communities, everyday Reno life, and modern Reno. Among items on display are the Bank Club roulette wheel, a Liberty Belle slot machine, and a Reno Wheelman's bicycle and trophies. A fence from the Robert Fulton House, first president of the Nevada Historical Society, will decorate the Room.

A Reno arch, built by Bob Fillipi, greets the visitor entering the Reno Room. Four life-size images of the Pickles family, drawn by Brian Crane, join the visitors in viewing the new room. The exhibit will be rich in photos, artifacts, ephemera, and manuscript materials — something for everyone. 



Historic Reno
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HRPS and Artown
July 2009
Historic Walking Tours



Tour cost is \$10 per person, free to HRPS members. Walks generally last from 1½ to 2 hours. No dogs, please. Reservations are required and space is limited. Please call 747-4478 or go to www.historicreno.org for information and reservations. HRPS is dedicated to preserving and promoting historic resources in the Truckee Meadows through education, advocacy and leadership.

- Sunday
 July 5
 9:00 a.m.

BIKE TOUR THROUGH OLD RENO - A leisurely ride through the most historic parts of Reno. Meet at My Favorite Muffin, 340 California Avenue. Tour guide: Glee Willis. **HELMETS REQUIRED, NO EXCEPTIONS!**
- Tuesday
 July 7
 6:00 p.m.

MANSIONS ON THE BLUFF - An historic walk that looks at some of the most notable homes in Reno. Court and Ridge streets and upper California Avenue, home to three senators and the merchants who made early Reno "The Biggest Little City in the World." Meet at the McCarran House, 401 Court Street. Tour guides: Ed Wishart, Tracy Soliday.
- Saturday
 July 11
 9:00 a.m.

BEYOND THE ARCHES - Witness downtown Reno as it has reinvented itself for 150 years. This tour links the downtown Reno arches with stories of the forces that shaped the town: railroad and mining, immigrants, as a notorious divorce and gambling mecca, and now as a livable cultural hub. Walk in the footsteps of Bill Harrah, Myron Lake, Baby Face Nelson, Frederic DeLongchamps and others. Meet at the National Automobile Museum, 10 S. Lake St. Tour guide: Sharon Honig-Bear.
- Tuesday,
 July 14
 6:00 p.m.

POWNING ADDITION AND LITTLE ITALY - Discover one of Reno's earliest and most delightful vernacular neighborhoods, predominantly settled by Northern Italian immigrants. A chance to meet some of the descendants of the Italian families who settled in the early 20th century. Meet at McKinley Arts & Culture Center. Tour guide: Felvia Belaustegui.
- Saturday,
 July 18
 9:00 a.m.

NEWLANDS NEIGHBORHOOD - An architectural walk through one of Reno's oldest, loveliest and most prestigious neighborhoods. Meet at My Favorite Muffin, 340 California Avenue. Tour guide: Scott Gibson.
- Saturday,
 July 18
 11:00 to 3:00 p.m.

CAUGHLIN RANCH OPEN HOUSE AND TOUR - A special day at the ranch will feature tours of the ranch house and grounds. Learn about Reno's pioneering families who developed this Truckee Meadows area. Local authors will also be on hand to sign their books. Hours 11 am to 3 pm. Free tours at 12:00 and 2:00 pm. The New Garden Shop, 3636 Mayberry Drive, Reno. For information call Cindy Ainsworth at 747-0340.
- Tuesday,
 July 21
 6:00 p.m.

UNIVERSITY NEIGHBORHOOD - A walk through an historic and endangered neighborhood at the foot of the campus—with vintage Queen Anne homes and charming bungalows. Meet at the base of the 9th Street university steps. Tour guides: Debbie Hinman and Jack Hursh.
- Saturday,
 July 25
 10:00 a.m.

PARSONS/MILLS ARCHITECTURE - Stroll one of Reno's most unique neighborhoods to view some designs of Reno architects Edward Parsons and Russell Mills, who sometimes collaborated on designs. Hear about the families who first lived in these homes. Meet at the corner of Marsh Avenue and LaRue. Tour guides: Anne Simone, Elsie Newman.
- Sunday,
 July 26
 9:00 a.m.

BIKE TOUR THROUGH OLD RENO - A leisurely ride through the most historic parts of Reno. Meet at My Favorite Muffin, 340 California Avenue. Tour guide: Glee Willis. **HELMETS REQUIRED, NO EXCEPTIONS!**
- Tuesday,
 July 28
 6:00 p.m.

EL RENO APARTMENT HOMES - Visit the original site of these charming and unique homes and view seven of them at their new locations. Other examples of the Sierra Vista Addition architecture will be seen. Meet at the Statewide Lighting parking lot, 1311 S. Virginia. Tour guide: Debbie Hinman.

Alice's Journey

By Debbie Hinman

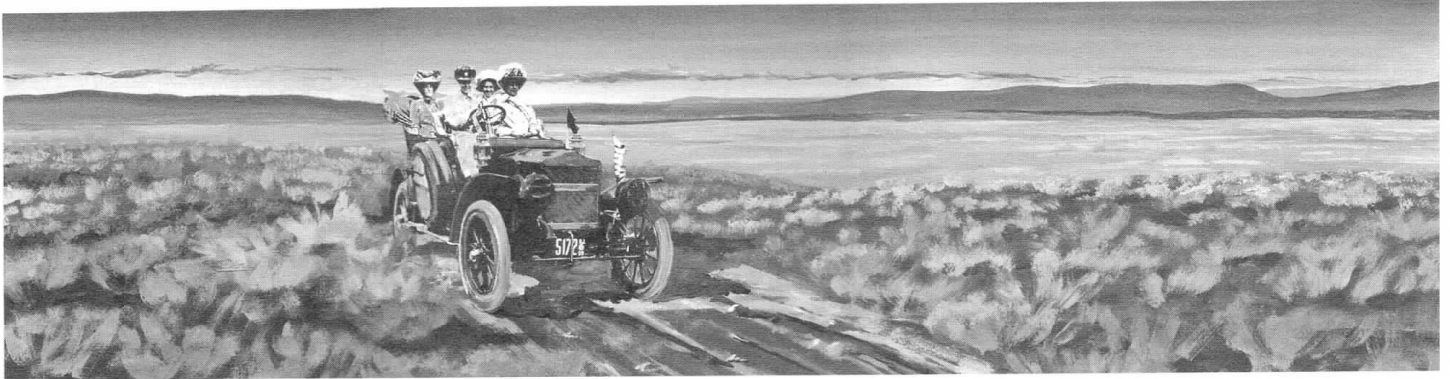
It was close to midnight in Reno, Wednesday, July 28, 1909, when the road-worn Maxwell DA, bearing four weary women, rolled to a stop in front of the spreading silhouette of the Riverside Hotel. Scattered squares of light studded the imposing brick edifice with its quaint turrets and wide front entry. In the few quiet moments before the welcoming Sacramento and San Francisco Maxwellites hurried forth to greet them, the women took deep whiffs of the cool, summer night air and heard the burbling of the Truckee River coursing alongside the Hotel beneath the new stone archways of the Virginia Street Bridge. The women were tired but exhilarated—their long, eventful journey was nearly at an end.

received a perfect score at the Montauk Point Run on Long Island and Kelsey's proposal came in the way of a prophecy, which greatly intrigued the young woman and her two sisters-in-law who had accompanied her on the Run. "You are going to be the first woman ever to drive an automobile across the United States of America, from Hell Gate on the Atlantic to the Golden Gate on the Pacific...and in a Maxwell!" he proclaimed over lunch. Alice reports in her memoir of the journey, *Veil, Duster and Tire Iron*, "By now I was numb all over. He might as well have said I would fly to the moon the following week!"

Kelsey's motivation was publicity for Maxwell-Briscoe but Alice didn't care—she

across the United States to help with parts, service and the occasional "pilot car."

The 1909 Maxwell DA furnished for the journey was a tall, stylish, dark green model with a hinged windshield, soft Pantasote top and right-hand drive. The sticker price was \$1,500. Delivered to Alice's Hackensack, New Jersey home on May 12, the 4-cylinder 30-horsepower vehicle was stock with a few modifications for this ambitious undertaking; the gas tank was upgraded from 16 gallons to 20, and a side rack held two spare tires. The women could only take one suitcase apiece, which allowed for very little, given the clothing styles of the day. As well as being a skilled



Maquette of the mural of Alice Ramsey and her three passengers by John Ton on the building at the intersection of Liberty and Sierra streets. Photo courtesy of John Ton.

History is full of tales of intrepid women, but Alice Huyler Ramsey has to rank among the most notable of the 20th century. June 9, 2009 will mark the centennial of Alice's departure from New York City in her 1909 Maxwell DA on a 3800-mile, 41-day transcontinental journey to San Francisco, California. Though not the first person to make the trip by automobile, she was the first woman to do so, making better time than some of the men—and her three passengers were also women.

Alice was only 22 and had been driving for less than a year when Maxwell-Briscoe Sales Manager Carl Kelsey, impressed with Alice's prowess behind the wheel, approached her with the idea of the transcontinental run. Alice had just

found herself intrigued and excited by the idea. However, she had a husband and a young son; what would her husband think of such an undertaking? In the coming months, Alice's two sisters-in-law, Nettie Powell and Maggie Atwood, both in their forties, broached the subject from time to time, their imaginations also caught by the novelty of the idea. Determining that they were indeed serious about the adventure and securing her husband's support, she recruited a fourth woman, 16-year-old Hermine Jahns, who had driven with her on the New York to Philadelphia reliability run. Gratified that his prophecy was on its way to coming true, Carl Kelsey assured Alice that Maxwell-Briscoe would supply the automobile and cover the expenses of the journey. He would also enlist the support and assistance of the dealers

driver, Alice had enough mechanical knowledge to perform small repairs and maintenance herself, with the assistance of a toolkit and assorted small parts.

The four women left 1930 Broadway, the home of the New York City Maxwell dealership, that June 9th morning in a downpour. They wore rubber helmets and voluminous rain ponchos over their dresses. Alice described the helmets as "highly recommended for a fisherman, or for a fireman on duty." Starting the engine with a turn of the crank, Alice ran around the vehicle to retard the throttle, gave her husband a goodbye kiss and hopped behind the wheel. Off they drove down Broadway, accompanied by the encouraging cheers of onlookers.

Continued on page 8

Alice's Journey (continued)

Continued from page 7

Rain continued to dog their journey on a frequent basis, out of the east and into the midwestern United States, turning dirt roads into what Alice termed "gumbo." As this trip was made four years before the Lincoln Highway became a reality, they frequently followed rutted wagon tracks through dirt and mud across open fields. At this time, there were only 152 miles of paved roadways in the entire United States and out of a total population of 80 million people, only 155,000 Americans owned automobiles.

There were serious issues with the wagon tracks that automobiles were forced to follow. In the north, Alice explained, wagon tracks spanned 56 inches, and automobile manufacturers of that era built their automobiles to conform to this measurement. However, the tracks in the south spanned 60 inches and there were many roads that did not conform at all, so that the vehicle was forced to travel for miles canted one way or another, with one side in the wheel rut and one on the bank of the road.

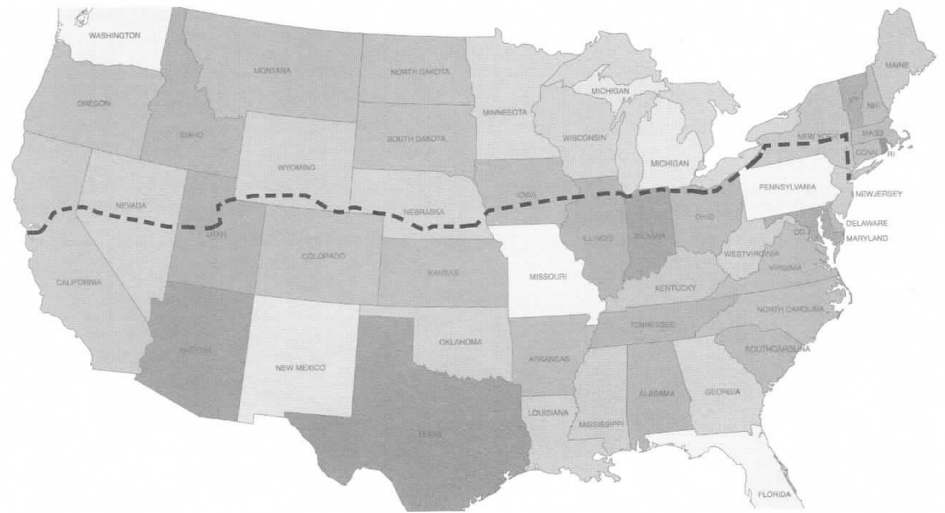
In addition to the challenges presented by the roads, or lack thereof, practically no markers or signs of any kind existed to guide the travelers' way from town to town. Although the American Automobile Association had been in existence for five years, they were not yet in the business of providing travel guides and maps to this new breed of traveler. There were, however, Blue Books, but due to the effort involved in producing them, they were introduced very gradually, beginning with New York State, followed by a guide to New England. By 1909, they only gave information as far west as the Missouri River. Beyond that, Alice had to depend on the directions given by locals or the Maxwell representatives that accompanied their vehicle from time to time.

Even the meticulous Blue Books were not infallible. Alice related an amusing tale of following the instructions to Cleveland. The Book read: "At 11.6 miles, yellow house and barn on rt. Turn left." Realizing she must have missed the

turn though she had been watching her odometer carefully, she turned around and asked a woman working in her yard about the correct road. The woman smiled and admitted that the owner of the yellow house, being "agin" the automobile, had gleefully re-painted his house and barn green, telling his neighbor, "We'll have some fun with them *auto-mo-bile* drivers!"

whatever was left in their picnic hamper. One of their staples was bread and butter with sugar sprinkled on top for energy.

At one point, the road was so treacherous and the extra weight so much a concern that Alice sent her three companions to the next town by train along with some of the heavier cargo, while she and advance man J. D. Murphy of the Boston



The path that Alice Ramsey took across the United States in 1909.

Whenever possible, Alice took care of necessary repairs on her own. On the stretch from Chicago leading to the Mississippi, while following a pilot car, the Maxwell had one of its many flat tires. In spite of the fact that there was a carload of men in front of them, Alice insisted on changing the tire herself. She allowed the men to take turns pumping up the tire, however. When the trouble was more serious, such as broken axles, Alice would have the parts shipped from the nearest dealership by train and enlist help for these heavier repairs.

Many times bridges were washed out by flooding, but the Maxwell usually made the river and stream crossings without incident, due to Alice's knowledge of how best to maneuver the vehicle or by the wisdom of her decision to wait until the waters subsided. The four women spent more than one night in the car alongside an overflowing stream, dining on

Herald tackled the road themselves. More than once Alice was advised to place the Maxwell on a flatbed wagon and have horses or oxen pull it to a less dangerous stretch of road. Alice adamantly refused; she had vowed she would *drive* the vehicle the entire distance, and she intended to do so. She did allow others to help pull the Maxwell out when it got stuck, but she also used her tow rope to pull out other stuck drivers along the way. Usually these motorists were apprehensive at the sight of four women coming to their aid, but they were soon convinced of their competence.

Probably the most frightening river crossing Alice experienced was on a railroad trestle above the Platte River. Her companions walked to the railroad shed to obtain a permit to use this stretch of track. After two hours, the companions gave Alice the high sign to begin the crossing. Said Alice, "BUMP.

Alice's Journey (continued)

Three-quarters of a mile of this, one bump at a time. As if living one day at a time in periods of stress, I lived one bump at a time."

From Wyoming, then through Utah and into Nevada, the women drove on in the summer heat. They spent the night in Ely, traveling on to Eureka, where they spent the night at the Brown Hotel next door to the Eureka Opera House. The following night was spent in Austin at the Pat Walsh Ranch. The consensus of the women was that the breakfast they were served the next morning was definitely the oddest ever, consisting of lamb chops and chocolate cake. One day while crossing the state, they had a nervous few minutes when they suddenly saw a dozen Indians on horseback bearing down upon them. Suddenly a frantic jack rabbit streaked across the road in front of their vehicle and the Indians followed, barely noticing the automobile with its four, ashen-faced passengers.

The Maxwell continued into Fallon, then through Hazen, Fernley and Wadsworth. Alice described the road as being pretty fair and goes on to say, "The image that is most vivid in my mind is the unexpected view as we drove over the mountain in the late evening and looked upon the little city of Sparks. I think I shall never forget the surprise of that vista bursting upon us in the darkness. Here was a hollow in which lay a community brilliantly lighted with electricity! Right off the dark and barren desert, this almost bowled us over. It was situated only a couple of miles from Reno and was connected to it—by trolley! Surprise! Surprise! Finally we had returned to civilization!"

After the stop at the Riverside, the party left the following morning for the last leg of their journey, south to Carson City and then up King's Canyon Road to the shores of Lake Tahoe, then on to Placerville, Stockton, Hayward and into San Francisco, where

they were grandly welcomed by huge crowds and local dignitaries, as well as the ever-present Maxwell-Briscoe representatives.


It wasn't until much later in her lifetime that Alice Ramsey received the appropriate accolades for her momentous achievement. In 1959, a story appeared in the *New York Times* heralding the 50-year anniversary of Alice's drive. This created renewed



Alice Ramsey as shown on <http://aliceramsey.org/>

interest in the journey and was followed up by other newspaper and magazine articles. In 1960, Alice was invited to attend the 43rd National Automobile Show where she received two awards: One from her old friend Carl Kelsey in conjunction with the Vice President of the Chrysler Corporation (which bought Maxwell-Briscoe in 1920) and a few others, and a plaque from AAA bestowing upon Alice the title of "Woman Motorist of the Century." Alice published her own account of her journey, *Veil, Duster and Tire Iron*, in 1961, using her original journal entries from the adventure. In 2000, Alice was the first woman to be inducted into the Automotive Hall of Fame. Alice moved to Covina, California in 1948 and lived out the remainder of her years there, passing away in 1983.

There is an intriguing postscript to this story. In 2005, Dr. Richard Anderson, an antique car aficionado from Monroe, Washington, set about trying to find a 1909 Maxwell DA. He had an idea of restoring a vehicle identical to the one Alice Ramsey drove, and having his 34-year-old daughter, Emily, re-create Alice's drive, leaving New York for San Francisco on June 9, 2009, exactly 100 years from Alice's departure date. He was disappointed to find only one verified 1909 Maxwell DA in existence, which was not for sale. However, its owner offered to donate parts he had located and assist Anderson in re-creating a second Maxwell "from the ground up." Less than a month from the intended departure date, the car is ready, sporting its rich, dark green color, and has passed all test runs. Emily Anderson is anxious to get started on her epic re-enactment of Alice's Drive. You can read about the project and will be able to follow Emily's progress at <http://aliceramsey.org/>. What a long way we've come since Alice could only communicate with friends and family through letters sent to General Delivery in the larger towns along her route!

Emily Anderson and her crew are slated to arrive in Reno July 4th weekend. A reception will be held at the National Automobile Museum for NAM members to meet Emily, and hear about her adventure. The Maxwell may be on display during this time, but plans have not been firmed up as of this printing; check local media for more information as the date draws nearer. 

Information for this article came from *Alice's Drive* by Gregory M. Franzwa (2005), an annotated version of Alice Ramsey's original book *Veil, Duster and Tire Iron* (1961), and from the website <http://aliceramsey.org/>.

REMINDER: All Membership Renewals Due July 1, 2009

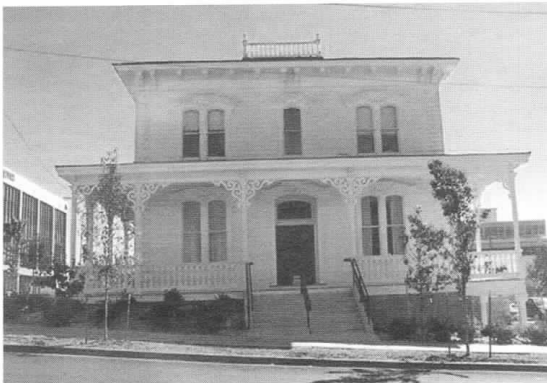
From Your HRPS President

The month of May is National Historic Preservation Month and each year the Reno Historical Commission (HRC) requests nominations for preservation awards. Seven awards were bestowed by the Commission in 2009.

This year, the commissioners deservedly honored life-long Reno resident Nan Spina with the Distinguished Service Award. In 1977, she helped organize historic walking tours before HRPS existed. Ms. Spina was a commissioner for HRC from 1994 to 2006. During her tenure she assisted in designing the Reno Historic Structures Handbook and other publications. She helped in drafting the City Register nominations and accessing data to provide a historical inventory of more than 2,000 properties dating from 1869 to 1956.

The Advocate Award went to Kelly Rae and Pamela Haberman who specialize in urban infill green buildings. Their two outstanding properties are the SoDo Project on No. Center Street and HabeRae on Morrill Avenue.

This year's Residential Award went to Joannie and Mike Cassity for their residence, a DeLongchamps-designed Tudor Revival home circa 1927-28, located at 543 Ridge Street. Their work in restoring this historic residence is exemplary.



Lake Mansion, 250 Court Street, received the 2009 Historic Landmark Award from the Historical Resources Commission.

Photo courtesy <http://www.lakemansion.com/>.



Felvia Belaustegui, HRPS President.
Photo by Debbie Hinman.

Two Non-Residential Awards were presented this year. The first went to the Lane Building, located at 401 West 2nd Street, built in 1906. Now owned by the University of Nevada, Reno, it is an excellent example of Mission/Spanish Revival design elements which has been well preserved in its original configuration.

The second award went to the beautiful St. Thomas Aquinas Cathedral, 310 W. 2nd Street. This 1907 building was in a state of structural decline when the Diocese of Reno made the decision to restore it in 2007. The construction was completed in an historically sensitive manner, which demonstrates an important aspect of historic preservation.

The Lake Mansion, 250 Court Street, received the Historic Landmark Award. Originally owned by Washington J. Marsh who had it built in 1877, ownership passed to Reno's founding family, Myron C. and Jane Conkey Bryant Lake, in 1879. In 1971, the home, which originally stood at the corner of South Virginia Street and California Avenue, was saved after being scheduled for demolition and was moved to the Convention Center site south of town. In 2004, the current owner of the building, VSA Arts of Nevada, raised the necessary funds to move the home to the current location at the southeast corner of Court Street and Arlington Avenue.

The Historic Resource Award was presented to Linda R. Newman, University of Nevada, Reno. Ms. Newman is a map librarian in Special Collections who has worked tirelessly to convert paper documents to a digital format. After a three-year effort, she now has the Nevada plat maps of the entire state available online. Also online are full-color Sanborn maps for various Nevada localities, along with a full explanation of their significance. This is a wonderful resource for researchers—or anyone with an interest in historic local maps!



St. Thomas Aquinas Cathedral, 310 W. 2nd Street, received a 2009 Non-Residential Award from HRC for the recent restoration effort.
Photo courtesy of www.nevadamax.com.

The awards were funded by a gracious donation from the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Our own HRPS funded the recognition luncheon, held at the Lake Mansion, on Wednesday, May 13. Fifty-two people attended the event. The Garden Shop, located at the 3640 Mayberry Drive, provided the floral arrangements for the luncheon tables. I would like to thank Alice Baldrice from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and Dr. Michael Fischer, Director of the Department of Cultural Affairs, State of Nevada for attending the presentations and the luncheon.

— Felvia Belaustegui, HRPS President
HRPS President and HRC Commissioner

HRPS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Join HRPS or 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
- Renewing Member

Name(s) _____

Mailing Address _____ City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone (H) _____ (W) _____ Best time to call: _____

Occupation: _____ Employer: _____

Fax _____ E-Mail: _____

Annual membership includes: Footprints (HRPS Quarterly) • Free participation in walking tours

Student \$15.00 Individual \$25.00 Family (Children 18 yrs and younger) \$40.00

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 USE ONLY PAID: Check Cash Amount: _____ Membership # _____ Renewal Date: _____

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REMINDER: All Membership Renewals Due July 1, 2009

As of July 1, 2008, HRPS converted its membership to a fiscal year cycle. All memberships will run from July 1 through June 30 of the following year. Have you renewed your membership? Check the website www.historicreno.org for a membership form.

History Lives: Check Out the Museums this Summer

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>Bowers Mansion (tour)
 4005 U. S. Hwy 395 North, Carson City, 849-0201.
 Call to make reservation.</p> <p>Churchill County Museum
 1050 S. Maine St., Fallon, NV 423-3677.
 Monday - Saturday, 10 am - 5 pm, Sunday, noon - 5 pm</p> <p>Fourth Ward School Museum and Cultural Center
 537 S. C. St., Virginia City,
 847-0975, Daily, 10 am - 5 pm</p> <p>Genoa Courthouse Museum
 2304 Main St., Genoa, 782-4325
 May - October: Daily, 10 am - 4:30 pm</p> <p>National Automobile Museum, The Harrah Collection
 10 S. Lake St., Reno, 333-9300
 Monday - Saturday, 9:30 am - 5:30 pm, Sunday, 10 am - 4 pm</p> | <p>Nevada State Capitol
 Musser and Carson streets, Carson City. (800) 638-2321.
 Daily, 8 am - 5 pm.</p> <p>Nevada State Railroad Museum
 2180 S. Carson St., Carson City, 687-6953
 Daily, 8:30 am - 4:30 pm</p> <p>Nevada Historical Society
 1650 N. Virginia St., Reno, 688-1190
 Wednesday - Saturday, 10 am - 5 pm</p> <p>Nevada State Museum
 600 N. Carson St. Carson City, 687-4810
 Daily, 8:30am - 4:30 pm.</p> <p>Sparks Heritage Museum
 820 Victorian Avenue, Sparks. 355-1144,
 Tuesday-Friday, 11 am - 4 pm, Saturday, 1 pm - 4 pm</p> |
|--|--|

**Online Reservations for HRPS Walks Now Available
at www.historicreno.org**



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JULY 2009 HRPS AND ARTOWN WALKING TOURS

HRPS Speaker Programs will resume in September 2009.

Tour cost is \$10 per person, free to HRPS members. Walks generally last from 1½ to 2 hours.

No dogs, please. Reservations are required and space is limited.

Please call 747-4478 or go to www.historicreno.org for information and reservations.

See page 6 for details of each walk.

Sunday, July 5, — 9:00 a.m. — BIKE TOUR THROUGH OLD RENO

Tuesday, July 7, — 6:00 p.m. — MANSIONS ON THE BLUFF

Saturday, July 11, — 9:00 a.m. — BEYOND THE ARCHES

Tuesday, July 14, — 6:00 p.m. — POWNING ADDITION AND LITTLE ITALY

Saturday, July 18, — 9:00 a.m. — NEWLANDS NEIGHBORHOOD

Saturday, July 18, — 11:00 to 3:00 p.m. — CAUGHLIN RANCH OPEN HOUSE AND TOUR

Tuesday, July 21, — 6:00 p.m. — UNIVERSITY NEIGHBORHOOD

Saturday, July 25, — 10:00 a.m. — PARSONS/MILLS ARCHITECTURE

Sunday, July 26, — 9:00 a.m. — BIKE TOUR THROUGH OLD RENO

Tuesday, July 28, — 6:00 p.m. — EL RENO APARTMENT HOMES

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