

Reno: Our Italian Heritage

by Debbie Hinman with Daryl Pelizzari

Though most of the homes that HRPS features on its annual Harvest of Homes tour have great history, some of the histories reach back many, many years, and are more intriguing and reveal more about the origins of Reno than others. This is the case with 603 Humboldt Street, the sturdy home built entirely of handsome local rock, that belonged to one family, the Pelizzaris, for 91 years.

Enter the Italians

The late nineteenth century in Reno was home to a microcosm of nationalities, but settlers of Italian origin made their mark to the greatest degree. A thesis written by a John Gottardi, student of the University of Nevada in 1926, gave the following reasons for this; he wrote, “The (Italian) immigrants of Nevada found very favorable climate, sky and soil, very similar to those of Italy: they all found good work, good pay without difficulty. They would eventually bring their brothers, wives, sons or father or the whole family or friends.”

John Townley, in his book *Tough Little Town on the Truckee* wrote, “After the turn of the century, Reno and the Truckee Meadows was the area where the Italians invested. Both the ranches of the Truckee Meadows and the “Little Italy” area of downtown Reno were concentrations of Italian wealth. The 1910 census records 372 Italians in Reno. In 1930, 637 were recorded. The Italians were the largest foreign born ethnic group in Reno and Washoe County, as well as the largest native born of foreign born parents.”

Alice Frances Trout, in her master’s thesis in 1916, wrote “Our sturdy Anglo-Saxon settlers are being rapidly replaced by Italians, particularly in the Truckee Meadows. Four-fifths of the land is now owned by Italians. The reason is not far to seek. As a people the latter are content to begin on a small scale, live below our standard until their financial condition will warrant a home and an automobile.”

Wilbur Shepperson, professor at the University of Nevada, Reno, also discussed the significance of the Italians in his book, *Restless Strangers*. Wrote Shepperson, “In 1900, Nevada contained



The Pelizzari home at 603 Humboldt in 1900, with Kate and children Lee (b. 1893), John (b. 1895), Humbert (b. 1897) and Joseph (b. 1899).

a larger percentage of Italians of any other state and was twice that of any other state west of the Mississippi.”

Two distinctive “Little Italy” neighborhoods appeared in Reno in the late nineteenth century, continuing into the twentieth. There was the area known as Powning’s Addition, along the Truckee River within easy walking distance of downtown where Italian residents had established bars, restaurants and hotels. North of this neighborhood in the area of Washington Street, considered a bit more upscale, lived many Italians a bit higher on the socioeconomic ladder. This doesn’t mean that Italians were in any way restricted to these areas, but there was a sense of community; residents helped one another build their homes, plant their gardens and make wine. It is likely this helped them adjust to their new country more easily and singles often found life partners in their own neighborhood.

The Pelizzari Family

It was somewhat unusual that upon arriving in Reno, Joseph Pelizzari would choose a neighborhood some distance from the Powning and Washington Street neighborhoods. To trace his early life in the U.S. is no easy feat, due to the lack of precise information, but papers saved by his grandson Daryl offer some clues.

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Joseph was born in Brescia, in Italy's Lombardi Province in 1868. It's believed he traveled west to Reno in the early 1890s, briefly went to Sierra Valley, California and returned to Reno. He then returned to Italy and either proposed to Katherine Pedercini, or kept a promise to come for her and carry her away to America.

However it happened, Joseph and Katherine were married in Reno in 1893 and the couple would call Reno their home from then on. In December of that year, Katherine gave birth to a daughter, Lena Dorothy, though she was later known as Lee or Leigh. A year later, with earnings from his talent as a jack of all trades, Joseph was able to purchase land with a small, wood frame house at 603 Humboldt Street for \$500 in gold coin.

This home was situated in the Marsh's Addition, established in 1877. The home was small, one of the first in this neighborhood as most of the city was developing north of the river. The area at that time probably felt more like open rangeland or a farming community than a neighborhood. But it was still in easy walking distance to Reno's downtown core.

The family was growing at a steady rate of a child every two years. In August of 1895, son John Joseph joined the family; in 1897, a second son, Humbert Paul arrived, then Joseph Lawrence in 1899. Christine Nancy was born in 1902. Joe's brother Battista had also joined the family in America. The little wooden house was becoming full to overflowing.

As the purchase of the home had included land behind the house, around 1908 Joe decided to push the structure to the rear of the property to make room for a larger home in front which he and his brother would build, with the help of the Cordone brothers.

Giacoma Cordone was a rancher and stone mason and the Pelizzari home is proof of his skill. All the rocks to build the exterior were gathered in the nearby neighborhoods of Humboldt, Lander, Marsh, and where the Mt. Rose Elementary School now stands. Unlike many of the other rock houses in the area, constructed of rounded gray river rocks, these rocks were chiseled and made flat. The varied shades of the stones were also a departure from those of many of the other homes.

Oddly, the house was built in two stages; the first half contained the living room and bedrooms. Until the second

stage, begun a few years later, the family used the bathroom and kitchen of the old frame house to the rear. The new house was completed in 1912.

As with most homes of the era and especially those built by Italians, the home also had a basement. Here's a description of this home's basement, remembered by the grandson of Joe Sr. and son of Humbert, Daryl Pelizzari, for an interview on the Italian American Experience in Reno: "I was down in the basement. It was a very dank, moist basement that they stored stuff in. They had their wine-stomping pit down there. They made the beams

for the floor look like all one large huge beam, and in green paint with letters about eight inches high my grandfather wrote, July 4, 1908. This house built by J. Pelizzari, Esquire."

There was a second family event the year the home was finished; though Joseph and Kate likely believed their family was complete following Christine's birth in 1902, Kathryn Constance arrived in 1912 to make an even half-dozen Pelizzari children.



Kate above, upper right: Lee (b. 1895), Humbert (b. 1897), and John (b. 1895); lower right Joe (b. 1899) and Chris (b. 1902) riding a burro or mule?



Grandfather Joe

Joe seemed to have been a "jack of all trades," finding work as he could around the small town of Reno. Some of his jobs included laborer, driver for a grocery store, and bartender on and off through the years.

But in 1911 he found himself in a bit of trouble. According to the newspaper account, Joe was bartending at the Columbus Hotel saloon when a local, Louis Perazzo, became so intoxicated that Joe ordered him to leave. Perazzo refused and attempted to hurl a cuspidor at Joe but a spectator stopped him, when he then attempted to strike Joe who drew a revolver and fired a fatal shot at the man. Joe was arrested but let go, pending the trial. Police were unable to locate the principal witness and there were no further newspaper mentions of the incident.

In 1913, Joe purchased a lot in Powning's Addition and in 1915, he was listed in the city directory as owner of the Virginia Bar so his troubles were presumably behind him. Joe became a member of the Knights of Columbus, the world's largest Catholic fraternal service organization, founded in Reno in 1882. At some point, he became involved in the nursery and gardening industry in Reno, according to his obituary.

On Easter Sunday in April of 1926, Joe had left the house briefly, possibly to have a smoke. As it was a wet day, he decided to use the basement entrance, presumably because his boots were muddy. He slipped on the steps, fell and hit his head. Kate had heard the noise and hurried down to see what had happened. Joe was unconscious so she called for a doctor. By the time he arrived, Joe had died. He was 58. His wife was the matriarch of the family until her death in January of 1943, following a prolonged illness. She was survived by all six of her children and two grandchildren.

The Pelizzari Bunch

In 1881, a “South-side” school had been erected due to complaints that it was too far for children in their neighborhoods to go to the school in the town center. As that portion of the town grew, in 1903, a lovely brick school was constructed south of the river, on the east side of Center Street. It was known as the Southside School. The older Pelizzari children, Leigh, John and Humbert, attended these schools.

By 1912, Mount Rose Elementary School had been built on Lander Street, which was closer to the Pelizzari home and Joe, Christine and Kathryn attended there. Humbert left school in ninth grade; the other children went on to Reno High, which was at that time on West Street. Once the “new” Reno High was built, it became Central Junior High. Kathryn went on to the university and earned a degree.

The Pelizzari clan all remained in Reno. The sons were as hardworking as their father and they all found their own specialties. John was a plumber, Joe an electrician, and Humbert a cabinetmaker. Leigh (Lee) and Kathryn (Kate) married local men; Leigh was a homemaker but had been a member of a whole host of local women’s organizations.



The Pelizzari home in 1995 with Uncle Joe in center (b. 1899), Daryl (son of Humbert), and Daryl’s son Devin on the left.

Kathryn’s husband was born in Germany but came to Reno in 1932 and worked for the U.S. Post Office, Washoe County and Harolds Club. Neither Chris nor Joe had ever married, and brother and sister were presumably content to live out their lives in the Humboldt house. Chris passed away in 1989, Joe in 1998. The next generation was small: there was Humbert’s son Daryl and John’s son Jack.




Left picture: Joe, daughters Chris and Kathryn, late 1910s.
Right picture: Chris, Kate “Mom” and Kathryn, mid 1940s.



End of an Era

After Joe’s death, the home, having been occupied by the Pelizzari family for some 91 years, was put up for sale. The rock exterior was solid but the interior was showing its age and the home was smaller than most. It was likely that most house hunters would be searching for a spacious living room and kitchen and more bedrooms. There it sat and it was likely most viewing it assumed its days were numbered.

Jill Savini, a local woman who not only grew up in Reno but in the next block from the Pelizzari home, feared for its future. She had always loved the rock exterior and the neighborhood brought back fond memories; as with many of the Old Southwest streets, it has not changed greatly over the years. Jill purchased the home in 1999 and set about a massive internal remodel with the assistance of her father, experienced in construction. The yard is lovely and shows the beautiful small home to its best advantage. And how appropriate that the home remains in Italian hands!

Saving a vintage home is a huge undertaking but how fortunate we are that there are those who understand its importance to maintaining a city’s heritage and sense of place. May the Pelizzari/Savini home stand for another 91 years. 

Sources for this article include: University of Nevada, Reno, theses of John Gottardi and Alice Frances Trout; Tough Little Town on the Truckee by John Townley; Restless Strangers by Wilbur Shepperson; and The Italian America Experience in Northwestern Nevada, an interview with Daryl Pelizzari by Kara Geiger, of the UNR Oral History Project. But most significant, discussions with Daryl and the loan of his collection of family photos and documents. Thank you, Daryl.

Debbie Hinman is a HRPS Walking Tour guide and serves on the FootPrints editorial board. Deb started writing for FootPrints in 2004.

The Parkway and The Eleanor Hotels

by Amy Burton

I first learned of The Parkway, a former downtown Reno hotel, when the HRPS book club read *The Eleanor*, a novel by local author Michael Croft. Michael came to our meeting to share the history behind his book. The story, both comic and poignant, follows Leland Powers, owner of a downtown Reno hotel, as he battles his demons on a journey toward compassion amid a cast of memorable characters. *The Eleanor* is mainly autobiographical based on Michael's lessons learned while working for his father at The Parkway Hotel in the 1970s.

The Parkway Hotel

The Parkway Hotel was located at 120 North Sierra Street which is now a parking lot between the Riverboat Hotel Apartments and Reno Ax/Liberty Provisions (formerly the J.C. Penney's store) one block north of the Truckee River. Built in 1926, it featured a large lobby with a barbershop in the front and a beauty parlor in the rear. Upstairs there were 49 rooms, some with baths, others without. Skaggs Groceries and Meats operated in the southwest corner of the building. The grocery/butcher shop was replaced by Gilbert Vasserot's Moulin Rouge Restaurant in the 1940s, and in later years, it became the Watch Hospital, a jewelry store/watch repair shop owned by Earl Landrus.

Michael's father, Dean, bought the Parkway in 1948 and ran it until 1976 before selling it to John Cavanaugh Jr. Cavanaugh also purchased the Royal Hotel which was north of the Parkway in the same block on the corner of Second and Sierra Streets. With some remodeling, the two hotels provided Cavanaugh with the 100 rooms he

needed to gain a gaming license. He then opened the Gold Dust Casino which he built in the parking lot between the two hotels.

The hotel became a second school for Michael who worked there during his junior and senior years of high school and while attending the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR). While Reno High School taught Michael academics, The Parkway taught him about life—the hard knocks kind. Half the guests were weekly renters, and the other half were tourists. Michael described them in his novel as “a riotous blend of money-huggers from over-the-hill looking to warm themselves with cards and dice sitting alongside those glorious icons of the Reno street—pensioners, maids, bar boys, and those scurrilous drifters who floated through town on three nickels and a dime.”

Daily rates for as long as Michael can remember were \$7.35 with tax during the week and \$8.40 on the weekend. Weekly rates were \$24.50 for a room without a bath. However, Michael said there was an unofficial sliding scale. In the novel, he describes it: “Most days Leland, the hotel owner, would stand there and listen, taking in the lies and cons and half-invented hilarity, before nodding and slicing the rent accordingly.” Michael shared a saying he heard among hotel managers of that time: “If they walk up the stairs, rent them a room. If they are carried up, have them share a room. And, if they crawled up, rent them a cot in the back.”



A 1920s postcard of Sierra Street, Reno, NV, includes the Parkway Hotel which opened in 1926. It was advertised as the “most home-like hotel in Reno.” It featured “all outside rooms,” and an “elaborate marquee.” Courtesy Nevada Historical Society.

It was into this gritty reality that a 16-year-old Michael went to work on Sundays as a desk clerk. Until then, his father Dean had not had a day off in seven years. “Dad grabbed me by my ear and plopped me behind the desk—no training,” said Michael. He learned to deal with bullying from the weekly renters. “They weren’t sinister, but they would test me. They would steal my lunch, sit around the lobby arguing over which channel to watch on the flickering black-and-white television, negotiate with me about the volume level and whether they could put their feet on the furniture.”

Michael learned to handle himself and to appreciate the hotel’s constant stream of characters. He still remembers several renters by name and room number. Among them was a disbarred attorney with a drinking problem who wore a Russian Cossack hat and ascot and introduced him to William Faulkner’s literature because “You know about pain,” he said. There was an abstract painter who worked as a bus boy at The

Mapes, and a compulsive gambler out of Brooklyn, N.Y. who did 25 years in Sing Sing prison for armed robbery and was eventually hired as a night clerk by his father (but that's another story).

His father was street smart with a gruff exterior and an impressive vocabulary of swear words. He was also surprisingly compassionate. In the 28 years his father owned the hotel, he only evicted two residents, and that was because they threatened Michael. As a young man, Michael described struggling with the paradox that was his father. As explanation, he shared this story:

Three guys checked in from Portland, Oregon. One noticed that Michael was reading a jazz biography and started talking to him about music. He won credibility with Michael when he described seeing Miles Davis perform in Chicago. Their conversations helped pass the time in Michael's often-boring job. However, his father sized the man up and told Michael not to get too friendly with him, because he was often in the habit of rubbing his tongue vigorously behind his front teeth. Michael later surmised it might have been a sign of amphetamine abuse.

The Portland men checked out, but a brief time later the one man called Michael at home and asked to borrow \$50, which he promised to pay back within two weeks. Michael feared it was

a con, but he took down the man's contact information. When he told his dad what the man wanted, he growled, "Send it to him," and walked out of the room. Michael did as he was told and a few days later sent him a money order for \$50.

After it was apparent the man wasn't going to repay him, Michael groused, "The guy you told me to send \$50 to hasn't returned it." Without hesitating, his father shot right back, "I know." An angry Michael fled to his bedroom in frustration and wondered if he was living in a crazy house. His father came in shortly after and said, "You have a roof over your head, a car to drive, and three meals on the table, what do you need \$50 dollars for? Don't ever hesitate to help someone in need." At that, Michael said his mind did a "double click." Working at the Parkway put him in direct touch with people he calls the "Invisibles." His father, despite his rough exterior, taught him to see them as people worthy of kindness, and that is the lesson for which he is most thankful.

The Eleanor

Michael finished his bachelor's degree in English and Creative Writing from San Francisco State University in 1976. While in San Francisco he enjoyed the jazz clubs, art galleries and museums he had dreamed of while growing up in Reno. "But you can't do that all the time," he explained. "San Francisco is expensive, and Reno was home." He came back with a burning desire to deal cards part-time in the casinos to earn enough so that he could stay home and read and write in his free time.

During the mid-70s, Michael said there were a lot of artists emerging out of the UNR who inspired him creatively, none more so than Joan Arrizabalaga, a sculptor and ceramist, who welcomed



Parkway Hotel, c 1950, the inspiration for Michael Croft's novel *The Eleanor*. By the 1950s the marquee was gone, an elevator added, Skaggs Groceries and Meats has become the Moulin Rouge Café, owned by Gilbert Vasserot, and a retail building had been built to the south side of the hotel. Courtesy Nevada Historical Society

many of them into her home on a daily basis. He would often sit in the corner and soak up the high-minded conversation they engaged in on a regular basis. Since then, he has published several short stories, news features, worked for Sundance bookstore and still serves as a senior editor for *Narrative* magazine after 20 years. He teaches private workshops on Zoom, and while he has written several novels and stories that now reside in the darkness of his closet, *The Eleanor* is his first published novel.

The Parkway was Michael's muse—his place. A Joan Didion quote hangs on the wall of his writing room: "A place belongs forever to whoever claims it hardest, remembers it most obsessively, wrenches it from itself, shapes it, renders it, loves it so radically that he remakes it in his image."

Michael always knew he'd write a hotel



Reno native Michael Croft, author of *The Eleanor*.

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Parkway and Eleanor

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story. “The story had been circling in my mind for 25 years,” he said. The breakthrough came when he switched to a comic approach. “The first paragraph came to me, and I couldn’t put pen to paper fast enough.”

Michael will tell you *The Eleanor* is a story about compassion rooted in Buddhist philosophy. To me it was the story of a struggling Everyman’s redemption, but after two-and-half hours of listening to this soulful storyteller, I think it is also a tribute to his father.

Dean Croft was born in 1912. He grew up in a Mormon family on a potato farm in southern Idaho. His mother died in 1919 in the flu epidemic. Michael describes Dean’s father, Parley, as “one gruff son-of-a-gun.” He married three times and fathered nine children and raised four others.

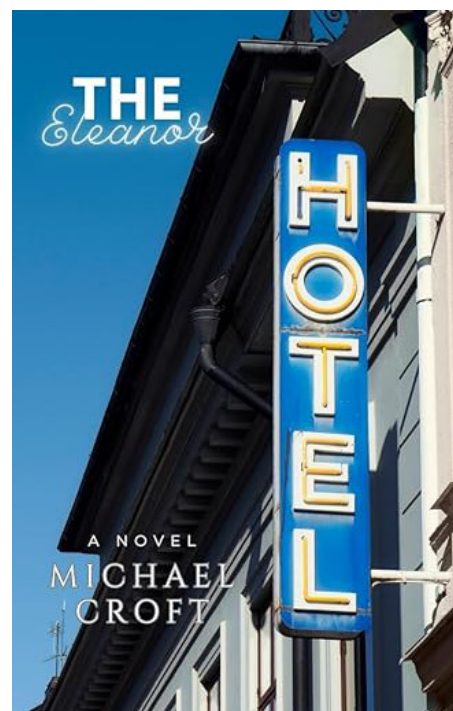
Dean was a good small town basketball player, and he wanted to go to college. So, he wrote the University of Nevada basketball coach, Doc Martie, asking for a scholarship in 1936. Doc told him if he could get to Reno and prove himself for one year, he would give him a scholarship for the second one. Dean got to Reno with the \$4.50 he would need for tuition. But when he arrived at the registrar’s office, he learned that tuition had increased to \$7.50. So, Dean walked

from the university on Ninth Street to Doc’s ranch that was located where the Atlantis Casino and Resort is now on South Virginia Street. Upon arriving, Doc told him he could sleep in the barn for three days and shovel manure to earn the \$3 needed for registration.

Registration was paid, but Dean could not afford books. Michael said his father worked out a plan. The football field at that time was in a sunken area at the center of the campus. Students would hang out and watch football practice and leave their books on the bleachers. Dean would scout the area for the books he needed for his assignments, “borrow” them, stay up all night reading, then return them to the bleachers the next day. Michael asked his father if all the books had made it back to their owners. “Most of ‘em did,” Dean responded. “My father was smart and driven. He valued education above all else,” said Michael.

Dean graduated with an economics major and an accounting minor. He was working as a high school basketball coach in Eureka, Nevada, when he met Michael’s mother, Norma Eather, the daughter of Judge Edgar Eather who was a Nevada Supreme Court Judge from 1948-58. Michael said his father was the one who gave the Eureka team the name Vandals.

The young couple moved to Reno for Norma, seven years Dean’s junior, to



The cover of Michael Croft’s 2024 novel *The Eleanor*.

attend the University of Nevada. Then they went to Idaho to help with the Croft farm while Dean’s brother served in WWII. They came back to Reno because Norma was homesick. In 1942, Michael’s sister, Deanna, was born, and in 1948 Dean bought The Parkway in partnership with his father-in-law, Judge Eather, and brother-in-law, Paul Laiolio, president of Pioneer Citizens Bank which later became Nevada State Bank. Michael was born in 1952.

Michael said if his father had followed his passion he would have been a high school basketball coach. But “There’s no money in coaching,” explained his father. Michael said that his father had actually made more money as a divorce witness following the end of WWII than he did as a hotel owner. Michael himself served as a witness a few times earning \$10 each time for his testimony.

Michael shared a final lesson from his father wrapped in a UNR basketball story. He and his father attended UNR games in the old gym, the convention center and finally Lawlor Event Center as faithful season pass holders. At one



Courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society.



A matchbook from The Parkway Hotel with the slogan, "A Home Away from Home." However, Michael Croft described the hotel as a place of deferred dreams with a bath down the hall. Inside the matchbook was a grocery list for "curlers, eyebrow pencil, Buchie, thread and shoes."

particular game, UNR was in the Big Sky Conference Tournament playing at 8 p.m. Dean and Michael arrived early to watch the 6 p.m. pre-game. Michael wasn't familiar with either team playing, so he asked his father who to root for. In his typical gruff fashion, Dean answered, "G? @d&%\$! it, root for the underdog." That's how he saw himself," said Michael, "as an underdog."

And that is what Michael does in The Eleanor. He wrote a novel that roots for the underdog. "I don't write about Reno," he said. "I write about my Reno: six square blocks of downtown in the

1960s and 70s when the casino life was still vibrant." Michael returned to Reno and claimed it. He remade it in his image and made the less fortunate visible through his craft.

This article was informed by interviews with Michael Croft and research with Sarah Patton at the Nevada Historical Society.

Amy Burton is a HRPS member, walking tour guide, former administrator, and FootPrints contributor and proofreader.



A 1930s photograph of Sierra Street featuring The Eleanor Hotel and the Montgomery Ward building.

Parkway Hotel TIMELINE

- 1926** Parkway opened. Its architect was George E. Holesworth, the contractor was Ed Rousch. Building cost was \$100,000. Owners were John S. Sinai & Sam Platt of Reno. It was under the management of Mr. & Mrs. Noffsinger.

Commercial Space: In 1926 Skaggs Groceries & Meats were located on the lobby level. In the late 1940s that area was occupied by the Moulin Rouge Café which later became The Watch Hospital.
- 1948** Dean Croft bought the hotel.
- 1958** J.C. Penney Co. renovated the building to the south of The Parkway creating a three-story store within inches of the Parkway's south wall. This blocked the view from the hotel's south-facing rooms.
- 1976** Dean sold the Parkway to John Cavanaugh Jr. who also bought the Royal Hotel on the same block at Second and Sierra Streets. This gained him the 100 hotel rooms required by the City of Reno to obtain an unlimited gaming license. Cavanaugh then built the Gold Dust Hotel & Casino which encompassed the two hotels.
- 1979** Cavanaugh added a four-story expansion to the Gold Dust including 100 new rooms.
- 1987** The Gold Dust Casino was destroyed to make way for the \$7.5 million Riverboat Hotel Casino erasing any remnant of the Parkway Hotel.



Historic Reno Preservation Society Presents 2026 Historic Walking Tours

Reservations required and space is limited. \$10 for Individual and Dual/Family HRPS Members, free for Supporting, Champion, and Lifetime HRPS Members, and \$20 for non-members. Visit www.historicreno.org to make your reservations. If tour is full, you will be placed on a wait list and notified by email if space opens. Call 775-747-4478 for information.

Please arrive 15 minutes early to check in and sign the required liability waiver. Wear comfortable shoes. A hat, sunglasses, and water bottle are advised in warm weather. **No dogs or baby strollers allowed.** Please note, some neighborhoods may have uneven walking surfaces and sidewalk barriers which may make it difficult for people with mobility issues. Walks generally last 1 ½ to 2 hours.

MAY HISTORIC WALKS

**Tuesday
May 12
6:00PM**

BRICKS and STONES – Discover the architectural treasures of the Humboldt and Lander Streets neighborhood, a mix of bungalows, Tudor, Mission Revivals and Cottage styles. Meet at the Lander Street side of My Favorite Muffin, 340 California Avenue. **Guide: Bill Kolton**



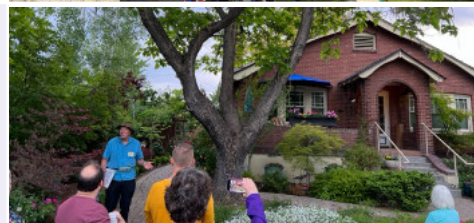
**Saturday
May 16
9:00AM**

NEWLANDS NEIGHBORHOOD – Enjoy one of Reno’s oldest and most prestigious neighborhoods. Newlands Heights Historic District was named to the national Register of Historic Places in 2017. Meet outside Brewers’ Cabinet, at the northwest corner of Arlington and California. **Guides: Derek Partridge and Matt Magaletti**



**Tuesday
May 19
6:00PM**

UPPER RALSTON/LITTLE ITALY – These residential neighborhoods contain a mix of architectural styles and a rich diversity of early Reno residents. Meet at the intersection of Washington, The Strand and College across from the Highland Reservoir. **Guides: Bradley Carlson, Jim and Sue Smith**



**Saturday
May 23
9:00AM**

LAKE ADDITION – Meander past divorce-trade dwellings, Victorian and ultra-modern architecture in one of Reno’s earliest additions. Includes the Lake Mansion. A new home and information added this year. Meet in front of the Nevada Museum of Art, 160 W. Liberty Street. **Guide: Meredith Ohm**



**Tuesday
May 26
6:00PM**

WELLS AVENUE NEIGHBORHOOD – Stroll this working-class neighborhood along the Wells Ave. streetcar path, across the V & T tracks and past the homes of the “Thoma Street Gang.” Wells Ave. is Reno’s second Conservation District. Meet at the Sinclair side of the Southside School Annex, 190 E. Liberty Street. **Guide: Mark Taxer**



**Saturday
May 30
9:00AM**

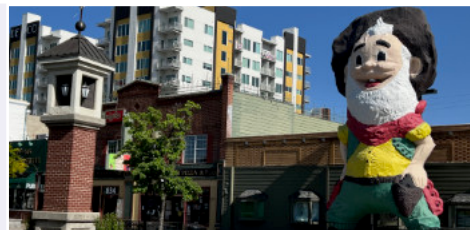
MANSIONS ON THE BLUFF/CALIFORNIA – Walk past historical homes and learn about the senators and merchants who made early Reno *The Biggest Little City in the World*. Bring water and wear comfortable shoes for this uphill tour. Meet at the corner of Nixon and California Avenues. **Guide: Scott Gibson (Repeats July 11)**



JUNE HISTORIC WALKS • No Walk June 2nd

Saturday
June 6
9:00AM

DOWNTOWN SPARKS – Learn about the Rail City with a tour of Victorian Square. Visit sites that played a role in the development of Sparks and Nevada. Meet at the Sparks Heritage Museum, 814 Victorian Avenue. **Guide: Scott Carey** in collaboration with the Sparks Heritage Museum. Make reservations through HRPS.



Tuesday
June 9
6:00PM

POUNING ADDITION – Discover one of Reno's earliest and most delightful vernacular neighborhoods, predominantly settled by Northern Italian immigrants. This neighborhood is the first City of Reno Conservation District. Meet in front of the McKinley Arts and Culture Center, 925 Riverside Drive. **Guide: Amy Burton**



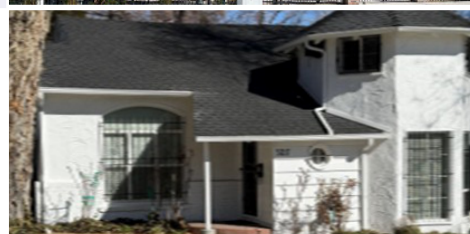
Saturday
June 13
9:00AM

EAST FOURTH STREET – From country road to railroad hub to Lincoln Highway, explore the roots of this historic corridor where century-old brick hotels, warehouses, railways and manufacturing buildings are continually preserved and revitalized. Meet on the Evans St. side of Louis' Basque Corner, 301 E. Fourth St. **Guide: Brett Banks**



Tuesday
June 16
6:00PM

MIDTOWN RESIDENTIAL – Walk along shady streets in a quiet neighborhood comprising the early Litch, McCarthy and Sierra Vista Additions. The homes are an eclectic mix of styles dating from the 1920s-1940s. Meet at the south side of Mary Street at South Virginia Street. **Guide: Debbie Hinman**



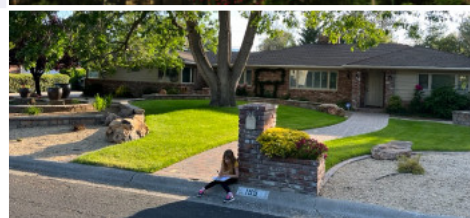
Saturday
June 20
9:00AM

DELONGCHAMPS RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE – Tour a neighborhood tour of homes both large and small designed by Reno's notable architect Frederic DeLongchamps. Hear about his life and what made him unique to this area. Meet outside the Giraud/Hardy House, aka Arte Italia, 442 Flint Street. **Guide: David Sholtz**



Tuesday
June 23
6:00PM

CIRCLE DRIVE/SOUTHRIDGE – Learn about Southridge Estates, one of Reno's outstanding residential areas in the 1950s. This neighborhood features large yards, big trees and the beautiful ranch style homes of many prominent Renoites. Meet in the driveway of 1615 Circle Drive. **Guide: Caroline Asikainen**



Saturday
June 27
9:00AM

UNR QUAD/HISTORIC DISTRICT – Learn about the early history of our state university and the architects who designed the buildings around the Quad: Morrill Hall, Mackay School of Mines, Frandsen Hall and other legacy buildings. Meet in front of Morrill Hall. Free parking in the UNR Ninth Street Garage. **Guides: Joy Orlich and Jack Hursh**



Tuesday
June 30
6:00PM

HEBREW CEMETERY – Jews were among the early residents of the Comstock and Reno contributing to flourishing trade and active civic engagement. Many notable Reno families are buried here. Enter on Angel Street where you will be guided through a set of gates to the parking area. You will exit onto Nevada Street. **Guide: Steve Matles**



JULY HISTORIC WALKS

Note: Saturday walks in July will begin at 8:30AM. Some dates will have two different walks scheduled that day. No walk on July Fourth.

**Sunday
July 5
8:30AM**

RENO PARKS' HISTORIES BY BIKE — **NEW!** This leisurely 7-mile (one way) ride on the Tahoe-Pyramid Trail starts at Glendale Park in Sparks and ends at the California Building in Idlewild Park in Reno with frequent stops. Learn about the early pioneers for whom many of our parks are named. Bring your bike, helmet and water. Meet at the entrance to Glendale Park, 399 Coney Island Drive, Sparks. **Guide: Jill Richardson**



**Tuesday
July 7
6:00PM**

EL RENO APARTMENT HOMES — Visit the original site of these unique homes. View other Sierra Vista Addition architecture such as the August Hill brick houses and the stone home of eccentric millionaire LaVere Redfield. Meet at the northwest corner of the Statewide Lighting parking lot, 1311 S. Virginia. **Tour guide: Debbie Hinman**



**Saturday
July 11
8:30AM**

MANSIONS ON THE BLUFF/CALIFORNIA AVENUE — Learn about the historic mansions located on California Avenue and the senators and merchants who made early Reno “The Biggest Little City” in the world. Meet at the corner of Nixon and California Avenues. **Guide: Scott Gibson**



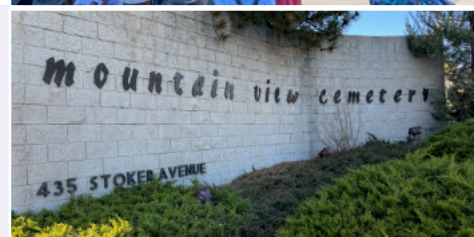
**Saturday
July 11
8:30AM**

MOVIE FOOTPRINTS IN RENO — Walk in the footsteps of Marilyn Monroe, Clint Eastwood, Helen Mirren and more. Explore downtown’s film history inspired by divorce, gambling and the city’s distinct look in such movies as *The Misfits*, *Sister Act* and *Love Ranch*. Meet by the northeast lobby entrance of the National Automobile Museum, 10 South Lake Street. **Guide: Robin Holabird**



**Sunday
July 12
10:00AM**

MOUNTAIN VIEW CEMETERY — **NEW!** This tour will take you through older parts of Reno’s largest cemetery. Perched on a hill overlooking the Truckee Meadows, many notable residents chose this location for their final resting place. Park on Redwood Drive, which is the street just before the offices. **Guide: Mac Wieland**



**Tuesday
July 14
6:00PM**

NEVADA STATE HOSPITAL — Visit Nevada’s first state hospital in Sparks. It is one of the state’s oldest institutions. Tour the DeLongchamps’ buildings, the 100-year-old Stone House and the hospital cemeteries. Park in the circular driveway on the Galetti Way side. Meet at the Nevada historical marker. **Guides: Brett Banks and Roger Slugg**



**Saturday
July 18
8:30AM**

PARSONS/MILLS ARCHITECTURE — View the elegant designs of Reno architects Edward Parsons and Russell Mills who were known to collaborate in this unique neighborhood. Hear about the families who first lived in these homes. Meet at the corner of Marsh and LaRue Avenues. **Guide: Madeline Ware**



JULY HISTORIC WALKS • *Continued*

Saturday
July 18
8:30PM

CULTURAL CROSSROADS EAST — **REPRISED!** Chinese, Italian and Jewish merchants occupied businesses along Lake Street and Commercial Row in the early 20th century, and notable area events included the Johnson-Jeffries fight. Meet at the northeast lobby entrance to the National Automobile Museum, 10 S. Lake Street. **Guide: Jill Richardson**



Tuesday
July 21
6:00PM

HILLSIDE AND GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC CEMETERIES — Tour Reno's oldest cemetery, Hillside Cemetery, officially established in 1875, and visit the grand Army of the Republic Cemetery, the only Civil War cemetery in Nevada. Wear closed shoes suitable for rocky, uneven ground. Meet at the west side gates of Hillside Cemetery south of the Knights of Pythias Hall, 980 Nevada Street. **Guides: Brett Banks and Mac Wieland**



Tuesday
July 21
6:00PM

MONROE STREET — Stroll along Monroe and Joaquin Miller Streets savoring the history and architecture of this residential area south of the Newlands Neighborhood. See the Sewell, Hart and Patrick Ranch houses, Greystone Castle, the Jack Dempsey house and other interesting properties. Meet at the corner of Monroe and Manor Drives. **Guide: Debbie Hinman**



Saturday
July 25
8:30AM

BEYOND THE ARCHES — **REPRISED!** Witness downtown Reno as it has reinvented itself for 150 years. The tour links the Reno arches with stories of the forces that shaped the town: railroad, mining, immigrants, divorce, gambling, and now a livable cultural hub. Walk in the steps of Bill Harrah, Myron Lake, Baby Face Nelson, Frederic DeLongchamps and others. Meet at the National Automobile Museum parking lot, 10 S. Lake Street. **Guides: Jim Smith and Bradley Carlson**



Saturday
July 25
8:30AM

MANSIONS ON THE BLUFF/COURT STREET — Many prominent Reno families built generous homes on the once treeless bluff overlooking the Truckee River with panoramic views of Peavine Mountain and the Sierra. Enjoy the charm of this prestigious neighborhood. Meet on the sidewalk at the McCarran Mansion, 401 Court Street. **Guide: Pat Cantwell**



Sunday
July 26
11:15AM

DOWNTOWN CHURCHES — **REPRISED!** Visit three of Reno's oldest and most architecturally significant churches — Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, First United Methodist Church, and St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic Cathedral. Meet under the tree at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, 200 Island Ave. **Guide: Mac Wieland**



Tuesday
July 28
6:00PM

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STREET — **REPRISED!** Perhaps you've done the Mansions on the Bluff and DeLongchamps walk, but how about the houses on the other side of Court, Ridge, California and Arlington? Distinctively styled homes line these quiet streets where many established Reno families lived. Meet at the southwest corner of Arlington Avenue and Court Street. **Tour Guides: Pat Cantwell with Debbie Hinman**





RENO'S TREASURE: VIRGINIA LAKE

By Pat Ferraro-Klos

“Let’s go to the lake.” How often have Renoites heard that? For walking? Running? Birding? Fishing? Swinging? Photos? Family picnics? Par course FitCenter? It’s all there and in almost immaculate condition. A real treasure.

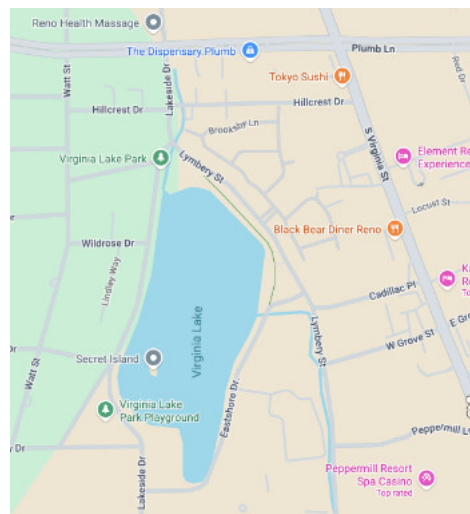
And why **VIRGINIA** Lake?

The lake was constructed by the WPA (Works Progress Administration), between 1936 and 1938. Although no specific mention survives as to why the name Virginia, all history points to the nearby Virginia Street, formerly the Virginia Road, and the proximity to Virginia City.

The lake is manmade and part of the Nevada Department of Wildlife’s urban fishing program which stocks it with rainbow trout, brown trout, and largemouth bass. Fishermen often set up two or three poles, get out a comfortable chair and wait for the big catch. Behind them are the countless walkers and runners getting in their miles around the lake. One lap is one mile.

I live a ten-minute walk from the lake and have taken full opportunity to love what it has to offer. For the last many years, I have been a birder carefully observing what goes on in the avian community, especially in

the changing seasons—Black-crowned Night Herons watching walkers and then taking flight over the lake with their massive wing spread, Egrets wading in the north-end shallows, Northern Shovelers scooting along with their wide bills, to name just a few of my favorites. My artist friend Nancy Peppin told me of a morning she was at the lake with a group of birders when an eagle dove down, grabbed a little duckling and took flight. One just never knows what will happen at the lake.



Virginia Lake is positioned to the right (east) of Plumas, to the left (west) of Virginia Street, south of Plumb and North of Moana.
Map courtesy of Google.

Virginia Lake Park is at 1980 Lakeside Drive and is a mile around, 12 feet deep when full and covers 24.5 surface acres. Photo courtesy City of Reno.

Signage around the lake informs people as to just what is there. Regularly- seen birds are Ruddy Ducks, Common Mergansers (females with bad hair days) American Coots, Double-crested Cormorants (owners of the island at the south end of the lake), Mallards, Canadian Geese, Ring-billed Gulls and the Night Herons.

As well as fish and waterbirds, turtles like sunning on the rocks between the willows on the western side of the lake. On a prolific turtle day, I have seen as many as 18 of them, some large like mommas and papas and others obviously babies. Seeing several swimming to the rocks and then climbing on is a real treat.

On the east side of the lake is the original park setting from the beginning of the WPA project: a tufa fountain surrounded by stone chairs, rock work lining paths, cacti planted to enhance nature, and of special importance is the plaque naming persons responsible for the Virginia Lake Park.



The plaque says so much about Reno in the 1930s. The name S.M. Pickett leads to Pickett Park across from Renown Hospital; J.C. Peckham is the namesake of the main thoroughfare of that name; Al Blundell was an early environmentalist, *HRPS FootPrints Summer 2013*.

Debbie Hinman's story in *FootPrints Summer 2019* explains the landscaping at the eastern side park. J.H. Reeve had become the Reno horticulturist and responsible for landscaping many Reno sites. Debbie quotes the *Reno Gazette Journal*: "Through the ingenuity of J.H. Reeve, very large coral rocks, hollowed



On the east side of the lake, the works of J.H. Reeve, Reno horticulturist during the 1940s, is visible.



Burning Man artist Peter Hazell's dragonfly sculpture was installed on the southwestern side of the lake in 2018. The dragonfly is constructed from steel, ceramic mosaic tiles and stained glass. All photos on page 13 by Pat Ferraro Klos

and resembling huge shells have been brought from the Pyramid Lake region and under Mr. Reeve's supervision have been arranged in tiers to form a terraced fountain."

Beautification of the lake became a City of Reno project and led to the installation of Burning Man artist Peter Hazel's dragonfly sculpture on the southwestern side of the lake in 2018. The dragonfly is constructed from steel,




Quoting Pat Klos, "In one corner of the grassy space on the west side is the little stone hut that has been there my entire life. As a child I fantasized this as my playhouse."



Paths sculpted with lovely rocks guide people around the lake.

ceramic mosaic tiles and stained glass. The cattails around the base are made of heavy-gauge steel. Students at nearby Anderson Elementary School were asked to draw designs on the mosaic tiles.

On the west side is the newer playground and picnic area utilized by thousands of Renoites every year. But in one corner of this grassy space is the little stone hut that has been there my entire life; it must be part of the original river rock aspects of the park. As child I fantasized this as my playhouse. At some point in time a barbecue has been added from a different kind of stone.

On warm summer evenings park visitors can purchase ice cream and other treats from various vendors. The offerings and rewards at the lake are never ending. 

Pat Klos is the originator of Historic Reno Preservation Society and was its first president in 1997. Pat, with designer Frank Ozaki, created HRPS first publication, called Newsletter. Pat has continued to be a contributor to HRPS since its inception.

A Message From Your HRPS President - Spring 2026



HRPS' President Joy Orlich

Dear HRPS Members,

After attending our March program, with Dr. Dana Bennett's outstanding presentation on how the early 20th century suffrage question played out in Reno (suffragists prevailed throughout the state except in Washoe County, but in 1914 women got the vote anyway), I was struck by two things – one, what incredibly knowledgeable and informative speakers our Programs Committee have produced, and two, the kinds of things they are able to research about the 20th century, largely don't exist in the 21st.

Groups like The Equal Franchise Society and the Nevada Association of Women Opposed to Equal Suffrage, no longer get columns printed in the local newspaper. Meeting notices of individuals or organizations such as the Twentieth Century Club who hosted presenters from both organizations, (along with comments on floral arrangements and who attended) are no longer written up and printed in the paper. People no longer write letters or send postcards.

Where will future historians be able to find out about these presentations? HRPS at least has physical as well as digital copies of each issue of *FootPrints*, but what of the other details of daily Reno life? In

what ways will people 100 years from now be able to get a sense of how our lives were conducted? Without the convenience of all-encompassing newspapers, photographs, letters and correspondence, or even advertising, how will anyone glean what it was like to be living in Reno in 2026? So much is now only digital.

A huge thanks to program chairs Susan Mullen and Shery Hayes-Zorn for pulling together this season's speakers. Our Sunday programs are part of our mission to "Preserve and Promote Historic Resources in the Truckee Meadows through Education, Advocacy and Leadership." The programs are always free and open to the public.

New Lifetime Members

Longtime members Dave and Lois Bianchi became our newest Lifetime Members at the end of December, and I just missed the publication deadline to make the announcement. So, a belated welcome to Dave and Lois, and thank you for your ongoing support of HRPS!

Walking Tours

Walking Tour season is almost upon us, and our Tour Guides are eager to show you around town. We've added a couple new walks this year and reprised a few we haven't done in a while. New ones include Mountain View Cemetery, conducted by Mac Wieland and Brett Banks, and a new section of the Truckee River in the Truckee River Parks bicycle ride, conducted by Jill Richardson.

Reprised walks include Downtown Churches, also by Mac Wieland, the El Reno apartment homes, by Debbie Hinman, Cultural Crossroads, East Side of Reno, by Jill Richardson, Beyond the Arches, with Jim Smith and Bradley Carlson, and The Other Side of the Street, coordinated by Pat Cantwell and Debbie Hinman – 28 walks in all.

All of our Tour Guides are volunteers who spend many hours researching, reviewing, and updating their walks with new information each year. We are always looking for ideas for new walks and people to research them. Got an idea? Let me know!

Artown Offerings

This year, we dreamed up two workshops to be conducted during Artown. Full information about these workshops will be included in Summer *FootPrints*, available June 15.

The first workshop will be an Authors Roundtable, featuring 3-4 local authors who have used Reno as a central character in their books. Susan Mullen, who hosts our monthly Nevada Authors Book Club, is coordinating this one.

Our second workshop, Researching This Old House, will combine some DIY research tips and a personal account of one member's journey to get her Mill Street Victorian house listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Both presentations will be held at Sunset Winery on E. Fourth Street.

Thank you for being a HRPS member. We hope you enjoy making new discoveries about local history with each story you read. And a special thank you to Debbie Hinman, our lead researcher and writer who has been writing for *FootPrints* for over 20 years, to Carol Coleman our Managing Editor who has been putting together each issue of *FootPrints* for over 20 years, and to Frank Ozaki of Double Click Design, who has completed the graphic design work since the beginning of HRPS and ships it off to the printer to create the beautiful publication you now hold in your hands or read online. We owe you all a deep debt of gratitude!

Joy Orlich
president@historicroeno.org
775-544-0686

SAVE THE DATE: 2026 HRPS HOME TOUR - SEPTEMBER 26

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Your annual HRPS membership includes the following benefits:

- Spring and Fall Speaker Programs
- Monthly Digital Newsletter to keep you informed of news and events
- Quarterly *FootPrints* publication: Articles of historic interest on local people, places, and events by local researchers and historians
- Discounted Neighborhood Walking Tours (\$10 Members; \$20 Non-Members)
- Discounted Harvest of Homes tickets (\$40 Members; \$50 Non-Members)

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- \$2,500.00 Lifetime Member (1-time payment): 1-2 People, no charge for Walking Tour/Home Tour tickets, name listed in *FootPrints*, invitations to hosted Lifetime Member events

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