

On The Trail of the Mapes Hotel *Architectural Elements Provide a Legacy to the Past*

by Sharon Honig-Bear

Irarely tell a personal story when writing about Reno history but this is an exception. I was curious about the once world-famous Mapes Hotel (*see adjoining article*) and its architectural legacy and wanted to discover how and why there are so many Mapes artifacts around town. It's been an interesting journey, complicated to unravel, and there is still more to discover. This is what I learned.

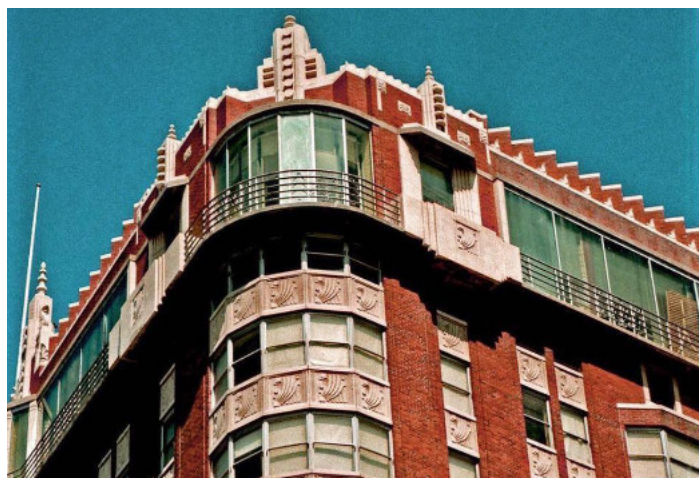
Although I've lived in Reno for 40 years, the Mapes was closed by the time I moved here. Yet, I knew it well. I worked downtown and passed it daily. I admired its beauty. I listened to many stories about celebrations held there and was sorry I didn't share in the memories. And yes, there I was with my children on Superbowl Sunday, 2000, watching the implosion of this beautiful old lady, from the top floor of the garage where I parked for my daily commute.

But there's more to my personal relationship with the Mapes. I'd encountered pieces around town, in public places and in private homes and that's when it got really personal. Eleven years ago, I bought a home, and only after I signed the papers, did I realize there was a classic Mapes element embedded in the grass in my yard. I have my very own artifact! Then lightning struck again, when my granddaughter attended camps at the River School Farm, west of Reno at 7777 White Fir Street. As I walked around this lovely piece of property, with the sounds of the Truckee thundering behind me, I started to see many vestiges of the Mapes incorporated in the landscape. Why were they here? How did one end up in my yard? And so began a several-month effort to determine how these legacy elements got dispersed around town.

The Best Collection in One Place

I started with a visit with Tom Stille, the mastermind behind the River School Farm. Tom has a Bachelor of Science degree in Horticulture from Iowa State University and an Master of Science degree in Parks and Recreation from San Jose State University. He's left a mark in public and private spaces in our region with his business Interpretive Gardens Inc. The River School Farm hosts camps, special events such as weddings, Artown events—and (this is where my interest awakened) a curated collection of terrazzo pieces from the Mapes Hotel scattered throughout the venue.

We arranged to meet and I found Tom in his small but comfortable office, with his wife and partner Iris. Iris, as it turns out is Swiss,



A Facebook post shows the architectural components on the Mapes structure described in the story. Note the windows of the Sky Room and the railings.

Courtesy of Facebook.

which explains why there is a Swiss flag hanging over the parking lot. Tom was first drawn to the area as head of Parks and Recreation in the late 1960s. He particularly liked the music in the Sky Room at the Mapes, although he lamented that he never got to meet or see Frank Sinatra or any of the greats that performed there. He wasn't actively involved in the movement to preserve the Mapes, but he always believed that it should be saved.

As we walked around the property, his landscape design skills were apparent. In the spring sunlight, an almost complete panel was artistically placed on a hillside rock garden, surrounded by spring poppies and plants. Another small garden sports a segment with a fleur-de-lys-like design. A metal chicken (there are live chickens on the farm, too) stands guard over another curved element. I admired a sitting area, backed with a beautiful half medallion, which serves as a space for drum circles at the full moon. Most significant are the two stages that Tom created using Mapes embellishments such as the cornices, finials and reliefs. Even the window sills on the buildings were salvaged pieces of terrazzo.

Tom bought the one-acre property in 1992. It was zoned for a nursery, not as a living space, but he is able to live there because he

continued on page 2

On the Trail of the Mapes Hotel

continued from page 1

is, as he described, “the caretaker for the nursery.” The acre has flourished, with his personal bale house, refrigerated units used by local farmers and purveyors at local markets, goats, chickens, and communal spaces.

I didn’t realize that his land abuts Washoe County land but an agreement was worked out so that it is technically called Mayberry Park Gardens. The agreement includes Tom maintaining the property. The property includes a sculpture garden with a number of pieces that were at Burning Man. Most notable is Pan’s Perch by Ryan Jackson, a steel, fruit-bearing tree with lotus flowers hanging from the branches. Tom noted that the rest of the artwork on the grounds had themes with birds or dancers.

As you continue to walk across a grassy expanse, there’s a platform that Tom calls The Meadow Stage. The Mapes is well represented with bright white elements contrasted against the green trees and tan stone. One of the most striking things about the Meadow Stage is the inclusion of a segment of the solid steel, Art Deco railing from the Mapes Sky Room. He got this section from Lani Perry (*see next section*) and Tom and other able-bodied people helped move it. This marks the end of the County property and then you are on Reno City land.

A slight diversion: the most famous saved elements are the large panels that decorated the exterior of the Hotel. I have always called the one in my yard a “medallion.” Other people have different names. I’ve heard used the term “coin” (or did people mean “quoin,” confusing since they weren’t on corners?) and “spangle” (although I’m pretty sure this is a misinterpretation of the word “spandrel”), “tiles,” and finally, the generic “panel.” Regardless of the name, these heavy and dramatic pieces were fashioned in Stockton, California. Tom said they were made by Italian artisans, using quartz mixed in with concrete, resulting in a rough-surfaced terrazzo. Molds were used and the pattern on the medallions was described as representing sagebrush, the genus *artemisia*, the Nevada state flower. I continue to call them medallions!

The Link to the Mapes Artifacts

The question remained: how did Tom get the Mapes pieces? There were two women who played a big part in his involvement with the

Mapes artifacts. The first was Barbara Eisenhour. Tom mentioned that Barbara, an artist and longtime resident of Reno now living in Colorado, had a contract with the demolition people. She had 30 or more pieces, selling some and alerting Tom, since she thought he might be interested in using some with his landscaping clients. So now the question was: how did Barbara obtain them?



Springtime at the River Farm with a Mapes medallion placed prominently on the hill.
Courtesy Sharon Honig-Bear.



Relic from the roof line of the Mapes, at the River Farm.
Courtesy Sharon Honig-Bear.

Efforts were made before demolition to salvage key elements. Lenita Powers, in a piece in the *Reno Gazette-Journal* on January 29, 2000, mentioned that Patrick Clauss, project manager for the demolition, removed three of the squares (yet another term for the medallions!) at the request of the City, but it cost more than \$2000 to remove each one. The high cost was driven by the need to get a crane to handle the removal and that each one weighed more than two men could handle.

This led me to track down Barbara and I uncovered an enthusiastic storyteller, remembering the Mapes and her serendipitous connections to the artifacts. One day prior to the demolition of the building, she stopped by the site to take some photos and spoke to Patrick Clauss. She said it was a pity that such a beautiful building was coming down and Clauss said he was struck by the public outcry and, if he had realized that, he wouldn’t have taken the job. Clauss invited Barbara to take photos and then asked whether she would be interested in a job keeping track of the many people calling and asking to salvage remnants after the demolition. She accepted and compiled a list with the names and contact information for interested people and agreed to follow up with them.

To make the process easier, she put together a guidebook of pieces that were available. Barbara followed up and remembered people were very satisfied with what she recalls were hundreds of pieces. After the site was cleared of as much rubble as possible, the salvageable pieces were on display like headstones in a cemetery. Many people showed up to browse. She called the City and other agencies trying to find good homes. When the remains needed to be cleared from the site, Brett Moten, owner of Infinity Forge on Dickerson Road, helped move the pieces with his trailer to a storage facility. Barbara was paying for

the space but she was still interested in connecting the Mapes components with interested parties. She would ask herself what more can she do to find homes for these beautiful pieces? At one point, when she needed to vacate the storage, she offered pieces to Tom and that was when his collection really took off.

Honored on West Street

The second woman who played a part with Tom and Mapes artifacts was Lani Perry, a highly skilled welder. Spearheaded by Christine Fey and the City's Arts & Culture team in 2014, a call to artists sought to create an installation for the middle of West Street, just north of First Street. Tom and Lani designed an urban garden, entitled the West Street Median Demonstration Garden. They incorporated some of his pieces of the Mapes, including two near-perfect medallions that became the focal point of the display, and Lani had ample opportunity to showcase her metalwork skills. Lani, by the way, works as a Maintenance Technician for the City, and in a bit of irony, her work included installing the Believe sculpture in the same plaza where the Mapes stood for 53 years.

The concept for the Garden was suggesting mountains, with the sun rising over them, like a jewel over the peaks. Not only does the site feature the medallions, but also some triangular pieces that evoke the mountain tops. One of the most notable features of this installation is Lani's whimsical gardening tools peeking out above one of the framed medallions. The Arts & Culture staff worked on two information plaques, one with Mapes history and another highlighting the West Street legacy. The plaques have faded with time and the City will be refreshing them soon.

They're everywhere, They're Everywhere!

I am not alone in owning a bit of the Mapes and it's like a treasure hunt to discover them. Some remnants are on private property, so respecting people's privacy is important (but there's no harm in asking if you can see anything in the front yard!).

Facebook has been a goldmine for tracking down architectural elements. A post in May, 2021 has vivid photos of some components, with the comment, "This is HUGE! We were able to save TWO of these original terra cotta pieces and track them down on the original blue prints. This was a big deal for us." Another post on Feb. 1, 2021 mentioned that someone was selling decorative pieces of the façade for \$1600 and the poster reached out, hoping the seller might reduce the price. I don't know if they were successful but they added, "We would love to preserve the history in these pieces of the Mapes."

I found another post on Facebook in July, 2022. "We are pretty damn excited to add another piece of the Mapes to our collection! Thanks to a Craigslist ad and an individual who requested to be

kept anonymous. We now have another awesome piece of the Mapes." A recent post on Facebook offers, "Very intact and even more rare Art Deco tile from the Mapes Hotel... was purchased by my uncle after the implosion. Also has a large framed blueprint describing the exterior and where the tiles went. Very heavy, probably 300 pounds. About 45" x 45". Will need a pickup truck at least. It is set in a metal frame. All nicely done." The asking price? \$5,000.



The firepit at the River School Farm, with a medallion at the back.
Courtesy Bruce Titus.



The West Street Median Demonstration Garden includes two medallions from the Mapes and information plaques describing its history.
Courtesy Sharon Honig-Bear.

Bill Kolton, HRPS walking tour leader for the Bricks and Stones tour, pointed out a lovely example of a corbel in the front yard at 924 Humboldt. Another example of a full medallion was in the beautiful side yard at 1009 Riverside, a home featured in our 2024 Historic Home Tour.

Tom remembers installing one at a home near Rancho San Rafael. Interestingly, I'm not sure how the previous owner of my house acquired the piece embedded in my yard.

I tracked down a video on Instagram and Facebook that showed a man in rural Nevada at an undisclosed location, loading the original steel railings that once graced the outside of the Sky Room. A little more digging and I discovered that these were destined to be used at the "onedollarhouse" that Logan and Angelina Needham bought for a dollar from Jacobs Entertainment. Called the Benham-Belz house, it was considered the oldest house in Reno, and was at 347 West St. until July 9, 2025 when it was moved.

Summer is here and it's a great time to be outside. Explore on your own and find more artifacts from the Mapes (and let me know what you find). Enjoy Artown and make a detour to visit the West Street installation. Or find a late afternoon and head to the River School Farm. Listen to the River, explore the artwork scattered around the property and honor the legacy of the Mapes Hotel that still enchants 79 years after it was constructed. And don't forget to let me know if you've identified other remnants of this lost Art Deco jewel. 📷

Sharon Honig-Bear is a long-time HRPS Board member, Past President and tour leader for Historic Reno Preservation Society. She was a restaurant columnist for the *Reno Gazette-Journal* and is now a columnist for *edibleRenoTahoe* magazine.

Contact Sharon at sharonbear@sbcglobal.net about sightings.

About The Mapes

by Sharon Honig-Bear

For many Northern Nevadans, the Mapes Hotel is just a name or a distant memory. But in its time, when it opened in 1947, it became the tallest building in Nevada with 12 stories and took full advantage of its prominent location on the northeast corner of the Truckee River and Virginia Street. It was the first skyscraper built in the Western United States since the start of World War II. For more than three decades, the Mapes was considered the most elegant hotel casino.

Built by Charles Mapes, Sr. a descendant of a pioneering Reno family, and his wife Gladys, they hired architect F.H. Slocombe of Oakland, California to draw up plans for a luxury hotel influenced by the Art Deco style of New York City's Empire State and Chrysler Buildings. The design became the prototype for the "vertical hotel casino" with guest rooms above and a gaming floor and other amenities below.

The Mapes was famous for the 12th floor Sky Room, with floor-to-ceiling windows that had commanding views of the Truckee River and the Sierra Nevada mountains beyond. At a time when few Reno hotels had their own nightclubs, the Mapes offered dining, dancing, and floor shows as well as gambling areas and cocktail lounges both on the main and top floors.

The Mapes was a celebrity magnet. Entertainment at the Mapes ranged from Liberace to burlesque dancer Lili St. Cyr, with an opening house band or orchestra and a chorus line called the Skylettes. During the 1960 winter Olympics held at Squaw Valley, headliners at the Sky Room were Mickey Rooney and Sammy Davis, Jr. The hotel served as the headquarters for the filming of

the 1961 film *The Misfits*, starring Clark Gable and Marilyn Monroe, who stayed in a suite on the sixth floor.

The Mapes thrived throughout the 1960s and mid 1970s but competing with more modern casino/hotels in the late 1970s and early 1980s led to money issues. It finally closed on December 17, 1982. The building was allowed to decay as many different owners took possession of the building with plans to revive the casino/hotel, all of which failed.

Finally, the Reno Redevelopment Agency took possession of the Mapes hotel building in 1996. Every engineering report came to the conclusion that the Mapes was actually poorly constructed and there was no hope in restoring the building. Preservationists worked feverishly to save the building but it was demolished in 2000.

For more information, follow the link to *FootPrints* to the Summer, 2021 issue <https://www.historicreno.org/media/custom/docs/FPv24n3.pdf>



Mapes Hotel on Virginia Street, c. 1950s. Courtesy Nevada Historical Society.



Superbowl Sunday 2000:
(L-R) Explosives were set and streets were cleared.
2nd image, smoke appears at the bottom and along high windows.
3rd image, top begins to crumble.
4th image, down in less than one minute.
Photos courtesy Barbara Eisenhour.



The Reno Rodeo is one facet of the city's horse history. 1942 postcard courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society

Reno: Not A One-Horse Town

by Debbie Hinman and Pat Ferraro Klos

The horse was an important part of life in early Reno whether you rode one, came by wagon or used freight. Even after the automobile became the favored means of transportation in the 1920s, horse culture remained strong in the biggest little city.

The Birth of a City and T. K. Hymers

Reno, Nevada came to be in 1868 due to an agreement with the Central Pacific Railroad to place a depot in what was then a barren, open plain next to a flowing river. Soon, the newly-named Reno was no longer a “one-horse” town.



The livery stable was an essential business in early Reno. T.K. Hymers Truckee Livery and Feed Stable at Second and Sierra Streets was built in 1869 and burned in 1903.

Courtesy Nevada Historical Society.

Thomas K. Hymers had established a livery stable at Sierra and Second streets and provided horses and wagons for passengers who disembarked from Sacramento passenger trains in October of 1868. Hymers built his own home near the stable, one of the first plastered structures in Reno which survived the 1879 fire that would later destroy much of the downtown area. Though Hymers' stable would be burned several times, he always rebuilt and maintained his business for 39 years.

Hymers, born in New York, made his way west and became an integral part of Reno providing locals with equine transportation and becoming civically engaged as a Washoe County Commissioner. One of his first priorities was to visit Santa Rosa, California to view their iron bridge with an eye toward replacing the narrow, rickety wooden bridge spanning the Truckee River. The wooden bridge was replaced in 1877 and the new iron bridge served Reno until 1905, when it was replaced with a concrete structure.

Hymers died in 1909, survived by his wife, daughter and a grandson, Lewis Hymers. Grandson Lew Hymers left an

imprint in Reno through his cartoons in local newspapers. In 1944, his book, “Seen About Town” chronicles “a series of cartoons and caricatures that have appeared in the *Reno Evening Gazette* over a period of five years.” Included among his personalities is Ted Baker, who Hymers labels a “Rancher and Rodeo Enthusiast” and, for the purposes of this article, one of the leading “horse people” in our area.

In the early days of Reno, horses clip-clopping down Reno's unpaved streets not only came from livery stables but from well-established businesses such as the local dairies, delivering milk products to its many customers. One of the most popular was the horse-drawn Chism Ice Cream wagon, the delight of Reno's children.

Changing Times

Times changed, the city grew and automobiles became the preferred transportation, but many Renoites never gave up their passion for all things western—including horses.

The Reno Rodeo

In 1919, the Reno Rodeo was established, becoming one of the oldest rodeos in the

continued on page 6

One Horse Town

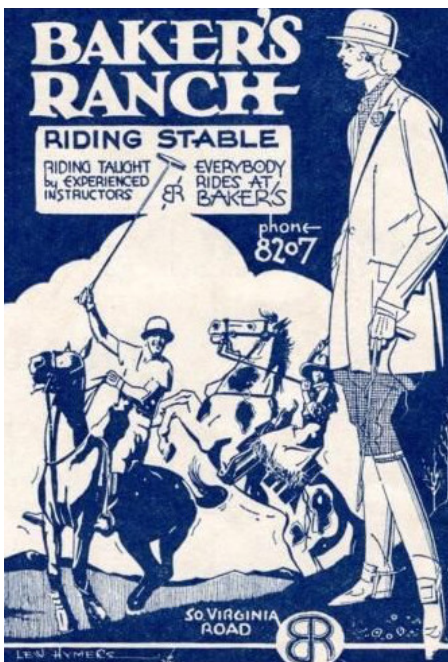
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United States. Though its purpose began as a promotion for the local economy and to showcase ranching culture, it became a premier event heralding the beginning of summer for Reno residents, young and old. Even today, every June the town fills with rodeo fans: locals, a wide range of Nevadans, Californians and tourists from across the United States, all garbed in western gear to watch the various events with anticipation and amazement. So how did locals get their “rodeo fix” the rest of the year?

The Riding Stable

Numerous stables began cropping up locally, most on what was then the outskirts of the city. Some of the earliest were a riding stable run by Charles McGinnis on the Virginia Road, and the Nevada Riding Stables on Arlington Avenue, offering horses by the hour or day and weekend mountain trips.

In the 1930s, William R. Denny was well-known in the community as a horseman. He began by leading a string of Shetland ponies around Reno for several years, giving children rides. He then had stables offering horses for fifty cents an hour or \$10 a week. Denny also offered



Baker Stables program.
Courtesy Griff Durham.



The Mansfield Family: L-R: Nick, Noreen, Butch, Pinky, Nancy and Mike (kneeling).
Courtesy Mary Lee Mansfield.

horsemanship lessons and free escorts. His stables were listed as the edge of Reno on South Virginia Road.

In 1936, a clever *Reno Evening Gazette* ad run by Harry Parker of Parker's Western Wear promoting a “Healthful and Invigorating Sport,” listed the A, B, C, and Ds of riding: these were stables known as Alamo, Baker's, Benjamin's, Carnation and Denny's.

Horses had become integral to major segments of Reno life via the rodeo, parades, and leisure time activities like the never-ending cowboy movies, some of which featured Rex Bell who would later become Lieutenant Governor of Nevada. Horseback riding flourished in nearby pastureland and picturesque riding locations.

Western Stables

One of the early popular stables was Nick Mansfield's Western Stables, located south of Virginia Lake at 3095 Lakeside Drive (Lakeside Manor Retirement today). In 1939, he purchased William Denny's business, and continued his operations. Nick Mansfield ran regular newspaper notices offering “Old-fashioned Western Chuck Wagon Moonlight Rides” to Hunter's Creek, treating riders to a campfire and a musical program. In 1951, Pat Klos' friend Nina Freedman's mother gave her a Western Stables birthday party hayride with 15 of her seventh-grade friends. They spent an afternoon behind those horses heading south of town past the stables to open land.

In the halcyon days before television and

computers usurped leisure time, horse riding was a favorite Reno pastime. Nick and his wife Noreen took full advantage of their equestrian backgrounds, also known as “cowboying.” In the 1950s and 60s for \$1 an hour, children and teenagers could ride a Western Stables horse and imagine being a part of “the Old West.” The WS signage read, “No racing of horses,” “No smoking,” and “Riders must be dressed appropriately.”

Nick Mansfield was a longtime well-known resident of Reno. Originally from Weaverville, California, he came to Nevada in 1932 and operated gaming establishments in Winnemucca, Elko and Hawthorne before settling in Reno. He worked at the Mapes Hotel, and earned the National Bellman of the Year award in 1955. Mansfield's stable business thrived and his own horsemanship won him many honors.

Baker's Stables

Baker's Stables was a Reno institution for many decades. Before opening his riding stable business, Ted Baker was manager of Denny's Stables during the early 1930s and also became a co-presenter of an event known as the Reno Stampede. Held at Moana Springs, events included bronc riding, steer roping, and wild cow milking, among others.

Ted Baker's ranch and stables were located near Moana Springs, along what is today Baker Lane. Around this time, Ted became very interested in polo. He traveled to the eastern United States to learn more about the sport, trained some of his horses and



The 1989 rodeo parade float honoring 50 years for the Nevada White Hats.
Courtesy Nevada Historical Society.



At the 1940 rodeo, the White Hats, a mounted posse, and the band entertain. Courtesy Nevada Historical Society.

created a Polo Field, holding matches there every Sunday afternoon against local polo teams. Several women riders also participated in the matches.

Local resident Linda Shelton shared the following memory of Baker's: "Ted gave us a tour of the barn, explaining how he brought architects and workers from Ireland, if I remember right, to design and build it. It was a unique and beautiful barn with thick plank floors and beams. Upstairs was interesting to me with the holes above each stall for feeding the horses. I loved the rock work, too."

Good Guys (and Gals) Wear White Hats

Reno's horse-related enthusiasm led to the creation of supporting organizations. The largest and longest-term one would be the Nevada White Hats, founded in 1939. In March of that year, a local group known as the Reno Mounted Posse, met at Ted Baker's ranch and chose The White Hats as their new name. They selected their new costumes which would represent the official Nevada colors: blue riding breeches, silver shirts and white sombreros (which later would evolve to white Stetsons). Their purpose would be to take part in local celebrations and also function as a social organization. It seemed at that time the club would be mostly, if not entirely composed of men. This would change in the future.

Local writer Karl Breckenridge celebrated the group in a June 14, 2015 column in the *Nevada State Journal*. In pure Breckenridge

style, he paraphrased the preamble to the Nevada White Hats' charter: "To just have one hell of a good time through camaraderie, camp-outs, trail rides, hoe-downs and occasionally more formal dancin', meetings, horse parades and all the training and drill that entails, barbecues, gymkhanas, pancake breakfasts and mystery bus tours."

The White Hats was the group that was responsible for the creation of Horseman's Park, described thusly by Breckenridge as: "a patch of dirt so far southwest of Reno that one packed a lantern and lunch to ride to it." The Hats were always present in parades, such as the Reno Rodeo and Admission Day ones, as they are today.

Diefenderfer's Stables

Horse interest was found across the entire Washoe Valley, though most horseback riding stables were located to the south of Reno. Diefenderfer's Stables served riders east of Reno and Sparks. Bob and Dorothy Diefenderfer were natives of Pennsylvania where Bob had been working for the Reading Railroad until they relocated their family to Nevada in 1946. In 1948, they bought land on North Truckee Lane near the intersection of Spanish Springs Road. Property owners in that rural location usually had several acres of land for their chicken farms, orchards, etc. The Diefenderfers had horses.

They built their 5-room home and adjoining facilities from used lumber they acquired in the area. Their business operated from 1957 to 1966 and included involvement in Reno's "Ponies in the Park," the sale of horses, horses for pleasure riding, and even the caring for many foster children.

Today's Reno

Pat has a long-ago memory of being hoisted onto a tame little mare at one of these stables, stiff with fright at first, then relaxing and loving the rhythm of the horse's movements and the clip-clop sound the hooves made. The stables of small-town Reno, we're sure, live in the memories of many *FootPrints* readers as well, and were a part of the charm and rural feel of our now cosmopolitan city. But today's annual rodeo named "The Wildest and Richest Rodeo in the West" and the sight of the White Hats sitting tall in their saddles can bring it all back. 🐎

Information for this article came from Mary Lee Manfield and her son Mike, Reno Evening Gazette and Nevada State Journal articles, Karl Breckenridge's article on the White Hats, and memories from FootPrints readers Griff Durham and Linda Shelton.

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

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.



2026 Historic Preservation Awards

Presented by the City of Reno on May 14, 2026 | Historic Resources Commission

Each May during National Preservation Month, the City of Reno's Historical Resources Commission (HRC) present awards to recognize local individuals and business owners who support preservation projects. We'd like to celebrate this year's recipients. Anyone can make a nomination. For more information visit <https://www.reno.gov/community/arts-culture/historic-preservation/historic-preservation-awards>

This year we've listed all of the awardees. We've included pictures of the wonderful homes in the Residential section, the people in the Advocate Award section, and the Distinguished Service award.

Further information on each award at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/134c607c324d4199b77e3e47d61241de>

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Northern Nevada

LEGACY BUSINESSES

Independent local businesses that contribute to Reno's history, culture, and authentic identity, and have been in operation continuously for at least the last 50 years.

- Mark, Fore and Strike
- Reno Rodeo
- Reno Philharmonic
- Van Woert Bigotti Architects

RESIDENTIAL

Outstanding renovation, restoration and/or preservation of a single-family home or multi-family residential building.

**Zeina Barkawi
and
Dom Sinnott**
576 Ridge Street



**Lisa and Doug
Bennett**
587 Ridge Street



**Sharon and Robert
Duste**
457 Court Street



**Matthew Hatjakes
and
Maegan Meresz**
791 Stewart Street



**Natalie and Bobby
Trigero**
370 Mount Rose
Street



ADAPTIVE REUSE, NON-RESIDENTIAL

Outstanding renovation, restoration, preservation, or adaptive reuse of a historic structure. The non-residential category includes all structures that are not used primarily as a residence.

- 129 Bell Street - Flow Designs
- VFW Post 9211
- Wedekind Road Historic Photo Mural by Iyana Esters

HISTORICAL PROJECT AWARD WINNER

Individual or group that has produced a publication, significant research, media production, public outreach, or other initiative to promote preservation within the community.

- **Light Circus Nevada Neon Museum - Will Durham**
- **Nevada Historical Society “On the Go” Program**
- **Historic American Landscape Survey Wingfield Park**

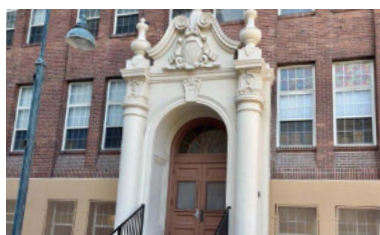
ADVOCATE AWARD WINNER

An individual or group that has, through education, deeds, or specific historic restoration(s), increased the public awareness of historic preservation within the community.



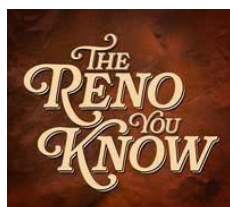
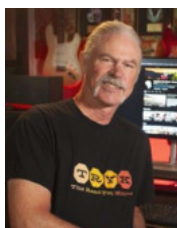
Father Chuck Durante

Father Chuck, rector of St. Thomas Aquinas Cathedral and Vicar General for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Reno, has played a significant role in historic preservation in the City of Reno and has made a lasting impact on the spiritual culture and identity of Reno residents for generations. Father Chuck is Reno-born and raised. He was the driving force behind the listing of the St. Thomas complex on the National Register of Historic Places in 2022.



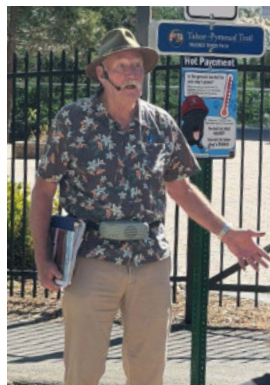
Steve Ellison

Steve had an early interest in the overland emigrant trail. He has photo-documented portions of that trail, the 40-mile desert, and the Applegate Trail. He collected historic photographs and made a documentary film about pioneering gaming establishments especially Harolds Club. Steve served on the HRPS Board and has donated his photographic services to the HRPS Home Tour for many years. In 2023, Steve launched a YouTube channel “The Reno You Know” that currently has 30,000 subscribers and 480,000 monthly views.



LaNae Gralla

LaNae continues to research, uncover, and educate about a part of Reno’s diverse heritage, the Jews of Northern Nevada. Her research has revealed artifacts from the original 1921 Temple Emanu-El and filled in important gaps in the succession of Reno’s early Rabbis. She has investigated the origin of a Torah scroll, rescued from Czechoslovakia after World War II, now on display at Emanu-El. LaNae organizes an annual celebration to educate others about the scroll’s importance.



Jim Smith

Jim is a long-time member of HRPS and for over 10 years has conducted historic walking tours. Jim and his wife Sue have a personal commitment to historic preservation having refurbished two historic homes, one is 36 Stewart Street. Jim is a long-time member and supporter of the Nevada Historical Society and the Boy Scouts.

Whitney and Scott Weed

Whitney and Scott extensively researched the 125-year-old property at 781 Mill. They have restored it preserving its original character. They were committed to recognizing its history, and this spring 781 Mill Street, now known as the Florence Crittenton Home of Nevada, was officially listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD WINNER

An individual or group that has shown through their work a career in preservation that has resulted in the preservation of structures, education, and other related preservation activities.



Bradley Carlson

Bradley is a sixth-generation Nevadan descended from a pioneer family that arrived in Nevada in 1862. Bradley, a professional architect, served as a HRPS Board member for six years, on the City of Reno Historical Resources Commission from 2019 until 2026, and is a HRPS tour guide.



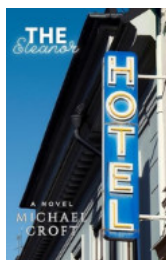
HRPS Artown Programs

Sunday, July 5, 2026
Nevada Sunset Winery
415 E. Fourth St.



HRPS' Artown offering this year included two programs held Sunday, July 5,
at the Nevada Sunset Winery on Fourth Street:
**Houses with Histories—Research Your Old House and
The Character of Reno—A Conversation with the Authors.**

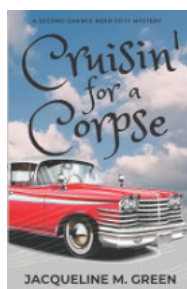
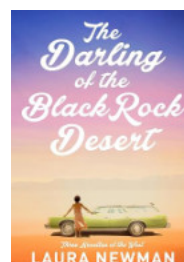
Houses with Histories included three perspectives from historic researchers. **Debbie Hinman**, *FootPrints* writer and researcher, shared her process and resources for solving the mysteries of historic Reno properties. **Melissa Haffey**, City of Reno historical resources specialist, clarified national, state and local historical designations and how to research and apply for these registers. Melissa shared several historical research resources available on the City of Reno website. **Whitney Weed** presented the story of her family's restoration of a historic Queen Anne two-story property at 781 Mill Avenue and her efforts to have it listed on the National Historic Register of Historic Places.



The Character of Reno featured a panel of three local authors whose recent novels include Reno as a character in their stories.

Michael Croft read from his novel *The Eleanor* set in a downtown hotel in the 1970s. It was influenced by his experience working in his family's hotel on Sierra Street, The Parkway. That hotel was Michael's muse. "I always knew I would write a hotel story, and I wanted to write about my backyard." Reno and The Parkway are Michael's places—characters in his life and his novel. (See Spring 2026 *FootPrints*, The Parkway and the Eleanor Hotels.)

Laura Newman read a piece about Burning Man and from her novel *The Darling of the Black Rock Desert*. Laura shared the distinction between writers who are plotters and those who are pantsers. Plotters plan their story's plot in advance. Pantsers, which Laura identifies as, "write by the seat of their pants." And setting drives her process. "I don't start with a plot but with a location that seers my soul. Will that place be a backdrop or a character? If the story's journey could only happen at that location, then it is a character." Laura often writes about the Reno area because of its landscape of extremes, its culture of embracing second chances, and events unique to the area.



Jacqueline Green writes cozy mysteries, and she shared from her book *Cruisin' for a Corpse*. After reading only a couple of pages she had the audience smiling and laughing at her characters as they explored Hot August Nights looking for cars that would be suitable for murdering someone. Originally from Anchorage, Jacqueline writes from the point of view of someone coming to Reno. She sees similarities between Reno and Anchorage. "They are both a bit unpolished, surrounded by mountains. And, outside of the casino core, Reno is a small town. Reno infuses its people—its characters are solid, imperfect, and they care. Jackie said she feels protective when writing about Reno and people who could be her neighbors.

Deep Blue Memories of Robert Laxalt

Article and photos by Amy Burton

"My father was a shepherd, and his home was the hills."

This is the first line of Robert Laxalt's second book *Sweet Promised Land* — a loving tribute to his father, a Basque-American shepherd in Nevada, and a meaningful story relatable to immigrant families throughout this country. *Sweet Promised Land* has been translated into four languages (German, French, Basque and Spanish), has sold over four million copies and has multiple printings.

When the Historic Reno Preservation Society (HRPS) *Literary Reno* book club met to discuss this Western American literature classic, members were joined by Laxalt's daughter, Monique Laxalt, and his biographer Warren Lerude who wrote *Robert Laxalt: The Story of a Storyteller*.

Sweet Promised Land

Monique and Warren both shared how Robert struggled to write that famous first line. Robert had accompanied his aging father Dominique on a trip back to

Dominique's hometown in France's Basque country.

"In 1953 Pop took his father to his home," Monique explained. "My brother Bruce was 2.5 years old; I was in utero. He and Dominique stayed in relatives' farmhouses. After dinner, in the silence and darkness of his room, he would write notes of the day. He realized he had a book in him, but it took many months to write that first line."

Warren further describes Laxalt's dilemma in *Story of a Storyteller*: "This was the book Laxalt could not decide how to write. He didn't know if it should be a novel or a memoir and he couldn't determine his own role in the storytelling. Should he be an interpreter of his father's emotions? Or should he be a first-person participant in the story? He thought it through and decided it was a true story, not fiction. He would have to write it as it happened." Then that famous first line came to him and the book flowed from there.

Monique remembers the sound of her father's typewriter as the background



Monique Laxalt, Robert Laxalt's daughter, displays her first edition copy of *Sweet Promised Land*.

music in their home. She and her two siblings would play on the floor as their father handed the pages he'd written that day to his wife Joyce to review as they sipped an evening cocktail. Warren added how Joyce read everything Robert wrote and provided feedback from her point-of-view as a loving wife, a playwright and a teacher of French literature.

Monique describes Robert's charcoal black Royal typewriter as a member of the family in her book, *The Deep Blue Memory*, about her life as a second-generation Basque-American and the daughter of a famous author. "For the three of us children, our earliest memory was of the sound of the typewriter, because it was there always, in the early morning hours as we woke, in the late night as we slept, in the background as we played."

Monique said the children were never a distraction to her father whom she called "Pop." "He never minded us playing around him as he wrote. He never sent us away."

continued on page 12



Monique Laxalt, daughter of Robert Laxalt, shared stories with the Literary Reno book club members at Mimi's Café, about growing up with her famous father. L-R back row: HRPS book club members Sharon Chidester, Pamela Moore, Yvonne Irby (face hidden), guests Monique Laxalt and Anthony Shafon, member Sally Tate. Foreground, L-R: guests Warren (hidden on left) and Janet Lerude, facilitator Susan Mullen and Frank Mullen (hidden on right).

Deep Blue Memories

continued from page 11

The journalists attending this book club meeting, Susan and Frank Mullen and Warren Lerude, said that the children were probably not a distraction because of Robert's newsroom background. Robert started his career as a journalist for United Press International (UPI). They reminisced about their experiences writing on deadline in an open bullpen filled with the noises of typewriters, the wire service teletype machine, ringing phones and the police scanner.

Monique vividly remembers the day her father received his acceptance letter from Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., for *Sweet Promised Land*. "He came running home from work waving a letter in his hand. My parents sat us three kids down on the concrete porch of our little house in Reno and poured a glass of champagne for each of us. We were ages 2, 4 and 7. The taste of the champagne mixed in our young minds with the words "New York agent" and "Harper and Row."

She shared her first edition copy of *Sweet Promised Land* with the photograph of her father on the back dust jacket, "Pop gave one to each of us [children] in 1957 [when it was first published]." The inscription in her father's hand reads, "To my Monique, by the time you can understand this, you will remember little



Pulitzer Prize winning author Warren Lerude signs copies of his biography of Robert Laxalt, *Story of a Storyteller*, for book club members.

of your grandfather. But this may in some part show you what kind of man he was. Your father, Robert Laxalt."

To emphasize how much the book meant to her and her siblings Monique said, "If ever a fire took our house, that book is what we would have all saved."

Despite what her father inscribed in her book, Monique did remember Grandfather Dominique well because she was 18 years old when he died. "Pop spent a lot of time at his father's sheep camp on Marlette Lake," she said. From an early age she remembers her parents taking her and her siblings up to the sheep camp where the children would stay with Dominique for three days—always three days. "He would make us pancakes over the fire," she recalled. She said the title of her book, *The Deep Blue Memory*, refers to the blue of Marlette Lake, the blue of the Nevada sky and the blue of the cover art of *Sweet Promised Land*'s first edition.

The final comment Monique shared was about the discrimination her father experienced as a Basque child growing up in Nevada. "Pop and his brothers and sisters were called 'Black Bascos' by their classmates in Carson City. My father had the courage to write about his immigration heritage when few would. It is a timely subject still today wouldn't you say?"

One of my favorite quotes from *Sweet Promised Land* that I shared on the Literary Reno walking tour addresses this challenge faced by the children of immigrant parents. I could never recite this passage without tears:

"All of us together were of a generation born of old country people who spoke English with an accent and prayed in another language, who drank red wine and cooked their food in the old country way, and peeled apples and pears after dinner.

We were among the last whose names would tell our blood and the kind of faces we had, to know another language in our homes, to suffer youthful shame because of that language and refuse to speak it, and a later shame because of what we had done, and hurt because we had caused a hurt so deep it could never find words.

And the irony of it was that our mothers and fathers were truer Americans than we,



Warren Lerude shares a 1945 photograph of Robert and Joyce Laxalt when they were University of Nevada Students from his book, *Story of a Storyteller*, with Barbara Weinhart and book club members.

because they had forsaken home and family, and gone into the unknown of a new land with only courage and the hands that God gave them and had given us in our turn the right to be born American.

And in a little while, even our sons would forget, and the old country people would be only a dimming memory, and names would mean nothing, and the melting would be done."

Robert Laxalt: The Story of a Storyteller

In addition to *Sweet Promised Land*, book club members also read *Robert Laxalt: The Story of a Storyteller* by Warren Lerude. Warren explained how he came to write Robert's biography. "My wife Janet and I were good friends of Robert and Joyce. He was 15 years my senior, and I am about 15 years older than Nicky (Monique). She is like a little sister to me. And Bob was my mentor." However, it was another friend and colleague of Warren's, Bruce Bledsoe, who suggested he write about "Nevada's most acclaimed writer of the modern era." Warren agreed to take on the task. "It took me three years and 20 banker boxes full of research to write."

However, Warren soon steered the book club conversation back to *Sweet Promised Land* and Robert's writing style. "My question to the group is this, was *Sweet Promised Land* a novel, a biography, an autobiography, journalism or literature?

Bob himself didn't know, and he tore many a page out of his typewriter that went into the trash before he came up with that memorable first line... And what's amazing is the success of *Sweet Promised Land* was like Robert "being at bat for the first time, in Yankee stadium, bases loaded, facing the best pitcher in the league, and he hit it out of the park."

Warren spoke of Robert's ability to turn a journalistic writing style into a literary art form. "He did as [Earnest] Hemingway, [John] Steinbeck and [Stephen] Crane did; He went back and forth between journalism and literature." Warren explained how Robert became this dichotomy of a news man and a literary author. "He had rheumatic fever as a child and was confined to his room. His family brought him books from the local library which developed his love of literature. But he made his living as a UP writer covering executions and gang assassination attempts, then worked as the public information officer for UNR. He founded the University of Nevada Press and wrote for Mother Geo [National Geographic magazine] and wrote 17 books. His book, *A Cup of Tea in Pamplona* was nominated for a Pulitzer. His writing featured the cross currents found in journalism but had the deep feeling of literature."

This push and pull between commercial and refined writing played out when Warren wished to honor Robert after his death. "When he wrote, journalism was considered a blue-collar way to make a living until you could get into the English

department. Bob was an English major, but when he died, I went to the Dean of the Journalism school [at the University of Nevada, Reno] not the English department. I told the Dean we should immortalize him, and it should be a gift for journalists. We created the Robert Laxalt Distinguished Writer's Program to show how journalists can matriculate into literature. (Frank Mullen was an awardee of that program.) Uncle Mickey [Robert's brother] wanted to know why the award would be associated with the journalism department. He thought it should be with the English department." However, Warren, a newspaper man himself, maintained the program should be a combination of journalism and literature.

As a former editor and publisher of the *Reno Evening Gazette* and *Nevada State Journal* newspapers, Warren attended conferences with east coast editors who often knew little about the western United States. Warren said he would give them Laxalt's *Sweet Promised Land* to remedy the situation. "I'd take it to Columbia, NY, editors' meetings. This book introduced them to the American West. Many were familiar with Europe but not anything in their own country west of the Hudson." It introduced them to the "other Nevada" beyond the state's gambling and divorce reputation.

Warren also asked the book club members what they thought the title inspiration might be. One member said it sounded like the title of a spiritual. Another guessed it came from *Sweet*

Promised Land of Nevada, a song featured in Walter Van Clark's novel, *City of Trembling Leaves* because Clark was Robert's mentor. Another thought it referred to the "American Dream"—the United States as the "sweet, promised land" for immigrants. Warren thought it was Dominique's realization after his trip home to the old country that his "sweet, promised land" was the Washoe Valley—that he was now an American.

Then Warren brought the group back to his original question: "Was *Sweet Promised Land* a novel, a biography, an autobiography, journalism or literature?" Frank Mullen answered, "literary memoir." The group agreed.

Among his many achievements Robert was chosen along with Walter Van Tilburg Clark to be the first writers inducted into the Nevada Writers Hall of Fame. In the forward to *Story of a Storyteller*, Basque Studies expert and 2012 Nevada Writer's Hall of Fame inductee William A. Douglass writes, "The trifecta of important Nevada literary figures is Mark Twain, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, and Robert Laxalt...Laxalt's *Sweet Promised Land* made him the beloved literary spokesman of a whole (unheralded) people whose saga is portrayed trenchantly through the life story of a single Basque sheepherder and his family."

Anyone interested in joining the HRPS Literary Reno book club may contact Susan Mullen at susanmullen@live.com. 



Warren Lerude, author of Robert Laxalt: *Story of a Storyteller*, shares his history as Robert's friend and mentee and what he learned while writing Robert's biography. L-R: Frank and Susan Mullen, Janet and Warren Lerude and guest Barbara Weinberg.

This article was informed by Monique Laxalt, Janet and Warren Lerude and Frank and Susan Mullen; the books Sweet Promised Land by Robert Laxalt, Robert Laxalt: The Story of a Storyteller by Warren Lerude and The Deep Blue Memory by Monique Urza and Ray Hagar's March 3, 2023 Reno Gazette-Journal article, "Robert Laxalt: remembering one of Nevada's greatest authors, journalists."

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

A Message From Your HRPS President - Summer 2026



HRPS' President Joy Orlich

Dear HRPS Members,

There is something about going for a walk in the cool of the morning or in early evening that is good for the soul. As I write, we have completed 8 of our 28 neighborhood walking tours. All of our tour guides, registration people and cabooses are volunteers and do an incredible job. Peggy Boni, who also helps with registration, caboosing, and ferrying equipment to each walk, is our part-time paid assistant, without whom we couldn't function. Peggy is always cheerful and always ready to help. If you ever need assistance with your walking tour registration or any other HRPS matter, contact Peggy at admin@historicro.org or 559-799-8971.

It is through our walking tours that we are able to engage most fully with our members, because they are a sensory education. You get to hear the information the tour guide has gathered about the people, homes, and neighborhood you are walking through. You learn about the era in which the homes were built, you get to see the homes and walk in the footsteps of the people who used to live there.

In the case of our commercial areas, such as the Downtown Sparks, East Fourth Street, Cultural Crossroads, or Beyond the Arches tours, you learn about the businesses and buildings that shaped Reno's character, and when attending our various cemetery walks, you hear more in depth stories about the residents whose names are associated with some of those businesses, streets, and homes on the other tours.

Our belief is that when you become acquainted with the people and places connected to Reno's history, you become more protective of those places; you have a stake in their preservation; you are more aware of what's lost when bulldozers arrive to tear them down.

There are still plenty of spaces for most of our July walking tours – and don't forget the Historic Parks bicycle tour. Take a look our website – historicro.org – for links and descriptions of upcoming tours.

Artown Programs

On Sunday, July 5, we hosted two programs at the Nevada Sunset Winery. The first featured HRPS researcher, Debbie Hinman, City of Reno historical resources specialist Melissa Hafey, and renovators Whitney and Scott Weed in a presentation called "Houses with History".

Debbie discussed the steps you would take to start the process of digging into your home's history. Melissa talked about the distinctions between local, state, and national historic register designations, and stressed that only a local designation protects a home or building from future nonconforming alterations. Whitney talked about how she and Scott began looking for a building to buy for his endodontics dentistry practice and stumbled across the historic Aitken house at 781 Mill St. and its remarkable history.

The second program, "The Character of Reno – A Conversation with the Authors",

featured a panel of local authors who have depicted Reno as a character in one or more of their books – Michael Croft, Laura Newman, and Jacqueline Green. The panel was facilitated by Susan Mullen. Susan is already thinking about authors to invite for next year!

Thanks to all who attended and to our outstanding presenters. The programs were informative and insightful.

Harvest of Homes Tour – Saturday, September 26, 2026

Believe it or not, we are already deep into preparations for our 2026 Harvest of Homes tour. The first step is securing the homes – we have 5 to show this year. Then we have the exteriors photographed. Next, an advance team does a walkthrough of each home, talking with homeowners, taking notes about particular features, and mapping out the route through the home, how many docents we will need, and where they will be placed within each part of the house.

By the time you receive this we will have visited all five homes, and I can tell you they are stunners! Three of the homes are located above the Washoe County Golf Course, where Arlington Avenue turns into Skyline Drive. We've never had this neighborhood on the tour before, and we think you'll be impressed with these gracious mid-century homes. Our fourth home is on Manzanita Drive, and those who attended Linda Smith's April program on Caspar Ehmcke got a preview. Our fifth home is a Delongchamps cottage on Gordon Ave. We'll have full details in the next edition of FootPrints. Meanwhile, mark September 26 on your calendar!

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

Historic Reno Preservation Society Historic Walks continue through July.
Information about the walks is available on the HRPS website:
<https://historicro.org/> in the Spring 2026 issue of *FootPrints*.

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- Discounted Neighborhood Walking Tours (\$10 Members; \$20 Non-Members)
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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Summer 2026 • Vol. 29 No. 3

- 1-3 On The Trail of the Mapes Hotel
- 4 About The Mapes
- 5-7 Reno: Not A One-Horse Town
- 8-9 2026 Historic Preservation Awards
- 10 HRPS Artown Programs
- 11-13 Deep Blue Memories of Robert Laxalt
- 14 President's Message
- 15 Lifetime Members, Membership Form
- 16 Supporters/Collaborators, Board Members, Officers, Staff & Chairs, Contact Information

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Double Click Design • dcdreno.com

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