

Three Against The Bank

by Debbie Hinman

I am often asked where I get my stories; some I just stumble across but others, like this one, come from readers contacting HRPS and suggesting topics. Unlike some others, this one is a first-person account from local resident, Mari Kay Bickett (formerly Bennett), with additional input from another local, Bob Frantz.

It was a beautiful early evening in the late fall of September 1974. The mood was festive; Reno's downtown streets were filled with enthusiastic locals gathered to watch as some 800 colorfully-garbed Masonic Shrine Temple musicians played instruments, drove small vehicles and marched down North Virginia Street. It was also Air Race weekend, which always brought crowds of out-of-towners to Reno.

The parade marched right by the beautiful 1915 Reno National Bank building at Second and North Virginia streets, designed for George Wingfield by Reno's pre-eminent architect, Frederic DeLongchamps. The building, an exceptional Classic Revival-style structure, had been purchased by the First National Bank in 1935 and housed the executive offices of casino owner Bill Harrah on the fourth floor.

Inside the bank, Assistant Operations Manager Mari Kay Bennett was ready to start her weekend—but three masked “bad guys,” later self-identified as the General, the Captain and the Lieutenant, had a million other ideas. Ironically, there were policemen stationed just outside the bank to ensure the crowds didn't get rowdy, who were blissfully unaware of what was about to occur inside.

The Heist

It was closing time for the bank. Mari Kay and Operations Manager Bob Frantz had just completed counting the money upstairs on the main floor of the bank and were headed downstairs to lock the safe deposit vault.

As Mari Kay neared the bottom of the stairs with Bob behind her, they were accosted by three men wearing full-head Halloween masks. One of them grabbed Mari Kay, held a gun to her head, and told Bob, “You better get down here or we're gonna shoot her,” and forced the two to lie on the floor. In addition to the masks, the men all wore coveralls, green gloves and crepe-soled desert boots and were armed with Colt revolvers.

It was later revealed that the robbers could access the closed bank because prior to that day, after hours the General had removed the lock from a rear door that led to Harrah's offices and the basement vault, and created a key to fit it and returned the lock to the door.

They ordered the two to get up and walked them back up the stairs to the bank lobby, guns pressed to their heads. Across from the stairway was the desk of Bank Manager, Herb Brown. He was on the phone, with the receiver to his ear. Bob recalls Herb was arranging a golf game with a buddy. One of the gunmen told Bob to order him to hang up the phone. Bob called out, “Herb, hang up!” Herb just stared at him in surprise. “Hang up the #@&!! phone or I'm going to blow her #@&!! head off!” shouted the gunman with his weapon to Mari Kay's head. Wide-eyed, Brown then obeyed.

Present in the bank besides Mari Kay, Bob, and Herb Brown were the security guard, three tellers and a

management trainee. The tellers had been loading the day's accumulated take into one of the vaults when the General ordered the Captain and Lieutenant to handcuff and tie the ankles of the employees and bank manager as he marched the two hostages back to the main vault where they were ordered to open it. Bob told them he didn't have the key, doing his best to dissuade the robbers. Sensing the rising fury of the General and

3 Rob Bank in Reno; Tie Up 9 Employees And Get \$1-Million

From the New York Times archives,
September 28, 1974



Current photos of Mari Kay Bickett, who was Assistant Operations Manager, and Bob Frantz, Operations Manager at the time of the 1974 heist.

Three Against The Bank

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fearing for their lives, Mari Kay, still with a gun to her head, said she knew where the secondary key was kept. Ordered to retrieve it, she did so and unlocked the vault.

She was commanded to fill a large duffel bag with bound stacks of bills. The Lieutenant watched, gun leveled at her head. Once the bag was full, Mari Kay was told to open a second vault, the customers' vault, which she and Bob were truly not able to access. The bag she had been filling was bulging with bundles of cash and when the Lieutenant again demanded she open the other vault or he would shoot her head off, Mari Kay told him, "You know, you have over a million dollars here!" The man responded, "No sh*t?!"

Mari Kay knew this dollar amount was not unusual as the majority of the funds in the vault were from neighboring casinos. The men then handcuffed Mari Kay, who was shown an odd kindness when the General ordered her to lie down and then placed a stack of empty money sacks under her head and asked if she was comfortable. He looked at her handcuffs and said, "I hope they're not too tight," slightly loosening one. Mari Kay thanked him, and as the robbers exited

the building, she pushed her hand through the loose cuff and was beginning to stand when the door was thrown open. At that moment, an armored van driver had arrived to pick up what was termed "the work," a case of deposits to be counted, so she lay back and rolled over on her hand as the robbers returned with the driver. They handcuffed him and tied his legs, then left for good with their take of \$1,044,000.

Mari Kay eased herself up and with her hand now freed, ran to set off the interior alarms. Unfortunately, with all the commotion outside, they went unnoticed. Mari Kay then called the police. She untied Bob and the others, and helped them stand outside the vault. Finally, the police arrived, followed by the FBI. One of the officers finally freed the hands of the remaining bank employees, as the cuffs were made in Japan and only one officer had a key that fit them.

The bank staff were told they would need to stay as the FBI



would be taking over to administer polygraph tests. There were two amusing postscripts to the robbery. When it was Mari Kay's turn for the polygraph, she was asked if she had ever taken anything from the bank and her response wavered, as she thought about the odd pen or tablet she might have unknowingly slipped into her purse. The machine registered an untruthful response. She explained her response to the tester who told her, "Okay, let's go with 'Have you ever taken anything worth over \$10?'" to which Mari Kay responded "No," and passed the test.

Bob's polygraph followed the same pattern, and he too passed after the examiner amended his question. When he was released, he left for the airport to meet a friend with whom he had plans to fly to Phoenix that evening. Arriving there, the friends stopped to have dinner at a local restaurant. That quickly, the word had spread and the buzz was all about the million-dollar robbery in Reno.



Above left, known as Reno National Bank, built in 1915. Later renamed First National Bank, above, and the interior of the bank, shown, left.

Returning to the Reno airfield the following day, as he got off the plane, Bob was met by FBI agents, who had been unaware of his plans to leave town and thought he might have been part of the plot and had run to Mexico. In the days following the event, Mari Kay noted a couple of different

cars with a driver behind the wheel parked across from her apartment. She reported this and was told not to be concerned, they were FBI agents.

The Culprits

The robbers, later identified as Curtis Ray Michelson (General); Ed Malone (Captain); and Floyd Forsberg (Lieutenant) had spent 10 months planning the heist. This was the Big One, the one that would make them unbelievably wealthy. They had parked their stolen green van in the alley and upon fleeing the bank, had removed their masks as Gus the driver drove them the short distance to the parking garage of the Sierra Inn, where a stolen car awaited them—the inn was across the street from the county jail and sheriff's office. They imagined that would be the last place police would look for them. They were right; they were not apprehended that day.

The Getaway

The men split up and the General assured his cronies that their portions of the take would be available to them the next day.

His word was good; Forsberg the Lieutenant collected \$264k. He and his wife headed back to Portland, Oregon. Stopping briefly in Eugene, he called his FBI inside contact who let him

know agents there knew he was involved in the heist and were already looking for him. Forsberg buried some of his take in the nearby woods and continued to Portland. His home was soon surrounded by FBI who offered him a deal and asked where Michelson had gone, whereupon Forsberg told them Newport Beach, where he had been living. Forsberg couldn't imagine Michelson would return there so he didn't believe he was giving him away. When he had shaken the FBI, Forsberg and his wife headed south to Mexico but decided that would be too obvious and altered their route to New York.

Forsberg's assumption was wrong; Michelson did return to Newport Beach along with Malone and the two were arrested in November. In a book later written by Forsberg about his robbery exploits, he reported, "Curtis, who had sworn never to be taken alive, had been singing literally from the moment he was arrested, fingering everyone."

In January, the FBI caught up with Forsberg outside a New York post office where he had rented a P.O. box under an alias. He was taken to the Los Angeles County jail where his cellmate was none other than Curtis Michelson.

Michelson swore he hadn't told the FBI that Forsberg had planned the heist—he told them it was Malone—but Forsberg didn't believe him. Forsberg had already made a deal with a friend, a former FBI agent, to break he and Michelson out of prison. It would cost him the rest of his hidden take but he had been locked up too often in his "career" and couldn't face it again.

However, after a nasty confrontation with an FBI agent where the agent insisted on interviewing him without an attorney present, Forsberg was transferred the next day—to Reno! Michelson was

Floyd Forsberg, "the Lieutenant", wrote a book about his career as a bank robber.

BEND, Ore., June 29 (AP) — Floyd Clayton Forsberg, who escaped from jail after being accused of one of the century's largest bank robberies was recaptured here early today by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Mr. Forsberg, 33 years old, escaped in April from the Washoe County Jail in Reno, Nev. He and two other men were accused of robbing the First National Bank of Nevada in Reno of more than \$1-million in cash on Sept. 27, 1974.

New York Times.

transferred as well, but by then he was a broken man, even going so far as to slit his wrists and turn in his robbery proceeds.

Forsberg began planning another prison break. This one was a success in April, with help from his ex-FBI friend, but he was apprehended in late June and sent back to prison with five years added to his 25, for his latest escape. All three men did time and most of the money was recovered; according to local newspapers, about \$700,000. The most ingenious hiding spot was Michelson's: \$170,000 was stuffed inside a tractor tire, then covered with baking soda to prevent moisture getting to the bills, and buried somewhere along the Mt. Rose Highway.

The Aftermath

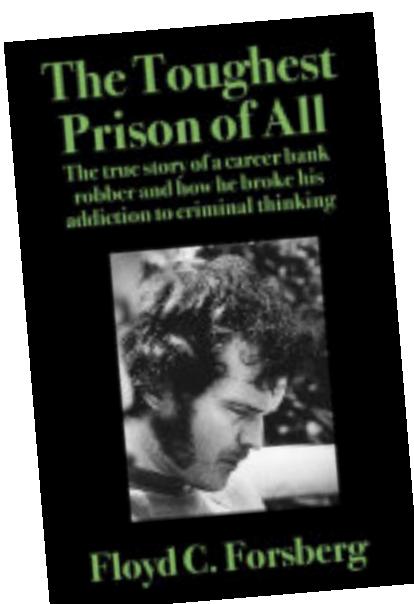
This heist made headlines across the nation. The *New York Times* headline read: "Three Thugs Sought in Nevada in \$1-million Bank Robbery." The *South Bend Tribune* of Indiana announced: "Reno Robbery Nets \$1 Million." The *World-News* of Roanoke, Virginia wrote: "Over \$1 Million Stolen in Reno Bank Robbery."

Mari Kay became a local celebrity, known as "The Million Dollar Baby." Not only was she once pulled over by a local police officer to ask if she was the Million Dollar Baby, a tall, handsome local sportscaster, Joe Bickett, recognized her in a local restaurant/bar and posed the same question. After first blowing him off, Mari Kay and Joe began a conversation, which led to dating and eventually the two married.

Mari Kay went on to earn a law degree, then was hired by the National Judicial College where she was later appointed the Academic Director, the first woman ever to hold that position. The Bicketts have now been happily married for nearly 50 years. 

Information for this story came from conversations with Mari Kay Bickett and Bob Frantz; Forsberg's book as shown on the left; an article printed in the February 1975 issue of TRUE magazine; and numerous newspaper articles, both local and across the nation.

Debbie Hinman is a HRPS walking tour guide and serves on the FootPrints editorial board. Deb started writing for FootPrints in 2004, and she is still a prolific contributing writer two decades later. She says her passion, "is discovering heretofore unknown local history."



Reno's Own Slice Of The Harlem Renaissance

The Langston Hughes Exhibit At The Nevada Museum Of Art

by Sharon Honig-Bear



If you haven't seen the current exhibit at the Nevada Museum of Art entitled *When Langston Hughes Came to Town*, I encourage you to visit sometime soon. Not only will you plunge into the richness of African American art and poetry, but you will be served a tasty slice of Reno history that illuminates Hughes's short sojourns in Nevada.

If you're not familiar with Hughes, he is known as a poet, novelist, and journalist. He was often called the unofficial "poet laureate of the Harlem Renaissance," a time in the 1920s that produced a flowering of African American talent. James Mercer Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri in 1901. He developed a distinctive writing style that is described as inspired by blues and jazz rhythms. He set out to document the many aspects of the Black experience, often using poetry that continues to resonate today.

I still remember a professor who profoundly influenced me as an undergraduate student. I was taking a literature class—but he broadened the approach, weaving together the history, art and ideas of the period with our readings. It was my first experience with a humanities approach and I never looked at things the same way again. That lesson renewed itself at the Hughes exhibit. My initial reason for visiting the show was its historic tie-in to Reno and Nevada, but as you progress through the rooms, you are rewarded with a dive into the art and poetry of the Harlem

Renaissance—and beyond that period into modern times.

When Langston Hughes Came to Town begins with a unique display of archival photographs, ephemera, and short stories that Hughes wrote, inspired by his visits to the Silver State in 1932 and 1934. In the first gallery, you are confronted by a monumental, wall-sized picture of Hughes. The walls to the right feature digital reproductions, part of a



Photo taken by Langston Hughes at Pyramid Lake. From Noël Sullivan Papers. Berkeley, CA. Bancroft Library, UC-Berkeley.

Yale University archive, of him in Southern Nevada. The left-hand wall focuses on his time in Northern Nevada. What especially struck me was the joy that poured out from these photos. Hughes looks young and happy, surrounded by friends.

He first arrived in Nevada on a cross-country trip that began while visiting

Black colleges and universities in the South. Along the way he observed the effect of the Great Depression and Jim Crow laws on Black people. In 1932, he stopped in Southern Nevada at the Boulder (now Hoover) Dam construction site with Loren Miller, editor of the *California Eagle*, and poet Norman MacLeod. The experiences shaped Hughes' articles about racial discrimination and poor working conditions. The gallery illuminates his work from this visit.

The left side of the first gallery provided my motivation to visit, and then revisit, the exhibit. I knew that Langston Hughes had two short visits to Reno in 1934 but up to now, detailed information was sparse. My interest began a decade or more ago when I first created the Cultural Crossroads tours for HRPS, looking at the rich ethnic fabric that contributed to an evolving Reno. Each year, as I revised and expanded the tour content, I found more information about the contributions of the Italians, Greeks, Chinese, Jews, and others, yet I took a special interest in the history and landmarks from the African American community. However, the Langston Hughes connection was missing—until now, in this exhibition that is well curated by Carmen Beals, and aided by research by historians Alex Albright and Dr. Alicia Barber.

While Hughes was living in Carmel in 1934, there were escalating tensions in the shipping industry. Hughes' political

activism and his support for a workers' strike led to him being threatened with being tarred and feathered!

His visit to Reno was partly a way to escape these controversies. Hughes spontaneously purchased a train ticket to safety and caught the 5:55 a.m. train from Truckee, California, to Reno in September 1934.

His time in Reno is overlooked in many accounts of his life, but he sent a letter on the day he arrived to his friend Noël Sullivan, a wealthy American concert singer and patron of the arts who befriended many African Americans and provided support for their welfare. In his letter he wrote, "Reached Reno and was settled in a big white house with the lawn so early that when I *went out looking for luncheon, the restaurants were still serving breakfast!* It is so nice and hot here that I feel like I am back in Africa."

The white house he mentioned was a Black boarding house at 521 Elko St., managed by Helen (sometimes referred to as Helaine) Hubbard, who was active in Reno's Black social and religious activities. At the rooming house, he paid

\$2.50 a week (and yes, the house is still there). Interestingly, he registered as James Hughes. He and the other boarders pooled their money to purchase food since racial discrimination limited their entry to public restaurants.

He returned to Reno again in early October to have a quiet place to write and generate income. It was supposed to be a six-week stay, but it was cut short when he discovered that his father was ill, and sadly died before Hughes arrived.

The exhibit features a black-and-white photograph taken by Hughes of a picnic at Pyramid Lake. He wrote on the back of the original, "Mrs. Willard, Miss Thooey, Tommy and Gordon, guests of Ted Gilbert." During his time in Reno, he explored the local scene, and his activities come to life in his daybook entries. He jotted something daily, providing a blueprint for his interests.

On September 11, 1934, he went to Virginia City where he toured an old gold mine and visited the Crystal Bar and Opera House (apparently, race was less of a barrier in that town). There are records of him keeping time for the boxer Kid Chocolate, seeing "The Count of Monte Cristo" at the Majestic Theatre and exploring the "hobo jungles" on the outskirts of Reno.

He found inspiration in the Hillside Cemetery, which later influenced his story "Mailbox for the Dead." Hughes spent time gambling at Chinaman's, one of the few places in Reno that accepted customers of color. He obviously liked gaming since his daybook included regular entries such as "won two dollars at



The white house where Langston Hughes stayed is now red, and appears to be brick. Courtesy of Trulia.

Chinaman's" on September 5, and on September 7 he revisited the club and lost three dollars.

I was a little confused by the mention of "Chinaman's" by Hughes'. I knew about the New China Club on Lake Street, but that business came along much later. I asked Dr. Barber about it and her research showed that "the Chinaman's" was likely one of two Chinese-run gambling clubs operating in Reno in the fall of 1934: the Star Club, operated by Walter Tun in a basement at 137 Lake Street, and the Public Club, operated by Woo Sing at 223 Lake Street. The Star Club, south of Second Street, was in the "Chinese Quarter," where most Chinese-related businesses and residences were still located. Both clubs would have had keno and table games. Hughes clearly enjoyed spending time and money at one or both of these.

A free-standing case in the gallery contains fascinating artifacts: facsimiles of letters, articles and manuscripts that Hughes wrote in or about Reno. Two short stories, "Slice 'em Down" and "On the Road" were published in *Esquire* magazine. The case has vintage, slightly worn copies of both issues. Next to one copy, there is a digital reproduction of the typewritten first page of "Slice Them Down" with a note attached saying it was an incomplete draft of revised changes, in which he gave the story a happy ending, rather than the original tragic one. The change was made at the request of the editor. With that modification, Hughes changed the title by replacing the word "em" with "them." The story begins:

In Reno, among the colored folks of the town, there are two main social classes: those who came to the city on a freight train, and those who did not. The latter or cushion riders was sometimes inclined to turn flat noses high at those who rode the rods by way of entry to the city.

The display case also includes an ad from the Elsinore Valley Sun for the Dixie Jubilee Quartet, proclaiming

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Reno's Own Slice

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"What is more harmonious than a good colored male quartet? These four peppy plantation performers are to entertain at the Elsinore theater, January 2 and 3." Hughes returned to Reno on October 13. His journal entry dated October 14, 1934 shows that he traveled to Carson City to hear the Dixie Quartet. Unlike the questionable use of the word Dixie now, apparently it was popular in the 1930s, even among Blacks. Reno featured the Dixie Club (also called the Dixie Social Club). It opened at 218 East Douglas Alley in the early 1930s and was known from the beginning to be patronized primarily by the Black community. By 1932, it was owned by Lou LaCou and John Smith.

So, what else can you see in this three-gallery exhibit? Although my visits were motivated by Hughes's Nevada connection, I encourage you to continue through the other related galleries. The second one features artworks from the cultural movement of the 1920s, often designated as the Harlem Renaissance. Artists include Charles Alston, Aaron Douglas, Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller, Norman, Lewis, and Augusta Savage. These are colorful and powerful works, and they're interspersed with poetry and writing from the period. The last gallery explores Hughes's influence on succeeding generation of artists, including Benny Andrews, Kwame Brathewaite, Barkley L. Hendricks, Isaac Julien, Gordon Parks, and Deborah Willis.

Hughes' days in Reno were counting down. On October 29 he wrote to Sullivan that "Reno is still amusing, but they are going to close up the little colored club, as they are not making enough money to keep it going. It was a grand little tough place where you could hear marvelous blues. Now there will be nothing left but a couple of gambling joints for the Race to go to... Almost every day I go climbing in the mountains to the North of us and you can look down on the whole valley. The mountains are full of rabbits jumping up from behind the sage brush. Tina and Greg [Sullivan's dogs] would have a grand time running them down...."



Top: Ad for the Dixie Club, reprinted from The Reno Evening Gazette, January 13, 1937.

Bottom: Photo of Langston Hughes, printed in Nevada Magazine, courtesy of Library of Congress.

Just a few weeks later his November 16 entry indicated, "Left tonight for Frisco. Bill Allen's birthday, wine drinking party."

He may have left Reno for the next party, but he continued to write poetry, theatrical performances, and lectures until he died in 1969. As captured in the gallery, "The exhibition demonstrates that the legacy of the 'poet laureate of the Negro race' continues today and his significant contributions augment our understanding of the African American culture."

Hughes never returned to Reno—but you can walk in his footsteps at the

Nevada Museum of Art. I encourage you to do so.

The exhibit *When Langston Hughes Came to Town* is at the Nevada Museum of Art until February 15, 2026. More information is available at <https://www.nevadaart.org/art/exhibitions/when-langston-hughes-came-to-town/>

Information for this article came from:

- Display panels from the current exhibit at the Nevada Museum of Art, *When Langston Hughes Came to Town*, curated by Carmen L. Beals, Associate Curator and Outreach Director, Las Vegas.
- Nevada Magazine story "Langston Hughes Sought Solitude in Reno" by Alex Albright in the January – February 2019 issue.
- Langston Hughes in Reno: an annotated timeline based on Hughes' 1934 daybook. *This website by Alex Albright is a gold mine of information about Reno and Black culture.* <https://alexalbright.works/research/literary/langston-hughes/langston-hughes-in-reno/>
- Various entries in HRPS' <https://renohistorical.org>

Sharon Honig-Bear is a freelance writer and photographer and was the restaurant critic for the Reno Gazette-Journal for more than seven years. For the past nine years she has written the Edible Traditions column for *edibleRenoTahoe* magazine. She is a Past President of HRPS, developing many historic walking tours and the Harvest of Homes Tour. She served on Reno's Arts and Culture Commission after retiring as Development Director of Washoe County Library.

Remembering Guy Rocha—What A Guy!

by Debbie Hinman, Researcher, Writer

Guy Rocha, who passed away this past September at the age of 73, will long be remembered for his warmth, personality and knowledge of Nevada history. But even more notable was his commitment to its accuracy.

Like many others, I recalled the story of U.S. Senator Key Pittman who, as the tale went, died prior to the 1940 election and was kept in a bathtub on ice until the election was over to retain the democratic seat. Pittman won. I always found it a great chapter of Nevada history, but then I found that Guy debunked this tale, having uncovered the fact that Pittman had suffered a severe heart attack five days before the election, and his team decided to downplay it, attributing the illness to fatigue. Pittman was alive when he was elected, but died five days later.

I don't recall when I first met Guy, but I was very flattered when he and Dennis Myers (then Editor of *Reno News & Review*) came to my 60th birthday party, so it may have been then. Dennis and I had been at Reno High together and we

frequently traded emails when working on our respective stories, but I was too much in awe of Guy to bother him with my pesky questions.



Among the many faces of Guy Rocha — we miss him

I do have a personal recollection proving Guy was a stickler for accuracy. Though somewhat less significant an error than the death of a senator, in the spring of 2006, I came home to a voice mail from Guy, kindly correcting my claim in the latest *FootPrints* that President Rutherford B. Hayes visited Reno and took a ride on the V&T Railroad in 1880; this actually occurred in 1878. I had been writing for HRPS for two years; I was quite

embarrassed by this error. I can thank Guy for teaching me I need to check, recheck, and check my facts once again.

Every so often, I would find a voice mail from Guy and shake in my shoes once I heard his voice. But it was often just an "I enjoyed your latest article—good job!" Then I would be walking on air for a week.

But it was when he suggested to Neal Cobb and Jerry Fenwick that they ask me to write the forward for their second volume of "Reno Now and Then," (Guy had written it for the first), that I realized what a thoughtful, generous person he was.

It is incredibly sad to realize what we have lost in the past seven years, regarding the knowledge of our local history and willingness to share it. These men whom I consider the "Holy Trinity of Local Historians" were Philip Earl, who left us in 2019; Karl Breckenridge in 2023 and our most recent loss, Guy Rocha. They are all sorely missed.

Newlands' Manor Pillar Street Signs Receive a Refurbishing

by Cindy Ainsworth, HRPS Past President & Chair Reno Preservation Fund

HRPS Board member Sharon Honig-Bear was contacted this year by HRPS' founding member Pat Klos to inform her that the Newlands Manor pillar street signs located on Nixon Avenue were fading. HRPS has a close connection to the pillars as we helped rehabilitate the masonry work along with replacing the street signs with new granite signage. I helped coordinate that project so when I learned that the signs were fading, I jumped to finding a stone memorial company that could update the sign lettering. After a lengthy process, we chose Memories Etched in Stone.

Sharon Honig-Bear contacted Reno City Council member Naomi Duerr to see if the city had any special community funding for preservation projects. We were not sure if we would receive anything but low and behold, we received the funding to restore the Newland's Manor pillar signs. Thank you Sharon, Naomi and the City of Reno.

With the funding in place, we were on our way to restoring the signs. The company painstakingly (during very hot summer days) cleaned, masked, and applied fresh black paint. They feel that the refreshed sign painting will last for quite a long time.

So next time you take a walk along Nixon Avenue, pause at one of the pillars and know that HRPS and the City of Reno helped preserve these wonderful historic pillars that contribute to the Newlands Historic District.



Left, masking and painting of a pillar sign. Right, the finished street sign for John Fremont Drive and Nixon Avenue.

Historic Reno Preservation Society *with* the Washoe County Library System
present the 2026 winter



HRPS Speaker Programs

Co-Chairs: Sheryln Hayes-Zorn and Susan Mullen

**Held at Noon on the second Sunday of the month,
these FREE programs offer topics related to Reno's history and culture.**

Because we often fill the 104-seat auditorium in the Downtown Library for these Speaker Programs, the library has asked that people register in advance. The HRPS newsletter, which is emailed to members and friends the first of each month will have instructions as to how to register. Of course, if you don't get to register, we won't turn you away as long as there are seats available.

PLEASE NOTE THE LOCATION MAY BE CHANGING FOR FEBRUARY THROUGH APRIL!

Date: Sunday, January 11, 2026, at noon

Presenter: Debbie Hinman

Topic: Reno's Mail Service: the Earliest Days to the Present

Location: Reno's Downtown Library, 301 S. Center Street

Reno's Mail Service will cover the history of the mail service, from its earliest days to the present. You will see Reno's impressive first post office building, which is no longer with us; the second post office, which has been decommissioned but still stands proudly on "DeLongchamps Corner" in downtown Reno, and hear details of its amazing decor and the impact it had on the downtown area.



The federal building and post office at the southeast corner of First and Virginia.



Debbie is a Reno native and University of Nevada Reno graduate. Active with HRPS since 2004, she is a researcher/writer for *FootPrints*, HRPS' quarterly publication, and creates and delivers summer walking tours in different sectors of Reno. She has previously served on the HRPS Board for four three-year terms. Debbie served for seven years on the City of Reno Historical Resources Commission.

Date: Sunday, February 8, 2026, at noon

Presenter: Sharon Honig-Bear

Topic: A Taste for History: Discovering Untold Stories about the Region's Food

Location: To be determined.

A Taste for History: Discovering Untold Stories About the Region's Food is a visual history of local food and drink and the stories that surround them. Sharon will share her love of Reno history along with local restaurant lore. Her program brings to life colorful characters, one-of-a-kind eateries and stories that touch on the Chinese, Jewish and Italian influence on our community.



The Wigwam at 2nd and Sierra.



Sharon is a freelance writer and photographer and was the restaurant critic for the *Reno Gazette-Journal* for more than seven years. For the past nine years she has written the "Edible Traditions" column for *edible Reno-Tahoe* magazine. She has been involved with HRPS for almost 20 years, serving as HRPS President, developing historic walking tours and the Harvest of Homes tour. She served for six years on Reno's Arts and Culture Commission after retiring as Development Director of Washoe County Library.

CONSIDER HRPS IN YOUR GIVING

Date: Sunday, March 8, 2026 at noon

Presenter: Dana Bennett

Topic: Reno Women Ready to Celebrate Victory: The Battle for the Ballot in Reno, 1910-1914

Location: To be determined

As the business, political and social heart of Nevada in the early 20th century, Reno was at the center of the debate about allowing women to vote in this state. Both the suffragists and the anti-suffragists launched their organizations in Reno and focused their efforts here. Dana will review both sides of that hotly contested question. Dana will introduce the Reno residents who engaged on both sides of the suffrage battle, and will showcase the Reno homes and buildings where suffrage was the main topic of conversation.

Dana grew up in Old Southwest Reno before it was known as the Old Southwest. After graduating from Reno High School, she left for colleges and career moves, but often returned to live in her hometown. She was an early member of HRPS and loves to reminisce about the Reno she remembers. Dana and her husband live in Midas, Nevada, where she is the President of Friends of Midas, the town's historic preservation organization.

Date: Sunday, April 12, 2026 at noon

Presenter: Linda Smith

Topic: Caspar Ehmcke: From Munich, Germany to Manzanita Lane, Reno

Location: To be determined

Linda explores the imprint on Northern Nevada of renowned architect Caspar Ehmcke. Best known for his work in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s on high-end residences and luxury retail stores in the Los Angeles area, Caspar Ehmcke also designed a number of notable residences and commercial buildings in Reno and around Lake Tahoe.

Linda gained a love of historic architecture when she and her husband Paul moved into the second floor of an 1815 Federalist townhouse in Washington, D.C. In Honolulu, Hawaii in the early 1980s, they bought a residence built by Hawaii architect, Valdimer Ossipoff. They moved to Incline Village in 2012. Last year they bought the Hirsh Estate in Old Southwest Reno, designed by Ehmcke. Linda worked for presidents and congressmen in Washington, D.C., and served as Director of Finance for the City of Honolulu and Policy Advisor to the Governor of Hawaii.



Previous Speaker Programs Available on HRPS Website

Check out these wonderful programs at HRPS website:
<https://historicreno.org/>

Hebrew Cemeteries in Northern Nevada with Sharon Honig-Bear

Suffrage, Women's Rights and Historic Preservation in Nevada with Dr. Alicia Barber and ZoAnn Campana

The Archaeology of Burning Man: The Rise and Fall of Black Rock City with Dr. Carolyn White

The U.P. House with Loren Jahn and Neal Cobb

American Mountain Men with Larry Walker

Before Reno and Sparks with Betsy Morse

Fact, Fiction and Howard Hughes with Geoff Schumacher

Nevada Barn Heritage with Jack Hersh

Harolds Club with Neal Cobb

Adaptive Reuse and Revitalization of the Reno Downtown Post Office with Bernie Carter

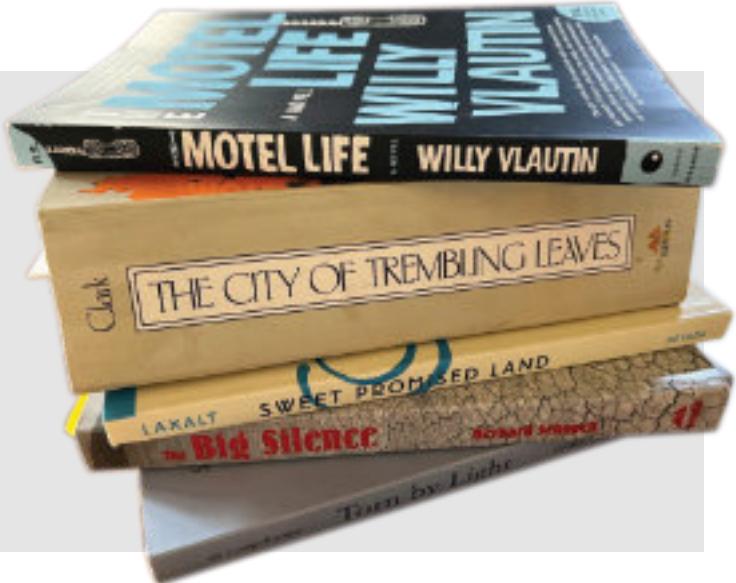
History of Washoe County (and Nevada) with Jim Bonar

Alice Ramsey's Journey with Debbie Hinman

The Lear Theater with Dr. Alicia Barber

Literary Reno: A History of Adaptation

by Amy Burton



Reno has a rich literary representation of local authors, poets and playwrights, and it is often a setting for literary works as well. Various HRPS members have worked for years to share that rich story, and that sharing has taken differing forms throughout the decades.

The idea for *Literary Reno* was born when founding President Pat Klos was the HRPS representative to Artown. In 2000, when the Artown committee was looking for new programs, Pat thought her *Nevada Literature* course could be modified to focus on Reno-based literature in a bus tour format. Klos had created two literary courses when serving as librarian at McQueen High School: *Western Regional Literature* and *Nevada Literature*.

The Literary Reno Bus Tour

The bus had room for 20 participants, and the popular tour ran for two years. Highlights included a start at the Riverside Hotel near the Court House—the setting for Clare Boothe Luce's play, *The Women*. The tour then headed to Morrill Hall on the University of Nevada, Reno campus where former U.S. Congressman Jim Santini read excerpts from his uncle Walter Van Tilburg Clark's book *City of Trembling Leaves*.

The participants then walked to poet Joanne de Longchamp's former home on North Center Street, part of the University Gateway District, an intact row of 19th Century Queen Anne style homes. On the porch, Michele Basta, Director of Public Relations for the UNR Library, greeted the bus tour participants dressed as Joanne and read from her poetry.

The Literary Reno Walking Tour

In 2008, Sharon Honig-Bear, HRPS member and future president, resurrected *Literary Reno* as a walking tour. She said she was motivated after reading UNR Professor Susan Palwick's book *The Necessary Beggar*. "I realized there was a whole body of newer literature that featured Reno. So, we added Ellen Hopkins and Willy Vlautin just to name two," said Sharon.

"The tour was an overlay of many historic sites, and so it covered history, architecture and another important part of the cultural



Pat Klos and Sharon Honig-Bear walking and talking in the Literary Reno Video, done with Glen Clancy.



From the Literary Reno video, Pat Klos stands in front of Joanne de Longchamps former home at 821 N. Center (now relocated to W. Taylor Street), as she reads de Longchamps' poetry.

landscape: our writers. This was a time when HRPS was trying to expand the few [walking] tours already being offered, and it allowed for a lot of freedom and creativity among us volunteer tour guides." Sharon led the walking tour from 2008-2010, then



Pat Klos, standing left, and Sharon Honig-Bear, in the hat at the door of Wild River Grill, speak to Literary Reno Walking Tour attendees. Courtesy HRPS Photo archive.



Literary Reno Tour Guides Nancy Manfredi and Charlotte Voitoff in downtown Reno in front of the restaurant Taste of Chicago. Courtesy HRPS Photo Archive.

she invited Wooster High School English teacher Charlotte Voitoff to co-lead with her in 2011.

The Literary Reno Video

During Sharon's tenure as *Literary Reno* guide, she and Pat joined forces to create a video version in 2009. The two worked with local videographer Gwen Clancy who guided them through developing the scripts and selecting the locations. "We were able to write grants and secure funding from the City of Reno Arts and Culture Commission and Nevada Cultural Affairs that underwrote the production costs," said Sharon. "The video was done over several sessions, and we had to wear the identical clothes each time!"

The Voitoff-Manfredi Walking Tour

By 2012, Sharon had turned over the walking tour to Charlotte who partnered with fellow Wooster High School English teacher Nancy Manfredi. They led the walking tour until the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. As a literary side note, Nancy shared that acclaimed Nevada author Robert Laxalt's wife also taught with them at Wooster.

During the walking tour, Nancy was passionate about sharing her love of downtown Reno. "My background made me want people to know that Reno once was a vibrant city with a wonderful downtown. I grew up in Sparks and going to Reno at that time was an adventure. Before I got a car, I took the bus when I wanted to go shopping or perhaps a movie, and I was not afraid to go by myself. I had gone to shows at the Riverside and Mapes, mailed letters from the beautiful Reno Post Office, shopped at Magnin's, the Wonder and Lerner's, eaten at Woolworth's and the Wigwam, cruised South Virginia Street with my Sparks High School friends on Friday and Saturday nights, and enjoyed the beautiful Harold's Club, Prima Donna, and Mapes Hotel's neon signs."

Nancy's passion was a hit with the participants. "When I first started doing the tour I realized that the Toscano Hotel with its restaurant was mentioned. My father took my family there for special occasions. I have a picture of my parents, my brother (whose 16th birthday we were celebrating), his good friend, and me there that I treasure. I would show that picture to the tour attendees and they seemed to like the personal touch."

And the literature was important too. "I wanted them to know about the literature of Reno even with its dark side," explained Nancy. The Literary Reno walking tour attempts to combine the visiting of historic sites as they relate to Reno as a literary setting and as home to its significant writers. As Nancy mentioned, that literature illuminates the two faces of Reno as described by Mark Curtis in his book *Reno: A Fabled City Finds its Soul*. One face is that of "Reno the 'biggest little city,' a place for gambling and quick

continued on page 12



Aluminum works in the Downtown Post Office: Top, Man with wings; Bottom, Airplane over the sun.

Literary Reno

continued from page 11

divorces, the glamorous precursor to Las Vegas and now its seedier casino shadow." And the second face is "the Reno that has been recognized for its easy livability: with its thriving arts community, a vibrant university, the snowmelt in the Truckee River running through it, historic neighborhoods and its spectacular outdoor setting."

Charlotte's favorite part of the tour was architectural. "I especially liked really looking at the old post office and its beautiful aluminum work," she remembered.

Charlotte commented on the challenges of leading a tour downtown, "There were the amusing disruptions: standing outside the Santa Fe and having cars CLANG as they ran over the metal plate in the road, trying to talk over *Street Vibrations*, or walking only as far north on Center as First Street because the rodeo parade was in full swing."

Literary Reno Moves to Zoom

The *Literary Reno* video was offered via Zoom as part of the *July 2020 Artown Neighborhood Stories* when the walking tours were temporarily cancelled during the COVID-19 pandemic. The video is still available in the HRPS website archives and features cameos with local authors Willie Vlautin and Ellen Hopkins: <https://www.historicreno.org/index.php/archives/stories-2020/27-videos/181-literary-reno-vid>. Sharon said a favorite moment from the video was walking the old alleys downtown with Willie, "It seemed his books came alive."

After COVID, A New Walking Tour

After the COVID-19 pandemic, HRPS members Anne Benoit, Jessica Johnson and Amy Burton shared a turn facilitating the tour in 2023. Anne and Amy continued into 2024. However, the challenges that Charlotte noted continued. Anne explained,



Literary Tour, 2023, Anne Benoit (with umbrella) in front of the Riverside Hotel. Photo by Amy Burton.

"Walking the downtown streets in July is just too noisy and fraught with obstacles from homelessness to harassment by passing vehicles. It is not conducive to the readings we are trying to project." The guides were also concerned the walk was losing its significance because so many historic places that were there when the tour was created were now gone.

The Literary Reno Book Club

So, in 2024, Anne suggested the *Literary Reno* walking tour be modified. The resulting iteration was a book club for HRPS members. Susan Mullen agreed to co-chair the club with Anne, and they held their first meeting at the Little Waldorf Saloon in January 2025. The club meets monthly to discuss a book by a local author with a local setting. A highlight of the club is the occasional visit by local authors. Michael Branch joined the group to share stories of writing *Raising Wild*, and Michael Croft attended to talk about his novel *The Eleanor*. There is currently a limit of 12 members with a few possible openings. Anyone interested in joining the group may contact Susan at susanmullen@live.com to be added to the waiting list. 

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



2025 Literary Reno Reading List

(in alphabetical order by title)

A Short History of Reno, Richard Moreno

Blood Mountain, Bill Brown

Girl Child, tupelo hassman

Horse, Willie Vlautin

Mending the Moon, Susan Palwick

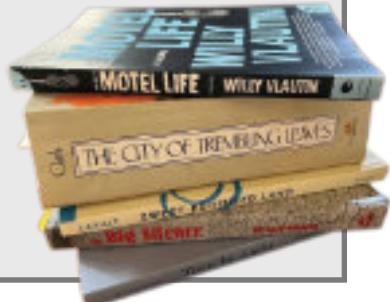
Raising Wild, Michael Branch

Robert Laxalt: The story of a Storyteller, Warren Lerude

Sweet Promised Land,
Robert Laxalt

The Better Half,
P. W. Borgman

The Eleanor, Michael Croft



PHOTOS OF 2025 HARVEST OF HOMES TOUR



Attendees enter
619 Gordon Avenue.



Treasurer Bill Newman registers a
walk-up attendee.



Administrator Peggy Boni
attaches a wristband.



Board member Brett Banks with
"before" photos of the 603 Humboldt
Street home.



Registration volunteers at
Gordon Avenue –
Brenda Boynton and Susan DeCamp.



Registration volunteers at
Humboldt Street –
Pauline Severino and Sarah Britt.



A Message From Your HRPS President - Winter 2026



HRPS' President Joy Orlich

Dear HRPS Members,

We have a lot of new developments to report so let's dig in!

Harvest of Home Tour

Our 2025 Harvest of Homes tour was a success, raising nearly \$15,000 for our Reno Heritage Fund grant program. These funds support community projects as well as individual historic home exterior improvement projects. A big thanks to Cindy Ainsworth and her committee for continuing to administer this program.

New Lifetime Members

Speaking of Cindy, we welcome Cindy and her husband Tom Ainsworth as new Lifetime Members along with Linda and Paul Smith, and Michael Dzeidzic and Wayne Jauer. Linda and Paul's Hirsh Estate home was featured in the last issue of FootPrints and will be included on the 2026 Harvest of Homes tour. Michael and Wayne were spotted on this year's Home Tour, saying it was one of their favorite activities.

Walking Tour Planning

We held our 2026 Walking Tour planning session in November. Tour guides and other volunteers discussed which tours will be on the schedule this summer along with ideas for future tours that need people to help research and write them up. If you're interested, get in touch with me.

New Dues Structure

Effective January 1, 2026: At a board planning session in October, we examined our dues structure in light of increasing costs, changing technology, and what our members have asked for. The biggest request we have is for an automatic renewal feature. Here are the new rates:

- **Individual Membership** - \$35/year (both regular and auto-renew options)
- **Dual/Family Membership** - \$60/year (both regular and auto-renew options) This level is for one or two people of the same household.
For these levels, Walking Tours will now be \$10/person (non-members pay \$20), and Home Tour tickets will remain at \$40/person (non-members pay \$50).
- **Supporting Membership** - \$150/year (both regular and auto-renew options)
This level is for one or two people of the same household and includes free walking tours plus discounted Home Tour tickets (\$40 vs. \$50 for non-members).
- **Business Membership** - \$500/year - This level is designed for businesses that want to show their support for our mission and includes their logo on the HRPS website, in FootPrints, and in the monthly digital newsletter.
- **Champion Membership (New category)** - \$1,000/year - this level will not have the auto-renew option and is for one or two members of the same household. Champion membership includes free walking tour tickets, free home tour tickets, and their names listed on the HRPS website.
- **Lifetime Membership** - \$2,500 - for one or two members of the same household. It includes free walking tour tickets, free home tour tickets, names listed in FootPrints and on the HRPS website, plus an invitation to hosted Lifetime Member events. All current Lifetime Members are grandfathered into these benefits.

Monthly speaker programs, quarterly FootPrints publication, and our monthly digital newsletter continue to be free for all membership levels.

Preservation Advocacy

We continue to monitor initiatives related to the Lear building, and will keep members updated with any new developments. Meanwhile, if this is a topic that interests you, I encourage you to subscribe to Alicia Barber's *Barber Brief* www.aliciambarber.com, for the most up-to-date information.

The National Bowling Stadium has awarded Will Durham's **The Nevada Neon Project** a long-term exhibit agreement to showcase some of his extensive neon sign collection. The exhibit is called "The Light Circus" and HRPS is pleased to be a Community Sponsor (\$2,500).

HRPS will participate in the City of Reno's effort to update the **Powning Conservation District** architectural survey of historic resources. Volunteers will be solicited to assist in this effort.

Downtown Reno Library

The last of several historic building plaques, contributed by HRPS, has been installed on the Downtown Reno Library at 301 South Center Street. The Downtown Reno Library opened in 1966. Architect Hewitt C. Wells, of Reno firm DeLongchamps, O'Brien and Wells, designed the new Downtown Reno Library, a modernist masterpiece. The library features simple exterior ornamentation and a stunning park-like interior, including an enclosed garden court with verdant indoor landscaping, hundreds of plants and trees, elevated circular reading areas, and tiers of open book stacks. In 1968, the library earned a national Industrial Landscape award from the American Association of Nurserymen, presented by Lady Bird Johnson.

The building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2013 and the Reno City Register of Historic Places in 2020.

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

HRPS Lifetime Members

Cindy & Tom Ainsworth

Darleen R Azizisefat

Sharon Honig-Bear

Sandi Bitler

Jacqueline Black (*)

Karl Breckenridge(*)

Lynn Bremer

Holly Walton-Buchanan

Dawn Cassinelli Bunker & Julie Cassinelli
Wiskershen

Florence Ann Burgess

George Burke

Linda Burke

Patty Cafferata

Tom & Phyllis Cates

Cindy & Tom Ainsworth

Jan & Phil (*) Chik

Press & Delores Clewe

Karalea Clough

Neal & Mary(*) Cobb

Carol & Sam Coleman

Dr. Thomas & Mary Conklin

Barbara & Ralph Courtney

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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)

Are You A...	HRPS Quarterly <i>FootPrints</i> Preference (Check one):
<input type="checkbox"/> New Member <input type="checkbox"/> Renewing	<input type="checkbox"/> Print Copy <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Copy

Membership Levels:

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<input type="checkbox"/> \$35.00 Individual (Auto-Renew)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000.00 Champion: 1-2 People, no charge for Walking Tour/Home Tour tickets
<input type="checkbox"/> \$60.00 Dual/Family: 1-2 People	<input type="checkbox"/> \$2,500.00 Lifetime Member (1-time payment): 1-2 People, no charge for Walking Tour/Home Tour tickets, name listed in <i>FootPrints</i> , invitations to hosted Lifetime Member events
<input type="checkbox"/> \$60.00 Dual/Family (Auto-Renew): 1-2 People	
<input type="checkbox"/> \$150.00 Supporting: 1-2 People, no charge for Walking Tours	
<input type="checkbox"/> \$150.00 Supporting (Auto-Renew): 1-2 People, no charge for Walking Tours	

Auto-Renew option requires a credit card. Your card will automatically be charged for your renewal each year. You may cancel this option at any time.

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Deedee Pace

Butch & Susan Peachy

Pioneer Center

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Double Click Design · dcdreno.com