Author’s Note: I wish to thank Arline Laferry and Beth Miramon for their help with the following article. Arline, a docent with the Nevada Historical Society, provided her newspaper research on the company, as well as biographical sketches of the principals. Beth, author of Reno’s Axle, Historic Fourth Street, contributed her knowledge of the pressed brick process, and made valuable corrections to the text of the article.

One of the first things that occurred to anyone taking a stroll through some of Reno’s historic neighborhoods is the prevailing use of brick in home construction. From the early part of the 20th century into the 1950s, brick or brick-faced homes dominated our residential neighborhoods.

The primary reason for this was the fact that the brick buildings were more fire safe than wood structures. In its early days, Reno suffered a series of horrendous fires, the worst in 1879, where ten city blocks in the core of downtown Reno, all frame structures, were decimated. In addition to safety concerns, brick structures exuded more of an impression of prosperity and permanence. And residents in the first part of the 20th century did not have to look far for this desirable building material. A fine product was now available from the Press Brick’s earliest projects. The building was seriously damaged in a 1957 downtown explosion and demolished soon after. Postcard courtesy of Debbie Hinman.

Built in 1899, the Elk’s Home, originally 38 W. First St., was one of Reno Press Brick’s earliest projects. The building was seriously damaged in a 1957 downtown explosion and demolished soon after. Postcard courtesy of Debbie Hinman.

In January of 1902, the Daily Nevada State Journal reported “The Reno Pressed Brick Company is a new enterprise in Reno, but is already doing a rattling business. The entire output of the works has already been sold and orders for future delivery are coming in. As soon as the ground thaws the works will resume operations.” The bricks were touted as being of a superior quality, weighing 5 1/2 pounds apiece. One of Reno Press Brick’s first projects was to supply brick for the University Hospital Building on the University of Nevada campus. Note that somewhere along the line, Reno Pressed Brick became Reno Press Brick.

By February of 1903, the fledgling business was successful enough that Charles Clough and Charles Gulling, purchased the four-acre Ryland Brick Yard in the general area of Fourth Street and Keystone Avenue. The following year, newspaper advertisements began appearing for the new Reno “Pressed” Brick Company at that location.
Continued from page 1

Brick making is an ancient practice—the Bible tells of the problems incurred by the Israelites in making mud bricks for the Pharaoh. The bricks were dried in the sun, which did not provide the necessary strength.

The modern dry press brick process used at Reno Press Brick was state of the art for its time. First the mixture was pulverized and then passed through a series of screens to remove any remaining large pieces. The large pieces were sent back to the pulverizer. The end product was then forced into the hydraulic press where the “clay” was squeezed through whatever shaped nozzle was being used for any given run. The stiff tube of extruded clay would push along a table, past wire-bladed cutters, which were spaced according to the product being processed at the time. From there, the newly cut bricks went out to air for a time, until they were dry enough to burn without expelling from heat-generated steam. The final step in the process was a trip to the kiln where the dried bricks were fired in order to harden them.

In May of 1903, the Reno Evening Gazette reported that the new plant was installed and “the wheels are turning as soon as the power company gets the power to the plant.” They went on to say “Within five days after the plant starts the first kiln will be begun…the first kiln will be used on the Timberview building (Second and Virginia Streets) and the new Elks’ Home (on First and Sierra Streets).”

In May, the company held its annual meeting, electing the following slate of officers: C. E. Mack, president; Harvey Dehart, vice-president; E. E. Blessing, secretary; C. E. Clough, treasurer, with all of the former plus Charles Gulling as trustees. The board then named J. E. Monroe plant superintendent. The Nevada State Journal received a sample brick which was, in their words, “as smooth as ever a pressed brick was and it is a perfect piece of workmanship.”

The new plant utilized electricity, still a new innovation in Reno at that time. The early kilns required 60 cords of wood to fire 200,000 bricks. An oil burning kiln was soon added to the enterprise. Clay for the bricks came from a 21-foot deep clay bed in a 1/4 acre piece of land owned by the company. When D. W. Cummings, an experienced pressed brick man, came from Chicago to set up the new press, he proclaimed it the best brick material he had ever seen.

Once the improvements were made and the new plant swung into full operation, the Reno Press Brick never had even looked back. Plant employees worked 12-hour shifts, and were kept busy looking back. Plant employees worked 12-hour shifts, and were kept busy

The Twenty-First Century Club, 335 West First Street, was constructed in 1925. It was supplied with brick from Reno Press Brick. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. Photo by Carol Coleman.

The newspaper article highlighted this great demand. The paper quoted Charles Clough as saying that Reno Press Brick had sold over three million bricks in the past two weeks. Three hundred thousand of these bricks were being shipped to Goldfield, Nevada which was booming during this period. Another three hundred thousand were earmarked for “the new Mackay building on University Hill.” In 1911, the company received its largest contract ever for one million bricks for the Mason Smelting Company in Mason Valley.

In 1914, the company diversified by adding heating oil sales and oil furnace installations to its product line. The officers felt that Nevada brick was a good benefit from increasing their span of products and services. The first oil was delivered locally by horse-drawn wagons. In later years, air-conditioning products were added to the product offerings. In 1924 the plant burned but was quickly replaced by a six-story building on the same site, an impressive height for early Reno.

But bricks continued to be turned out over the next 39 years as the company proudly displayed its slogan “A brick built town is a prosperous looking town.” On its advertising, local architect Frederic DeLongchamps designed much of his work with smooth, red Reno brick in mind. Many local homes, the Masonville Hotel, and its University of Nevada buildings all distinctively displayed the classic local material. And all of these are still standing today. The EI Cortez

Membership Report
February 22, 2006—July 1, 2006

Reno Press Brick: a Reno Institution (continued)
Sometimes it’s the simplest questions that provoke the most thought. At a recent Board Meeting, members pondered the very basic question “What is HRPS’ role?” Our mission statement declares the organization to be “Dedicated to Preserving Reno’s Rich Past with Education, Advocacy, and Leadership.” But how do we do this, given our limited span of influence and resources? How can we reap the most benefit from our efforts and make a difference in our community? The Board decided that our roles of advocacy and education are exemplified in our monthly programs, our quarterly newsletter, our walking tours and our visibility in the community. We play an active educational role with our seven monthly Programs on the first Wednesday of each month. We tour our walking tours not only educate participants but also strive to alter perceptions and encourage appreciation of examples of early architectural features that may have never been noticed before. In addition, they introduce people to some of the early residents of the area.

Our advocacy role is in lending our support to assist other groups and individuals in saving buildings. We work with the City of Reno Historic Resources Commission in areas of common interest. As HRPS Board members, we individually attend City of Reno Historic Resources Commission meetings and write letters to support preservation. Since 2000, HRPS has given an annual Historic Preservation Award to a local individual or organization for their efforts in restoration and adaptive reuse.

The Department of Cultural Affairs
Division of Museums and History and
The Nevada Historical Society
Present an exhibition in the Changing Gallery

THE ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF FREDERIC J. DELONGCHAMPS

September 15 through December 31, 2006

Please join us for the Opening Reception Friday, September 15, 2006 at 5:30 PM.

This exhibit is a collaboration between the Nevada Historical Society and the Special Collections Department of the University of Nevada, Reno Library and is sponsored by the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority.

The Nevada Historical Society is located at 1650 N. Virginia Street, Reno, NV 89503

For more information, please call 775-688-1980.

The Cultural Center and Research Library are open Tuesday – Saturday, Noon to 5:00 PM.

Rejo Press Brick: A Reno Institution (continued)

Hotel, the Twentieth Century Club and the “new” Reno High School are of Reno
pressed brick.

A 1927 advertisement claimed “more than fifteen varieties and colors of brick” were being produced at the plant. However, the local clay was varying shades of red. If buyers wished to use golden brick, they had to have it shipped from Sacramento or Salt Lake City.

In 1930, longtime associate of the company Albert J. Caton resigned his position with the First National Bank of Nevada (formerly Farmers & Merchants National Bank) to take over as active Manager of Reno Press Brick. Two years later, upon Charles Clough’s death, Caton purchased the company and became president and general manager. Caton was a native Nevada, whose parents were pioneers of the Comstock. He attended Gold Hill High School, and graduated from the University of Nevada in 1904, where the popular young man had been student body president.

Reno Press Brick had an extensive history of dedicated, long-term employees. Second and third generation workers were commonplace at the company, and a 1951 Nevada State Journal article mentions several men who spent their entire working lives at the company, such as foreman Art Frosic, with 62 years.

So devoted were the officials of the company to their featured product, when it came time to add a new office building to the brick yard in 1952, architect Ed Parsons was instructed not to use concrete as a foundation, as that was a competitor product. Parsons attempted to dissuade them but the elder Catons insisted upon brick footings using steel. In his oral history, Parsons relates that not more than six months later, the building began to settle and the foundation had to be redone.


Junior, or “Bert” as he was called, was a very capable young man who had been trained for the task. Like his father, he was a University of Nevada graduate but had also obtained a degree from Ohio State University.

The reason for the closure of the brick plant was concern over the effect of the smoke and by products generated by the plant. At the company’s inception, the plant was located outside the city limits, and not only were environmental concerns non-existent, but Reno was much smaller and there were few residential neighborhoods in the immediate vicinity of the plant. Residents coping daily with muted dirt storms from the brickyard conditions were hardly going to concern themselves with a little smoke.

Though the company is gone, the prestigious output of the factory is evident throughout the city’s older neighborhoods. In a newspaper interview given not long before the closure of the plant, Caton was asked why brick had retained its popularity as a building material. He gave the following thoughtful reply: “Brick is easy to build with, is durable and it cuts maintenance costs to the bone. When you build with brick, you can be sure your building will have a lasting permanence; a minimum of expensive upkeep and beauty that maintains staleness the year around.”

Looking at our numerous existing brick bunzows and downtown classics such as the Riverside Artist Lofts and the El Cortez Hotel, it is hard to argue with this point of view.

Information for this article came from: Numerous articles from the Nevada State Journal and Reno Evening Gazette; dated 1907 through 1978, and the aforementioned assistance of the two generous and knowledgeable ladies Arline Laferry and Beth Timann.

Debbie Hinman is a member of the HRPS Board, Director of HRPS Walking Tours and Editorial Board.
From 1900s until the late 1960s, Reno, Nevada held the title of Divorce Capital of the World. Before the modern age of no-fault divorce, legal dissolution of marriage could take years or it was simply not allowed. Early in the twentieth century, a number of states were vying for the nation’s migratory divorce trade. These states saw economic opportunity in offering relatively quick divorces. Lessen divorce laws were usually centered on a residency requirement and allowable grounds for divorce.

By 1931, Nevada had cornered the migratory divorce market by lowering its divorce residency period to six weeks. During the 1930s, Reno’s Washoe County served as the divorce capital of the nation’s migratory divorce trade. By 1931, Nevada had cornered the migratory divorce trade. During the early 1900s through the 1960s, Renoings with racial minorities, however. From socio-economic levels and both sexes were from lower white women arriving in plush states and countries. In the 1930s, Reno’s divorce trade was the result of the African-American community. C.L. R. James was a noted black Marxist writer and intellectual who came to Reno from New York to divorce his first wife so his marriage to white actress and socialite, Constance Webb, would not be bigamous. James made his name as the leader of a Mexican mail-order divorce business. In December of 1933, just one day before his 64th birthday, Roberts died, having lapsed into a diabetic coma days earlier. He died with six months left on his final mayoral term. Though Reno may have had more distinguished migrants in its 138-year history, it is hard to imagine that it had any who were more colorful, in or out, as admired and revered as Ed Roberts. He was a man of his time, and a grand time he had.


Outstanding Accomplishments of the ROBERTS’ ADMINISTRATION

The following is a list of the major undertakings instigated by and accomplished during the administration of Mayor E. E. Roberts in the City of Reno.

• The extension of the sewage system from East Second Street and Billie Ross’ at 520 Palomino Park Road
• The purchase of a plot for the burial of Spanish American War veterans
• The lowering of insurance rates
• The establishment of an eight-hour day for all workers
• The extension of paved streets from 15 miles to 35 miles
• The establishment of Skating Pond
• The extension of sewers to all parts of the city
• The installation of sewage disposal plant
• The extension of the White Way from Court to Cherokee on South Virginia Street
• The extension of the White Way from Fourth Street from Sierra to Virginia, and from Sierra to West, and on Churubusco from Second to First
• The installation of sewage disposal plant
• The establishment of an eight-hour day for all workers
• The extension of paved streets from 15 miles to 35 miles
Continued from page 7

ditions and established “The Stockade,” or “The Cribs,” which was a Reno landmark until military officials forced the city to close it in 1942. Roberts’ “live and let live” approach to government seemed to sit well with most inhabitants of Reno during that time period, as Roberts went on to be elected to two more terms as mayor. He often said that people should be allowed to do as they wish, as long as they weren’t hurting anyone else. In addition to his liberal views on prostitution, he believed gambling should be legalized so that it could occur in the open, and that the graft and corruption surrounding prohibition could be resolved by making alcohol production and sales legal as well.

In his 1931 speech from, of all places, the pulpit of the Methodist church, Roberts persuaded the State of California to have the building constructed for the event while he and his City Council worked tirelessly to transform Idlewild Park into a lovely setting. As Professor Dennis Dworkin stated of Roberts’ administration, The California Building as it looked during the Transcontinental Highway Exposition in 1927. Roberts persuaded the State of California to have the building constructed for the event while he and his City Council worked tirelessly to transform Idlewild Park into a lovely setting. Photo from Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Library.

Roberts: A Whiskey Barrel on Every Corner (continued)

In 1931, according to newspaperman James Hunter, Miss Hunter was one of very few female attorneys in Reno, and James found her to be liberal, sympathetic to radicals, and “strong on the Negro question.” Despite what would seem like paralyzing discrimination, Reno’s African American community embraced the divorce trade as vigorously as did white Nevadans. It functioned as a nearly inclusive microcosm of the bigger divorce scene, as Reno’s black population opened their homes to temporary visitors and made them welcome in a town that was not welcoming of their race. 

In August 1950, Ebony magazine showcased the story of a young woman from Richmond, California who came to Reno for a divorce. The article asserted: “Nuptial knot cut by 500 Negro wives annually in divorce court.” What a surprising statistic that is! The story revealed an image of Reno and a class of visitors whose presence in town had gone mostly unnoticed—or certainly unreported. To be sure, African American celebrities came to Reno for divorces. Ebony noted examples such as Mrs. Bill Robinson in 1944, Mrs. Adam Clayton Powell in 1946, and the wife of Ink Spots star Bill Kenny in 1949. The writer, however, the article claimed, were “unpublicized West Coast wives.”

While in Reno, Mrs. Allen met Reno’s leading African-American citizens. Bill Bailey, who ran the only two integrated nightspots in town, and Reverend R.F. Thompson of the Bethel AME Church welcomed the young woman to their respective establishments. She attended an NAACP meeting and a church social at Bethel AME, which touted itself as the “Biggest Little Church in the World.” All in all, the Ebony article painted Reno in a surprisingly good light. Although most restaurants held a strict segregationist policy, Mrs. Allen reported that she could shop in any store in town, including “fashion shops which carry the latest New York and Hollywood exclusives.”

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Mella Harmon is Curator of History at the Nevada State Historical Society and a HRPS member. Mrs. Harmon holds a master’s degree in land use planning and historic preservation from the University of Nevada, Reno.

In his 1931 speech from, of all places, the pulpit of the Methodist church, Roberts persuaded the State of California to have the building constructed for the event while he and his City Council worked tirelessly to transform Idlewild Park into a lovely setting. Photo from Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Library.

E Macdonald, of starting every day with a case. Finding none with the proper credentials, he engaged Charlotte Hunter. Miss Hunter was one of very few female attorneys in Reno, and James found her to be liberal, sympathetic to radicals, and “strong on the Negro question.”

Like many divorce-seekers, C.I.R. James needed to find employment to help finance his six-week stay in Nevada. It was decided that the best place for James to go was the Pyramid Lake Guest Ranch, where Harry Drackert reluctantly agreed to hire him as a handyman. His job was to keep the yard clear, supervise the irrigation system, mow the lawns, help take luggage in and out of the ranch’s station wagon, and wash dishes twice a day. In his spare time, James wrote letters to his wife, read French literature, and began an English translation of History of the French Revolution by the French Trotskyist historian Daniel Guerin. After about a month of unaccustomed physical labor, Harry Drackert terminated James’ employment, but allowed him to stay on as a lodger. This did not help his precarious financial situation, but gave him more time to devote to his demanding writing schedule.

James’ letters during his stay in Reno and at the ranch shed light on both the life of an unaccustomed physical laborer, Harry Drackert terminated James’ employment, but allowed him to stay on as a lodger. This did not help his precarious financial situation, but gave him more time to devote to his demanding writing schedule.

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Reno’s African American Divorce Trade (continued)

Committee charged with the project, according to newspaperman James Hunter, Miss Hunter was one of very few female attorneys in Reno, and James found her to be liberal, sympathetic to radicals, and “strong on the Negro question.”

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Reno’s African American Divorce Trade (continued)

Confirming what had long been known, the article acknowledged that black women were barred from the swank hotels, dude ranches, and auto courts, but touted “the Negro-run boarding houses where rates are low.” The article suggests that “if she is careful and stays away from the gambling casinos, the total bill [for a Reno divorce] can be kept down to $300.”

The Ebony article featured a young woman named Emma Allen, who found in Reno a friendly and hospitable community of some 500 African-Americans. She found a room at Doris Needham’s boardinghouse on Elko Street. Mrs. Needham, whose husband was an elder at Bethel AME church, started her business for black divorcees because there were so few decent places for them to stay in Reno. Of her home, Mrs. Needham said: “We keep a clean, neat house and we don’t tolerate any monkey business. Women are not allowed to bring any male guests home.”

While in Reno, Mrs. Allen met Reno’s leading African-American citizens. Bill Bailey, who ran the only two integrated nightspots in town, and Reverend R.F. Thompson of the Bethel AME Church welcomed the young woman to their respective establishments. She attended an NAACP meeting and a church social at Bethel AME, which touted itself as the “Biggest Little Church in the World.” All in all, the Ebony article painted Reno in a surprisingly good light. Although most restaurants held a strict segregationist policy, Mrs. Allen reported that she could shop in any store in town, including “fashion shops which carry the latest New York and Hollywood exclusives.”

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2006 Fall Historic Walking Tours
Historic Reno Preservation Society will present six historic walking tours and one bike ride during the fall 2006 season. Walking Tours are $10 per person; tours are free to HRPS members. Tours generally last 2 hours. No dogs, please. If you would like to attend a walk or bike ride, please call Headquarters at 747-HIST (4478) to reserve space.

Tuesday, September 5, 6 p.m.
WELLS AVENUE NEIGHBORHOOD - Take a stroll through a working class neighborhood along the path of the Wells Avenue streetcar, across from the Vie tracks, past the homes of the "Thoma Street Gang." Meet at Southside School, Sinclair & Liberty Streets. Tour Guide, Mark Laser.

Tuesday, September 12, 6 p.m.
MANSIONS ON THE BLUFF - View high style architecture in Reno's most significant political neighborhood. Meet at the McCarran House, 401 Court Street. Tour Guide, Ed Wishart.

Tuesday, September 19, 6 p.m.
UNIVERSITY HISTORIC DISTRICT (CAMPUS) - Visit Merrill Hall, Mackay School of Mines, the Keck Museum, and learn the history of this beautiful campus. Meet at Honor Court, 9th and Center Street. Tour Guide, Jack Hursh.

Saturday, September 23, 10 a.m.
EL RENO APARTMENT HOMES - Visit the original site of these charming and unique homes, and view seven of them at their new locations. Other examples of the Sierra Vista Addition architecture will be seen. Meet at the Statewide Lighting parking lot, 1511 S. Virginia. Tour guide, Debbie Hinman.

Tuesday, September 26, 6 p.m.
POWNING ADDITION AND LITTLE ITALY - Discover one of Reno's earliest and most delightful vernacular neighborhoods, predominantly settled by Northern Italian immigrants. Meet at Mckinley Arts & Culture Center. Tour guide, Felvia Belaustegui.

Saturday, September 30, 10 a.m.
NEWLANDS NEIGHBORHOOD - An architectural walk through one of Reno's oldest and most prestigious neighborhoods. Meet at My Favorite Muffin, 340 California Avenue. Tour guide, Scott Gibson.

Sunday, October 1, 10 a.m.

Roberts: A Whiskey Barrel on Every Corner
by Debbie Hinman

There is no dearth of colorful individuals in Reno's history. In its early days, the city attracted many unique people who came here for the promise of wealth, a fresh start in a young town, release from an unhappy marriage, or adventure. Some moved on, disappointed, but many more felt the attraction of the Truckee Meadows pulling them in like a siren's song and they stayed and contributed to the growing town. One of these significant contributors was Edwin Ewing Roberts, one of the best-known local political figures of the first three decades of the 20th century.

Born on December 12, 1870, in Sutter County, California, Roberts was educated at Howe's Academy in Sacramento and went on to become certified as a teacher. He taught in Hollister, California from 1891-1897. In Hollister, he met and married a fellow teacher named Nora Range in 1893. The couple had one child, a daughter, Hazel Lee. During that period, Roberts became the clerk of a committee of the California State Legislature and began studying for a law degree. Becoming intrigued by politics, he soon enrolled in the California School of Elocution and Oratory.

All of these pursuits prepared him for the life he was to lead but as often happens in life, it was one chance decision that brought him to Nevada. On March 17, 1897, Roberts made the trip to Carson City to see the state's first legally-sanctioned boxing contest, Fitzsimmons vs. Corbett. Many caught their first sight of Nevada because of this fight, and Ed Roberts had found his new home.

He took a teaching post at Empire, a mill town on the Carson River. In 1899, his eight studies paid off and he was admitted to the Nevada bar. Following his growing interest in politics, he was soon elected Ormsby County District Attorney, a position he held for five two-year terms. But Roberts had his eye on a loftier prize.

In 1910, he succeeded George Bartlett as Nevada's lone congressman. Roberts always directed his energy toward issues impacting his adopted state, such as land reclamation through irrigation, public buildings and highway construction. His four terms in the House of Representatives gave Roberts many opportunities to speak out on national issues as well.

Possibly the best-known of his positions was that against the declaration of war against Germany and the closely related issue of the draft. In an impounded address to the House, Roberts declared "True patriots have no need of conscription. If all the people in the country who have been yelling their heads off for war... during the last three years would now come forward and volunteer their services like real men, there would be no need for conscription." He proudly concluded: "As for the state I have the honor to represent, it will not be necessary to resort to conscription. Nevada is the first state in the Union to come forward with its full quota of troops."

On a personal level, probably the most noteworthy occurrence of Roberts' Washington tenure was the introduction of his beloved daughter Hazel to her future husband, Walter Perry Johnson, also known as "Big Train." Johnson, ace pitcher for the Washington Nationals, later the Senators, went on to a stellar baseball career, and was later one of the first inductees into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1936. The two married in 1914 and although they continued to live in the East, they made frequent trips to Reno to visit Roberts after he moved back to Nevada.

Johnson and popular Baptist minister Brewer Adams became great friends and hunting companions. In his oral history, newspaperman John McDonald reported that all of the boys living in the vicinity of the Roberts' residence on S. Virginia Street would converge on the home when the news came that the Johnsons were in town. "Big Train" would come out into the yard and pitch to the boys, much to their great delight.

In 1918, Roberts declared for the U.S. Senate. Although he won the Republican nomination, he was defeated in the general election by incumbent Charles R. Henderson of Elko. Roberts returned to Nevada, opening a law office in Reno in the E. C. Lyons building on Second and Center Streets. He did a lucrative divorce business, no doubt assisted by the numerous contacts he made in Washington.

But presumably Roberts missed the public life, and decided to run for Reno mayor in 1923. One of the big issues of the day was prostitution. The city had closed down Reno's red-light district the year before (which, of course, did not end the trade); the ladies of the night just moved to different areas around town. Roberts' position was to establish a segregated area which would be policed for safety. Roberts handily won the election.
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2006 Fall Historic Walking Tours

Tuesday, September 5, 6 p.m.
WELLS AVENUE NEIGHBORHOOD - Take a stroll through a working class neighborhood along the path of the Wells Avenue streetcar, across from the V&T tracks, past the homes of the "Thoma Street Gang." Meet at Southside School, Sinclair & Liberty Streets. Tour Guide, Mark Lazer.

Tuesday, September 12, 6 p.m.
MANSIONS ON THE BLUFF - View high style architecture in Reno's most significant political neighborhood. Meet at the McCarran House, 401 Court Street. Tour Guide, Ed Wishart.

Tuesday, September 19, 6 p.m.
UNIVERSITY HISTORIC DISTRICT (CAMPUS) - Visit Morrill Hall, MacKay School of Mines, the Keck Museum, and learn the history of this beautiful campus. Meet at Honor Court, 9th and Center Street. Tour Guide, Jack Hursh.

Saturday, September 23, 10 a.m.
EL RENO APARTMENT HOMES - Visit the original site of these charming and unique homes, and view seven of them at their new locations. Other examples of the Sierra Vista Addition architecture will be seen. Meet at the Statewide Lighting parking lot, 1511 S. Virginia. Tour guide, Debbie Hinman.

Tuesday, September 26, 6 p.m.
POWNING ADDITION AND LITTLE ITALY - Discover one of Reno's earliest and most delightful vernacular neighborhoods, predominantly settled by Northern Italian immigrants. Meet at McKinley Arts & Culture Center. Tour guide, Felvia Belaustegui.

Saturday, September 30, 10 a.m.
NEWLANDS NEIGHBORHOOD - An architectural walk through one of Reno's oldest and most prestigious neighborhoods. Meet at My Favorite Muffin, 340 California Avenue. Tour guide, Scott Gibson.

Sunday, October 1, 10 a.m.

Roberts: A Whiskey Barrel on Every Corner
by Debbie Hinman

There is no dearth of colorful individuals in Reno's history. In its early days, the city attracted many unique people who came here for the promise of wealth, a fresh start in a young town, release from an unhappy marriage, or adventure. Some moved on, disappointed, but many more felt the attraction of the Truckee Meadows pulling them in like a siren's song and they stayed and contributed to the growing town. One of these significant contributors was Edwin Ewing Roberts, one of the best-known local political figures of the first three decades of the 20th century.

Born on December 12, 1870, in Sutter County, California, Roberts was educated at Howe's Academy in Sacramento and went on to become certified as a teacher. He taught in Hollister, California from 1891-1897. In Hollister, he met and married a fellow teacher named Nora Range in 1893. The couple had one child, a daughter, Hazel Lee. During that period, Roberts became the clerk of a committee of the California State Legislature and began studying for a law degree. Becoming intrigued by politics, he soon enrolled in the California School of Elocution and Oratory.

All of these pursuits prepared him for the life he was to lead but as often happens in life, it was one chance decision that brought him to Nevada. On March 17, 1897, Roberts made the trip to Carson City to see the state's first illegally-sanctioned boxing contest, Fitzsimmons vs. Corbett. Many caught their first sight of Nevada because of this fight, and Ed Roberts had found his new home.

He took a teaching post at Empire, a mill town on the Carson River. In 1899, his eight studies paid off and he was admitted to the Nevada bar. Following his growing interest in politics, he was soon elected Ormsby County District Attorney. A position he held for five two-year terms. But Roberts had his eye on a loftier prize.

In 1910, he succeeded George Barlett as Nevada's lone congressman. Roberts always directed his energy toward issues impacting his adopted state, such as land reclamation through irrigation, public buildings and highway construction. His four terms in the House of Representatives gave Roberts many opportunities to speak out on national issues as well.

Possibly the best-known of his positions was that against the declaration of war against Germany and the closely related issue of the draft. In an impassed address to the House, Roberts declared "True patriots have no need of conscription. If all the people in the country who have been yelling their heads off for war...during the last three years would now come forward and volunteer their services as real men, there would be no need for conscription." He proudly concluded: "As for the state I have the honor to represent, it will not be necessary to resort to conscription. Nevada is the first state in the Union to come forward with its full quota of troops."

On a personal level, probably the most noteworthy occurrence of Roberts’ Washington tenure was the introduction of his beloved daughter Hazel to her future husband, Walter Perry Johnson, also known as “Big Train.” Johnson, ace pitcher for the Washington Nationals, later the Senators, went on to a stellar baseball career, and was later one of the first inductees into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1936. The two married in 1914 and although they continued to live in the East, they made frequent trips to Reno to visit Roberts after he moved back to Nevada.

Johnson and popular Baptist minister Brewster Adams became great friends and hunting companions. In his oral history, newspaperman John McDonald reported that all of the boys living in the vicinity of the Roberts’ residence on S. Virginia Street would converge on the home when the news came that the Johnsons were in town. “Big Train” would come out into the yard and pitch to the boys, much to their great delight.

In 1918, Roberts declared for the U.S. Senate. Although he won the Republican nomination, he was defeated in the general election by incumbent Charles B. Henderson of Elko. Roberts returned to Nevada, opening a law office in Reno. In the E. C. Lyons building on Second and Center Streets. He did a lucrative divorce business, no doubt assisted by the numerous contacts he made in Washington.

But presumably Roberts missed the public life, and decided to run for Reno mayor in 1923. One of the big issues of the campaign was prostitution. The city had closed down Reno’s red-light district the year before (which, of course, did not end the trade), the ladies of the night just moved to different areas around town. Roberts’ position was to establish a segregated area which would be policed for safety. Roberts handily won the election.

Editor’s Note: This story represents a new feature for FootPrints. We will feature an historic Reno person—artist, politician, educator, businessman/woman or an other significant resident. The staff hopes you enjoy this new element of our newsletter.

Continued on page 8
Continued from page 7

tions and established "The Stockade," or "The Cribs," which was a Reno landmark until military officials forced the city to close it in 1942. Roberts' "live and let live" approach to government seemed to sit well with most inhabitants of Reno during that time period, as Roberts went on to be elected to two more terms as mayor. He often said that people should be allowed to do as they wish, as long as they weren't hurting anyone else. In addition to his liberal views on prostitution, he believed gambling should be legalized so that it could occur out in the open, and that the graft and corruption surrounding prohibition could be resolved by making alcohol production and sales legal as well.

In his 1931 speech from, of all places, the pulpit of the Methodist church, Roberts delivered his cure for the ills of prohibition, which gained him nationwide press. He often said that people should be allowed to do as they wish, as long as they weren't hurting anyone else. In addition to his liberal views on prostitution, he believed gambling should be legalized so that it could occur out in the open, and that the graft and corruption surrounding prohibition could be resolved by making alcohol production and sales legal as well.

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From 1906 until the late 1960s, Reno, Nevada held the title of Divorce Capital of the World. Before the modern age of no-fault divorce, legal dissolution of marriage could take years or it was simply not allowed. Early in the 20th century, a group of women were central to the formation of the nation’s first major divorce trade. In 1930s, Reno’s Washoe County Courthouse processed more than 30,000 divorce cases, mostly for people from other states and countries.

The Reno divorce trade was known far and wide and was often depicted in film and fiction. From these many contemporaneous portrayals, however, it would seem that only the rich white women arriving in Las Vegas Pullman cars partook of Reno’s divorce services. In fact, more than a few men came to town to get divorced, and many of both sexes were from lower socio-economic levels or diverse ethnic origins.

Reno was in no way progressive in its dealings with racial minorities, however. From the early 1900s through the 1960s, Reno openly practiced de facto racial segregation. In November 1906, Reno’s City Council forbade all unemployed African-Americans from coming to the city. In 1907, when the first African-American church was established in town, Reno’s African-American population numbered around 225. Bethel AME Church completed construction on its small white clapboard church on Bell Street in 1930. The fifty or so members who made up the founding congregation would go on to make a significant mark in Reno’s history. They were the founders of the first branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Nevada, and the center of community service and culture for Reno’s African-American population. The church also played a pivotal role in Reno’s black divorce business.

Although not formally legalized, Reno practiced strict segregation. Most minorities were restricted in their housing and employment options, were not served in white restaurants and bars, could not enter white casinos, or seek accommodations in white hotels. Churches, of which Bethel AME was the largest, played an important role in the social lives of black residents and served as a spiritual haven for their race. Had I not learned of the book Special Delivery: the Letters of C.L.R. James to Constance Webb, 1939-1949, I would never have considered the existence of a black divorce trade in Nevada.

As for entertainment, there were a few places on Douglas Alley and along East Commercial Drive that catered to a minority clientele. In 1943 to 1945, Ran by Bill Bailey, Dixie’s Social Club served Asians as well as blacks. Early African-American clubs opened from 1946 to 1958. The Harlem Club served meals and offered a wide variety of casino games. Bill Fong ran the New China Club on Lake Street from 1952 to 1971 specifically for an Asian and black clientele.

Short of distinctively ethnic surnames, or possibly residency addresses, nothing in the divorce records suggested a divorce seeker’s race. Had I not learned of the book Special Delivery: the Letters of C.L.R. James to Constance Webb, 1939-1949, I would never have considered the existence of a black divorce trade in Nevada.

The following is a list of the major undertakings instigated by Roberts in the City of Reno.

- The purchase of a plot for the burial of Spanish American War veterans
- The lowering of insurance rates
- Completion of many miles of macadamized streets
- Completion of University Terrace
- Retired pension law for all employees
- During the Roberts Administration assessable valuations
- Establishment of Municipal Swimming Pond
- The erection of Center Street Bridge
- The connection of Center Street with South Virginia Street
- The establishment of a Zoo and Aviary in Idlewood Park
- The purchase of Evans Park
- The removal of the Southern Pacific sheds on Center Street
- The erection of Center Street Bridge
- The establishment of a Zoo and Aviary in Idlewood Park
- The fish hatchery in Idlewood Park
- The opening of Elko Avenue
- The opening of Yerington Street
- The widening of Pine Street
- Obtaining of the State Building
- Establishment of the University of Nevada at Reno
- Construction of the University of Nevada at Reno
- Acquisition of Municipal Airfield
- Establishment of Municipal Swimming Pond
- The erection of sewer systems to all parts of the city
- The erection of the White Way from Court to Sheney on South Virginia Street
- The widening of the White Way from Sierra to First Street
- The establishment of the White Way on Fourth Street from Sierra to Virginia, and from Sierra to Vesta, and on Chestnut from Second to First
- The removal of the All Brown School
- The widening of the street to accommodate a new building
- The establishment of an eight-hour day for all workers
- Retired pension law for all employees
- Increase of wages for all city employees
- Completion of University Terrace
- Construction of many miles of macadamized streets and sidewalks
- Improvement of the street car system from the city
- The official name of our city “The Biggest Little City in the World”
- Erection of electric arch over Virginia Street
- Establishment of the go-stop signals at Second and Virginia
- The lowering of insurance rates
- Warming of the water to prevent the water meters from freezing

Information for this article came from: Oral History of John McDonald; Oral History of John Sanford; Philip L. Earl, “This Was Nevada: Nevada History Dec. 1982; ‘Mrs. W.P. Johnson’; Nevada Exposition, 12/17/33; Walter Perry Johnson, Wikipedia, online encyclopedia.

Debbie Hinnman is a member of the HRPS Board. Director of HRPS Walking Tours and on the Footprints Editorial Board.

Roberts: A Whiskey Barrel on Every Corner (continued)
Sometime it’s the simplest questions that provoke the most thought. At a recent Board Meeting, members pondered the very basic question “What is HRPS role?” Our mission statement describes the organization to be “Dedicated to Preserving Reno’s Rich Past with Education, Advocacy, and Leadership.” But how do we do this, given our limited span of influence and resources? How can we reap the most benefit from our efforts and make a difference in our community?

The Board decided that our roles of advocacy and education are exemplified in our monthly programs, our quarterly newsletter, our walking tours and our visibility in the community. We play an active educational role with our seven monthly Programs on the fourth Wednesdays at Mt. Rose Elementary School. Our newsletter, FootPrints, supports all our efforts in historic preservation with timely and interesting articles. The walking tours not only educate participants but also strive to alter perceptions and encourage appreciation of examples of early architectural features that may have never been noticed before. In addition, they introduce participants to some of the early residents of the area.

Our advocacy role is in lending our support to assist other groups and individuals in saving buildings. We work with the City of Reno Historic Resources Commission in areas of common concern. As HRPS Board members, we individually attend City Council meetings and write letters to support preservation. Since 2000, HRPS has given an annual Historic Preservation Award to a local individual or organization for their efforts in restoration and adaptive reuse.

While the Board guides the organization, it is our members who act as the engine, carrying us forward. At the April Board meeting, attendees were asked to create a “Top Ten List” regarding priorities for future preservation. Here is the list:

1. Longley/Caporn House (Longley Lane)  
2. DeLongchamps family home on Mill Street  
3. Virginia Street Bridge  
5. Masenec Temple (Reno’s oldest commercial building)  
6. Freight House  
7. Old Slot Machines (this was prior to the Liberty Belle auctions held in July)  
8. The Borland/Clifford House {339 Ralston St.}  
9. 2 Queen Anne houses on Washington and Jones Streets  
10. “Open Space,” i.e. Ballardini Ranch

HRPS would like to thank all of you, our members and friends, for your concerns about protecting the charm and character of Reno’s older neighborhoods. With your help, we will do our best to achieve this goal. Famed local architect Ed Parsons said “Somebody has to say there is something worth keeping. If you can’t see and see something - if all you have are photographs – you lose a sense of your place in life.” We of HRPS wish to retain this sense for all of us, and our generations to come.

From Your Board: HRPS Historic Preservation Priorities

Reno Press Brick: A Reno Institution (continued)

Hotel, the Twentieth Century Club and the “new” Reno High School are of Reno pressed brick.

A 1927 advertisement claimed “more than fifteen varieties and colors of brick” were being produced at the plant. However, the local clay was varying shades of red. If buyers wished to use golden brick, they had to have it shipped from Sacramento or Salt Lake City.

In 1930, longtime associate of the company Albert J. Caton resigned his position with the First National Bank of Nevada (formerly Farmers & Merchants National Bank) to take over as active Manager of Reno Press Brick. Two years later, upon Charles Clougherty’s death, Caton purchased the company and became president and general manager. Caton was a native Nevada, whose parents were pioneers of the Comstock. He attended Gold Hill High School, and graduated from the University of Nevada in 1904, where the popular young man had been student body president.

Reno Press Brick had an extensive history of dedicated, long-term employees. Second and third generation workers were commonplace at the company, and a 1951 Nevada State Journal article mentions several men who spent their entire working lives at the company, such as foreman Art Frosic, with 62 years.

So devoted were the officials of the company to their featured product, when it came time to add a new office building to the brick yard in 1952, architect Ed Parsons was instructed not to use concrete as a foundation, as that was a competitor product. Parsons attempted to dissuade them but the elder Caton insisted upon brick footing using steel. In his oral history, Parsons relates that not more than six months later, the building began to settle and the foundation had to be redone.

On Nevada Day, October 31, 1952, Caton passed away. His son Albert Jr. Caton Jr. took over the company. Albert Junior, or “Bert” as he was called, was a very capable young man who was well qualified for the task. Like his father, he was a University of Nevada graduate but had also obtained a degree from Ohio State University.

The reason for the closure of the brick plant was the concern over the effect of the smoke and byproducts generated by the plant. At the company’s inception, the plant was located outside the city limits, and not only were environmental concerns non-existent, but Reno was much smaller and there were few residential neighborhoods in the immediate vicinity of the plant. Residents coping daily with rutted dirt streets in early Reno faced serious traffic conditions were hardly going to concern themselves with a little smoke.

Though the company is gone, the prodigious output of the factory is evident throughout the city’s older neighborhoods. In a newspaper interview given not long before the closure of the plant, Caton was asked why brick had retained its popularity as a building material. He gave the following thoughtful reply: “Brick is easy to build with, is durable and it cuts maintenance costs to the bone. When you build with brick, you can be sure your building will have a lasting permanency, a minimum of expensive upkeep and beauty that maintains staleness the year around.”

Looking at our numerous existing brick bungalows and downtown classics such as the Riverside Artist Lofts and the El Cortez Hotel, it is hard to argue with this point of view.

Information for this article came from: Numerous articles from the Nevada State Journal and Reno Evening Gazette. Dated 1907 through 1978, and the aforementioned assistance of the two generous and knowledgeable ladies Arline Leferty and Beth Adamam.

Debbie Hissman is a member of the HRPS Board. Director of HRPS Walking Tours and the FootPrints Editorial Board.
Reno Press Brick: a Reno Institution (continued)

Continued from page 1

Brick making is an ancient practice—the Bible tells of the problems incurred by the Israelites in making mud bricks for the Pharaoh. The bricks were dried in the sun, which did not provide the necessary strength.

The modern dry press brick process used at Reno Press Brick was state-of-the-art for its time. First the mixture was pultered and then passed through a series of screens to remove any remaining large pieces. The large pieces were sent back to the pulterizer. The end product was then forced into the hydraulic press where the “clay” was squeezed through whatever shaped nozzle was being used for any given run. The stiff tube of extruded clay would push along a table, past wire-bladed cutters, which were spaced according to the product being processed at the time. From there, the newly cut bricks went to air for a dry time, until they were dry enough to burn without exploding from heat-created steam. The final step in the process was a trip to the kiln where the dried bricks would be fired in order to harden them.

In May of 1903, the Reno Evening Gazette reported that the new plant was installed and “the wheels to turn as soon as the power company gets the power to the plant.” They went on to say “Within five days after the plant starts the first kiln will be burned...the first kiln will be used on the Thoma Bigelow building (at Second and Virginia Streets) and the new Elks’ Home (on First and Sierra Streets).”

In May, the company held its annual meeting, electing the following slate of officers: C. E. Mack, president; Harvey Dehart, vice president; E. G. Esper, secretary; C. E. Clough, treasurer, with all of the former plus Charles Galling as trustees. The board then named J. E. Moore plant superintendent. The Nevada State Journal received a sample brick which was, in their words, “As smooth as ever a pressed brick was and it is a perfect piece of workmanship.”

The new plant utilized electricity, still a new innovation in Reno at that time. The early kilns required 60 cords of wood to fire 200,000 bricks. An oil-burning kiln was soon added to the enterprise. Clay for the bricks came from a 21 foot deep clay bed in a 1¼ acre piece of land owned by the company. When D. W. Cummings, an experienced pressed brick man, came from Chicago to set up the new press, he proclaimed it the best brick material he had ever seen.

Once the improvements were made and the new plant swung into full operation, Reno Press Brick was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. Photo by Carol Coleman.

The Twentieth Century Club, 335 West First Street, was constructed in 1925. It was supplied with brick from Reno Press Brick. It was listed in the 1983 article highlights this great demand. Photo by Carol Coleman.

In 1914, the company diversified by adding heating oil sales and furnace installations to its product line. The officers felt that Nevada bricks held benefit from increasing their span of products and services. The first oil was delivered locally by horse-drawn wagons. In later years, air conditioning products were added to the product offerings. In 1934 the plant burned but was quickly replaced by a six-story building on the same site, an impressive height for early-day Reno.

But bricks continued to be turned out over the next 35 years as the company proudly displayed its slogan “A brick-built town is a prosperous looking town” on its advertising. Local architect Freder D. Longehag designed much of his work with smooth, red Reno brick in mind. Many local homes, the Riverside Hotel, and his University of Nevada buildings all distinctively displayed the classic local material. And all of these are still standing today. The El Cortez Hotel, and his University of Nevada

**Membership Report**

February 22, 2006—July 1, 2006

**Renewals:**

Patti & Carson Adams  
Lynn Allen  
Jim Carlson & Michelle Atway  
Robert & Sandra Backus  
Carroll Baird  
Alba Barber  
Karen Barber  
Trip & Margaret Bartels  
Dana Beggs  
Karen Benna  
Diana Blanchard  
Patricia Blanchard  
Allan Blaine  
Fred & Marilyn Bonenfant  
Jane Bouden  
Anna Bridgman  
Sarah Brink  
Sue Breeder  
Rebecca (Coll)  
Larry & Betty Brown  
Diane & David Backman  
Linda Bare  
Sue Byars  
Darrel & Jackie Cain  
Vernon & Bernice Campbell  
Ede E. Cann  
Wanda Canziani  
Tom & Phyllis Cates  
Neal Cabo  
Carol & Carson Coleman  
Joan Collins  
Len Crocker

**Reno Press Brick:**

Wendy & Tim DelGrotto  
Al DelMuro  
Tom Dinkin  
Judy & Steve Dollinger  
Beverly A. Drake  
Jackie Dros  
Peter & Terry Dunn  
Tom & Joan Lachman-Letcher  
Sharon Barks  
Sheila Erlich  
Jerry Jernemark  
Rita Jernemark  
Elizabeth Fisher  
Eugene C. Freny  
Mary Lee & Chuck Folkerson  
Charlie & Tonni Giglio  
Dori Goldman  
Don Goldman  
Jeff Gold usher  
Selina Goldstein  
Sandy Gordon  
Helen Glouch  
Fritz & Evelyn Grabe  
Melinda & Dan Gorin  
Thomas Jefferson H. Esq  
Mike & Nanette Harkins  
Tom Harris  
Suzanne Hawkins  
Phillip Hedrick  
Debbie Hinchman  
Mary Ellen Heren  
Robert & Judi Hobson  
Jack Hurd  
Bill & Beth Iseri

**HARP Membership Application**

Please check your mailing label! Renew your membership and help HARP preserve historic Reno!

Make sure to check with Historic Reno Preservation Society and mail along with this application to:

P.O. Box 14003, Reno, NV 89507

**Name:** (N)  
**City:**  
**State:**  
**ZIP:**

**Highest Level of Education Completed:**

**Occupation:**  
**Employer:**  
**Phone:** (N)  
**E-Mail:**

**Annual membership includes:**

- Postcards  
- Reno Gazette Newsletter  
- Free admission to walking tours  
- Student $15.00  
- Family (Children, 18 and younger) $25.00  
- Family (Children, 18 and younger) $40.00  
- Business Contribution $50.00  
- Supporting $100.00  
- HARP Angel $250.00

**Additional donations:**

Thank you for joining HARP. An organization is only as strong as its members. There are many areas in our organization where your enthusiasm, skills, and dedication will be invaluable to Historic Reno and future generations. The good of the Historic Reno Organization is to preserve the historic resources of our community. What would you like to contribute to HARP?

**Renewals:**

Patti & Carson Adams  
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Jim Carlson & Michelle Atway  
Robert & Sandra Backus  
Carroll Baird  
Alba Barber  
Karen Barber  
Trip & Margaret Bartels  
Dana Beggs  
Karen Benna  
Diana Blanchard  
Patricia Blanchard  
Allan Blaine  
Fred & Marilyn Bonenfant  
Jane Bouden  
Anna Bridgman  
Sarah Brink  
Sue Breder  
Rebecca (Coll)  
Larry & Betty Brown  
Diane & David Backman  
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Sue Byars  
Darrel & Jackie Cain  
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**PAID:**  
**Check:**  
**Cash:**  
**Amount:**  
**Membership #**

**Renewal Date:**
Author’s Note: I wish to thank Aline Laferry and Beth Misammon for their help with the following article. Aline, a docent with the Nevada Historical Society, provided her newspaper research on the company, as well as biographical sketches of the principals. Beth, author of Reno’s Axle, Historic Fourth Street, contributed her knowledge of the pressed brick process, and made valuable corrections to the text of the article.

One of the first things that occurs to anyone taking a stroll through some of Reno’s historic neighborhoods is the prevailing use of brick in home construction. From the early part of the 20th century into the 1950s, brick or brick faced homes dominated our residential neighborhoods.

The primary reason for this was the fact that the brick buildings were more fire safe than wood structures. In its early days, Reno suffered a series of horrendous fires, the worst in 1879, where ten city blocks in the core of downtown Reno, all frame structures, were decimated. In addition to safety concerns, brick structures exuded more of an impression of prosperity and permanence. And residents in the first part of the 20th century did not have to look far for this desirable building material. A fine product was now available from the newly-created Reno Press Brick Company. From the early part of the 20th century into the 1950s, brick or brick faced homes dominated our residential neighborhoods.

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