"What people think is, is more important than what actually is so."
Abraham Lincoln

Lincoln should know. A lot of people think he participated in the Lincoln-Douglas debates when he ran for president, that Ann Rutledge was his great lost love, and that he wrote the Gettysburg Address on the back of an envelope. None of which is true.

From Betsy Ross's mythical needlework to Ronald Reagan supposedly never getting the girl in the movies, our history is filled with "facts" that everyone knows are true—except they aren't.

Such folklore seems to grab the public imagination more tenaciously than the usually more interesting reality. Year after year, stories with no substance are repeated and retold while the facts remain buried.

In Nevada a number of tall tales have become accepted as truth and have in some cases resisted all efforts at correction. Here is one of the best known:

**Workers Buried in Hoover Dam.** This long-standing urban myth is the despair of Hoover Dam tour guides. Someone in every group taking the tour is sure to ask how many men are buried in the concrete of the gigantic dam. According to the story, on several occasions during the dam's construction in the 1930's a worker slipped, fell, and was covered by concrete as it was being poured. Unable to stop the cascade of concrete before the worker suffocated, supervisors had no choice but to allow the concrete to continue flowing—covering the worker and sealing him in the dam. This happened seven times during construction, according to the tale's most popular version.

In 1986, Tom King, Director of the University of Nevada Oral History Program, interviewed several men who had labored on the construction of Hoover Dam that told him a number of bodies lie buried in it. "These stories were made somewhat plausible by the authority of the tellers, themselves dam workers, and by our knowledge that building the dam was indeed an extremely hazardous enterprise," according to King. "however, further questioning revealed that none of the storytellers had actually witnessed such a tragedy or knew the identity of any of the victims. This was not surprising: the tellers believed what they were saying, but their stories were folklore--there are no bodies in the dam."

"The idea of workers forever entombed in the giant structure that they had helped build was so irresistibly poetic, so deliciously macabre," wrote Joseph Stevens in his award-winning book *Hoover Dam: An American Adventure* (1988), "that it became the basis for the most enduring legend of Hoover Dam, and article of faith for millions of visitors who down through the years would insist, despite the firm denials of tour guides, Bureau of Reclamation engineers, and historians, that the great arch was not only a dam but a sarcophagus."

Actually, the dam was poured in relatively small sections, so about all a fallen worker had to do to get his face clear of the rising concrete was to stand up. Officially, 96 dam workers died of various causes, and 112 persons unofficially, but none were permanently buried in concrete.

The closest any worker came to being buried was on November 8, 1933 when the wall of a form collapsed sending hundreds of tons of recently-poured concrete tumbling down the face of the dam. One worker below narrowly escaped with his life, however W.A. Jameson was not so lucky and was covered by the rain of debris. Jameson was the only man ever buried in Hoover Dam, and he was interred for just
16 hours before his body was recovered. His remains were shipped to Rock Hill, South Carolina, where a brother and sister lived.

A structural engineer interviewed for a Discovery Channel documentary on Hoover Dam argued that it would be sheer folly to leave a worker buried in the dam. A decomposing body would jeopardize the dam's structural integrity and risk the multi-million dollar project including property and lives downstream on the Colorado River. Suppressing information documenting workers buried in Hoover Dam would have required a colossal cover-up involving the federal government, the states of Nevada and Arizona, Clark and Mohave counties, two Las Vegas newspapers, and the many contractors who built the dam.

A similar myth surrounds the construction of Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia River in the state of Washington. While more than 12,000 people found work on the project between 1933 and 1942, and 77 died on the job, none were buried in the concrete.

Perhaps people confuse a catastrophic event during the construction of the Fort Peck Dam in Montana with Hoover Dam and Grand Coulee Dam. On September 22, 1938, a section of the earth-filled dam broke loose and slid into the reservoir below. The debris buried eight workers and only two bodies were recovered. A monument pays tribute to the dead including the six men forever entombed in the Ft. Peck Dam.

1st Photo: Library of Congress
2nd Photo: Union Pacific Railroad

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, January 1996 edition as Myth #1; reprinted as Myth #84 by Sierra Sage, January 2003 edition)
“One of the oddest episodes in a life more than commonly filled with the unusual is the duel Sam Clemens did not fight,” wrote Leland Krauth in Mississippi Quarterly (Fall 1980). “Clemens’ challenges to James L. Laird, one of the owners of the Virginia City Daily Union, were never accepted; there was no confrontation on the field of honor.”

In a drama that matches the traditional romance of the West, young prospector-reporter Sam Clemens, a.k.a. Mark Twain, supposedly departed Nevada on May 29, 1864 to avoid fighting a duel over some items he had written impugning the honor of a group of Carson City socialites. The truth is probably more prosaic: Nevada Territory, and particularly Virginia City, where Clemens wrote for the Territorial Enterprise, was suffering an economic depression. The mines were shutting down, the population of the once-great Comstock silver lode was hemorrhaging, and Clemens likely was just another of the departing pilgrims seeking greener pastures.

He had resigned his commission as a notary public in Virginia City in April. Moreover, Clemens’ popularity on the Comstock was in decline. And finally, he was restless and anxious to move on; "I wanted to see San Francisco," he later wrote in Roughing It (1872). "I wanted to go somewhere. I wanted- I did not know what I wanted. I had spring fever and wanted a change, principally, no doubt."

And what about the duel? Samuel Clemens, while in charge of the Enterprise in his editor’s absence, made trouble for himself in May 1864. Clemens, during a drinking spree, wrote an article facetiously suggesting that money raised by prominent Carson City women for the Sanitary Fund—a Civil War relief organization that helped care for sick and wounded soldiers and their families—went to an eastern miscegenation society and that the rival Virginia City Daily Union was not meeting its pledges to the fund. Fellow reporter William Wright, a.k.a. Dan DeQuille, had convinced Clemens not to publish the injudicious story. However, while Clemens was briefly out of the Enterprise office, the foreman found the copy on a table and assumed it was left there to be published.

The Carson City socialites were incensed and wrote a scathing letter to the Enterprise demanding to know who wrote the article. Union owner James Laird, serving as editor in the absence of his regular editor, angrily rebutted Clemens’ indiscrete claims. In his Autobiography, Clemens, late in life, wrote that the feud with Laird became so intense that he challenged Laird to a duel and then, thinking better of it, fled Nevada Territory to avoid arrest for violating the anti-dueling law.

There were some articles written about duels in the Comstock newspapers, but they smack of the kind of journalistic jibes and pranks of which Clemens and his colleagues were fond. (“By the privileges of our order,” he once said, “we are independent of facts” -- which explains where some of these pieces of Nevada folklore come from.) The fact that Clemens and his pal Steve Gillis embellished the duel yarn as the years passed lends support to the view that the abortive duel may have hastened Clemens’ departure but it was not the sole reason he left for California.

This is among the most lurid and grotesque of Nevada's folk tales. U.S. Senator Key Pittman died on November 10, 1940, only five days after winning reelection. For years stories have circulated that Pittman actually died before the election. His friends, so the story goes, kept his body in a bathtub filled with ice at Reno's Riverside Hotel so that his Senate seat could remain Democratic (Pittman's successor would be appointed by Governor Edward Carville, who like Pittman was a Democrat.) The story made the rounds for years and was repeated in the sensational national bestseller, The Green Felt Jungle (1963) except the events took place at Tonopah's Mizpah Hotel in that version. At one time, the Mizpah's Key Pittman Restaurant had a history contained on the menu which erroneously claimed that Key Pittman, a Tonopah pioneer, died at the hotel and that his body was kept on ice there.

The real facts, though, are more elaborate and just as disreputable. According to a 1977 interview by myself with Pittman's personal physician, and witnessed by historian Phil Earl at the Nevada Historical Society, the elderly senator suffered a heart attack while engaged in a pre-election drinking spree at the Riverside. The physician, Dr. A. J. "Bart" Hood, was summoned by courier (no telephones were used to avoid eavesdropping operators) and examined the senator on the evening of November 4. Dr. Hood told Pittman's political lieutenants that there was nothing he could do to save Pittman. Quietly, the senator's cronies moved him into Washoe General Hospital. A coronary disease specialist who was flown to Reno from San Francisco concluded, once Pittman regained consciousness, that death was imminent. Democratic leaders chose to keep the facts secret and issued a cover story that Pittman was temporarily ill, thus allowing Nevadans to go to the polls on November 5 and elect a dying man. Reno's Nevada State Journal quoted Dr. Hood as saying that "the Senator was suffering from sheer exhaustion and fatigue, and the strain of the campaign through the state has been too much for 'an already overworked condition'. The Senator's condition is not critical but he will be kept in the hospital several days, principally for the rest."

As one of Pittman's biographers, Betty Glad, reported, attending physician Dr. Vinton Muller, mortician Silas Ross, and St. Mary's Hospital official Sister Seraphine later stated that Pittman was still alive on election day and that he died at Washoe General on November 10. The Senator's wife, Mimosa, arrived at his bedside on election day from Washington D.C. Her diary (now at the Nevada Historical Society) noted that she saw Pittman alive and conscious: "Went straight to hospital with Dr. Hood. Key happy." An embalmer further reported that Pittman's death certificate recorded no evidence of the tissue effects on Pittman's body that would have confirmed the ice story.

According to journalists Barbara and Myrick Land in A Short History of Reno (1995), "One political reporter, it was rumored later, asked one of Pittman's handlers why the senator was making no campaign appearances in this important final week. The handler replied 'We're keeping him on ice.' This may account for a bizarre tale that was widely repeated in the state after the election."

For a more detailed account see: "The Mysterious Demise of Key Pittman", Nevada Magazine (October 1996), pp. 80-83.

Photo: Nevada Historical Society

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, March 1996 edition; revised and reprinted in Sierra Sage as Myth #88 in May 2003)
This is a folktale generations of school children in northern Nevada have grown up believing to be historical fact. Even today well-meaning teachers, authors, and others, unknowingly perpetuate the myth as a true story. According to the legend, practically everyone in Carson City was shocked to discover that Hannah Keziah Clapp was awarded the bid to purchase the Capitol fence in 1875 because the Capitol Commissioners did not recognize her initials, H.K., and found, to their surprise, that they had given the job to a woman!

Actually there are a number of different versions of the fence-building myth that have been widely circulated over the years according to Kathryn Totton, Clapp's biographer. Writing in the fall 1977 issue of the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, Totton noted that writer Marian Michelson first presented the fence story in a feature article entitled "A Sketch From Life" in 1899, nine years prior to Hannah's death in Palo Alto, California; it was the subject of a radio program called "Death Valley Days" in 1940; in the same year Reno's *Nevada State Journal* published a version of the tall tale; and on December 28, 1943, Gladys Rowley in her column "Reno Revue" in the Journal made it the principal topic. Each re-telling altered the details of the event for the sake of the tale.

Michelson had Hannah hiring the crew and supervising the work in a "long, warm ulster" and warm woolen hat. In fact, the fence was erected in the heat of August and September. Anyway, according to records at the State Archives, Ms. Clapp, and her colleague and longtime companion Elizabeth C. Babcock, were only responsible for the fence purchase. Another contractor, William D. Torreyson, was awarded the bid for installation, and Robert B. Stewart received the contract to lay the sandstone base for the fence.

With the facts obscured by the passage of time, the October 13, 1940 Journal article--making reference to the recently-aired "Death Valley Days" broadcast--had Hannah in trousers and boots overseeing the project and doing ". . . a really excellent job building the fence." The article claimed that "Hannah Clapp believed she could do the job more efficiently than any man, and submitted an estimate which was so sound and so moderate that she was awarded the contract, in spite of the fact that she was a woman.”

Gladys Rowley took even greater liberties and claimed that the Capitol Commissioners were unaware that the H. K. Clapp to whom they awarded the bid was a woman, although she had been a well-known resident of Carson City for almost fifteen years. Thomas C. Wilson, an advertising executive, perpetuated the myth in his popular *Pioneer Nevada* vignettes published by Reno's Harold's Club (1951). Dante Pistone followed suit in his article "Carson City Heroine," published in the *Nevada Official Bicentennial Book* (1976).

The population of the entire county was listed as only 3,222 souls in the 1875 state census. The truth was almost everybody knew H. K. Clapp, including Samuel Clemens when he lived and worked in the capital city in the early 1860's. Clemens, in a lengthy letter dated January 14, 1864 and signed Mark Twain, detailed a visit to Clapp's Sierra Seminary and his observations of the classroom. In
addition, the Carson City section of the 1862 *First Directory of Nevada Territory* lists Samuel Clemens and Miss H.K. Clapp on page 69. Virtually every city directory and newspaper story referred to Hannah as H.K. Clapp.

An article that ran in the May 4, 1875 edition of the Carson City *Daily Appeal* made it abundantly clear just how the editor felt about H.K. Clapp and Eliza C. Babcock being awarded the bid for the Capitol fence. "Let there be no further complaints about the non-enjoyment of their rights by the women of Nevada. The contract for the furnishing of iron fencing for the Capitol Square has been awarded to Misses Clapp and Babcock, Principals of Sierra Seminary; their bid $5,500 in coin for the delivery of the fencing upon the grounds is the lowest by some hundreds of dollars of those submitted." The cast and wrought iron fence was purchased from Robert Wood Co. Ornamental Iron Works of Philadelphia and shipped by rail to Carson City.

In the end, these pioneer educators and astute businesswomen made a sizeable profit of $1,000. The *Appeal* graciously commented that "It will be found, we think, that Misses Clapp and Babcock have handsomely fulfilled their contract."

Photo: Nevada Historical Society
1862 City Directory page: Nevada State Library and Archives

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, April 1996 edition; revised and reprinted in Sierra Sage as Myth #90, July 2003 edition)
Myth #5: The Wild Bunch in Winnemucca by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist and Dennis Myers, Journalist

This has become the best known instance of fantasy overtaking reality in Nevada. The story goes that Butch Cassidy, the Sundance Kid, and several companions robbed the First National Bank in Winnemucca on September 19, 1900. The story became so popular after the movie *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) made the obscure outlaws both heroes that the town began holding an annual Butch Cassidy Days celebration.

Then in the fall of 1982 the myth was challenged by the *Humboldt Historian*, which published a carefully researched article by Lee Berk. Berk, who had unearthed papers of banker George Nixon that contained new evidence, had replowed all the old ground--bank records, investigative files, newspaper accounts--and discovered that although Wild Bunch members pulled the heist (including the Sundance Kid), Butch was not among them.

For instance, Nixon had negatively identified Cassidy. That is, after viewing photographs of the Wild Bunch outlaws, Nixon had said positively that Cassidy was not among the robbers. A web of additional evidence also supported the Berk thesis, such as placing Cassidy six hundred miles from Winnemucca robbing a passenger train in Tipton, Wyoming on August 29, 1900, twenty-one days before the Winnemucca holdup. The bank robbers were known to have camped in a field north of Winnemucca ten days before the holdup. If Cassidy had committed both crimes, it would have entailed making the six hundred mile ride from Tipton to Winnemucca in eleven days. "I figured that Cassidy couldn't have gotten there," according to Berk. "He had to go on horseback."

Where the story originated, no one knows for sure, but it may have been the work of the Pinkerton Detective Agency, which, after the robbery, issued two wanted cards listing the robbery among Butch's and Sundance's credits. According to an entry for Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid in *The Mythical West: An Encyclopedia of Legend, Lore, and Popular Culture* (2001), "the majority of the gang's crimes... took place between 1896 and 1901. During that period, those in which both Butch and Sundance actively participated included no more than two train robberies and one bank job." The Winnemucca bank robbery is not listed as the one bank job.

The myth includes a photograph of Wild Bunch members sent from Fort Worth, Texas, to the First National Bank a few months after the robbery. An unsigned note thanked the bank for the cash. The photo of five men included Harry Longabaugh (the Sundance Kid) and Robert Leroy Parker (Butch Cassidy). The presumption was that everyone in the photo was associated with the Winnemucca robbery. Yet, only three of the gang entered the bank and robbed it of $32,640, giving birth to a legend.

In fact it was the Pinkertons who sent George Nixon (later a U.S. Senator from Nevada) the photograph more than five months after the robbery. A Wells Fargo detective in Fort Worth found the photo at the Schwartz photography studio and recognized the Wild Bunch gang. Wells Fargo sent a copy of the photo to the Pinkertons, who were investigating the robbery on behalf of the American Bankers Association.

Note: For further reading on this subject, a well written synopsis of the "Great Winnemucca Bank Robbery" by David Toll can be found in the May/June 1983 issue of Nevada Magazine.

Photo courtesy of the Denver Public Library Western History Collection.

Contrary to what you'll read on back of picture postcards purchased in Goldfield, Theodore Roosevelt never spoke from the balcony of the Goldfield Hotel or anywhere else in the town. His only Nevada appearances were in Reno and Carson City (as President in 1903), Reno (1911, 1912), and Las Vegas (1915). The story makes little sense anyway, inasmuch as it was Roosevelt who in December 1907 sent federal troops into Goldfield, where they broke a miners’ strike. Theodore Roosevelt going to Goldfield would be like Fidel Castro going to Miami.

The story apparently originated with a character who showed up at the 42-round Gans-Nelson lightweight world title fight in Goldfield on September 3, 1906. According to historian Phillip Earl, Curator of History emeritus at the Nevada Historical Society, the fellow went around posing as the president at a variety of functions. The town's residents knew the truth; modern Nevadans are apparently a little more imaginative.

As for Wyatt Earp, there is no end to the list of things he didn't do in Goldfield. He didn't tend bar there, he didn't own a hotel or saloon there, and in fact he didn't do much of anything there except reportedly visit his brother Virgil in 1905. Virgil died there on October 19, however he is buried in Riverview Cemetery in Portland, Oregon. Somehow over the years Wyatt's actual activities in and around Tonopah in 1902-03, including owning the Northern Saloon, have become blurred with imaginary stories of Goldfield, perhaps because the two towns are only 25 miles apart and were part of the same mining boom.

On August 23, 2002 according to the Associated Press (AP), Goldfield residents enthusiastically welcomed to the mining town's 100th anniversary celebration a 60 year-old man who claimed he was Wyatt Earp's grandson. The man showed up in costume and said his gun, which he was willing to sell for $5,000, once belonged to his grandfather. He was commissioned an honorary Esmeralda County sheriff's deputy as politicians posed for photographs with him. "There was just one problem," wrote the AP, "historians say Wyatt Earp had no children and the man is an imposter."

Experts on Wyatt Earp attending the celebration confronted the fraud and asked for proof, none of which was forthcoming. "Absolutely, he's a con man," said Michael Curcio of Genoa who portrays Earp at special events and has studied the controversial lawman. "If you are going to do a fraud, you ought to get your history right." Before morning was up, the impostor had hightailed it out of town. Community leaders were embarrassed to discover they had been deceived by a flim-flam man. The moral to this story is to be careful what you believe. Your ignorance is the duper's delight.

An excellent source on Wyatt Earp is The Earps' Last Frontier: Wyatt and Virgil Earp in the Nevada Mining Camps, 1902 - 1905 by Jeffrey Kintop and Guy Rocha.

Photo: Nevada Historical Society

For children growing up in Nevada for much of the 20th century, the experience of claiming Carson City as the nation's tiniest capital city was a familiar one.

For kids in the city itself, it was an even more noteworthy rite of passage. As the late Robert Laxalt, author of the critically-acclaimed Sweet Promised Land (1957), once wrote of his boyhood in Carson City in the 1920s and 1930s (when the population dipped below 2,000), "It was a point of pride that our town was the smallest capital in the United States. This was drummed into us from day one by townspeople and school teachers and the Carson City Daily Appeal. We accepted the boast and repeated it to each other as dutifully as though we were reciting one of the commandments."

The claim dates back to the 1890s when a shrinking Carson City inherited the title of the smallest state capital from Bismarck, North Dakota; however it lost its foundation more than two generations ago. As a quiet hamlet of 5,163 residents, Carson continued to be the smallest state capital in 1960.

Yet during the early 1960s the town grew so quickly -- to 10,000 and beyond -- that by 1963 it passed Montpelier, Vermont (which at about 8,000 residents still holds the honor today).

Then Carson's population and physical size grew even more, spurred by a 1969 consolidation with Ormsby County, ranking it among the ten largest capital cities in area in the U.S. at 143.35 square miles. In 1970 the capital's population had reached 15,468. By the 1980 census Carson City more than doubled to 32,022 persons, which made it larger than at least 10 other capital cities. Ten years later, Carson City's population climbed to 40,443 and it surpassed Jefferson City, Missouri in size.

According to the 2000 census, 52,457 persons resided in the state capital and the estimated population in 2006 is about 57,000. Carson City has grown larger than the city of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, which has lost population. Population projections suggest that Carson City has surpassed Cheyenne, Wyoming; Charleston, West Virginia; and Bismark, North Dakota, making it the 16th smallest state capital in the U.S. By 2011, a freeway is projected to link Reno to Carson City leaving only four state capitals--Dover, Jefferson City, Juneau, and Pierre--outside the interstate system, all of them smaller than Carson City.

In 1979, Houston Oil & Mineral, a mining company, expanded an open-pit gold mine near Virginia City which threatened the destruction of much of upper Gold Hill. Comstock residents fighting the mining company said the property was so historic and hallowed it was depicted on the Nevada State Seal. The basis for the claim -- sometimes repeated by state politicians -- is a railroad “trestle” appears on the seal, and the Crown Point Trestle on the Virginia & Truckee (V&T) Railroad had been located in upper Gold Hill until it was dismantled in 1936 and the Crown Point Ravine filled in.

Ty Cobb, a Virginia City native and long-time Reno newspaper reporter named for the colorful and controversial Detroit Tigers baseball player, helped his father tear down the engineering wonder. Cobb, in a story appearing in the Reno Evening Gazette on July 15, 1936, wrote that the Crown Point bridge, “one of the most historic structures in the West... is pictured on the official seal of the state of Nevada.” He repeated the claim in his article, “Nevada’s Crown Point landmark,” published in the Nevada Official Bicentennial Book (1976). Cobb confided in me shortly before his death in May 1997 that one of his teachers at the Fourth Ward School in Virginia City, where he graduated from high school in 1933, told him that the Crown Point Trestle was depicted on the State Seal.

“When the V&T suspends operations there will go out of existence not alone the last of the glamorous passenger carrying short line railroads of Nevada” wrote Comstock promoters Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg in Virginia and Truckee: A Story of Virginia City and Comstock Times (1949), “but also an institution so important in the state's economy that its representation is an integral part of the Great Seal of Nevada. The trestle remains only in memory and in reproachful immortality in the Great Seal.”

The claim is widely accepted in Nevada, but there is no truth to it. The state seal was originally designed in 1863 during the first constitutional convention in Carson City, slightly modified during the second constitutional convention in 1864, and adopted by the state legislature in 1866. The structure on the state seal is made of stone and is more properly called a viaduct. Work on the V&T and the Crown Point Trestle constructed of wood, did not begin until three years later in 1869. Actually, it makes a better story this way. After all, when the viaduct was first depicted in the seal, there were no steam-powered railroads at all in Nevada. The Central Pacific Railroad did not arrive until December 13, 1867. Its inclusion by lawmakers in such an important state symbol was an act of faith in Nevada's future, knowing the nation's first transcontinental railroad would run through the heart of the Silver State. In fact, Nevada's First Territorial Legislature in 1861 approved a bill granting the “Big Four” the right to build a railroad across Nevada from west to east.

And upper Gold Hill -- with its elegant Gold Hill Hotel, historic Greiner’s Bend, and V&T railroad depot -- survived the onslaught of the mining company when, with the price of gold in decline, it closed down its operations in the early 1980's.

Myth #9: A Capital Name: Kit Carson and Carson City by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

"I inquire if the correct name of this place is Carson City," asked M. G. Parker of Silver City during the second Nevada State Constitutional Convention in July 1864. Delegates were preparing to approve Carson City as the proposed state capital of Nevada. "I named the city myself," delegate and co-founder of Carson City Frank Proctor proudly proclaimed on July 27, 1864, "Carson City is what we used to call it."

The passage of time has obscured the facts surrounding the beginnings of Carson City, and today Abraham Curry is generally given the credit for naming the town and not Proctor. Co-founders John Jacob Musser, Benjamin Franklin Green and Francis Marion Proctor, who came with Curry to Eagle Valley from Downieville, California in 1858, have been all but forgotten.

It has long been incorrectly assumed that "Uncle Abe" named the community after Christopher "Kit" Carson because Carson passed through the small valley as a scout for John C. Fremont in his expedition of 1843-44. Fremont's journals and the maps of the expedition clearly demonstrate that Carson did not enter Eagle Valley. While Fremont named the Carson Lake (Sink) and Carson River in honor of Kit, the explorers did not follow the river through Eagle and Carson valleys to its source but veered southward into Mason and Antelope valleys, then turned north, and eventually crossed the Sierra Nevada just south of Carson Pass. Fremont did not name Carson Valley or Carson Pass, those names would be applied after the publishing of the survey maps in 1848.

What most people don't know is that Kit Carson passed through Eagle Valley in 1853 on his way to Sacramento from New Mexico Territory. Maybe this event was lost to history because it was only a sheep and goat drive, but herding some 7,000 head of those critters was no mean feat and he sold the livestock for $32,000.

We do know the town laid out in Eagle Valley was known as Carson City by early September 1858, and whether it was named for the Carson River or Carson County, Utah Territory, created in 1854, or directly for Kit himself, ultimately the naming could be traced to Carson's association with the western Great Basin. Ironically, while Kit Carson surely came to know of Carson City, he never visited the community prior to his death at Fort Lyon in Colorado Territory on May 23, 1868.

The following year Carson's remains were removed to a small cemetery near his old home in Taos, New Mexico Territory. Statues on the legislative mall pay tribute to the famous frontiersman and to Abe Curry, the "father" of Carson City.

Photo: Kit Carson Memorial Foundation, Inc., Kit Carson Home and Museum, Taos, New Mexico.

Myth #10: “Gentleman Jim” Corbett and Carson City’s Corbett School by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

For almost forty years after the opening of the Corbett Elementary School on January 4, 1954, teachers and principals told the students attending the Carson City school that it was named after the famed world heavyweight boxing champion, “Gentleman Jim” Corbett (1866-1933). It must be true because James J. Corbett had fought Bob Fitzsimmons and lost his heavyweight crown in Carson City on March 17, 1897. Literally thousands of students, their parents, and others believed that the name of the school honored “Gentleman Jim”.

But it was just hearsay! Corbett Elementary received its name by default in 1953 because the school was constructed on Corbett Street in the Corbett subdivision of Carson City. The Chamber of Commerce and school district sponsored a contest for students to name three new elementary schools. The names finally selected were Max C. Fleischmann, John C. Fremont, and Martha Gleason. The widow of the philanthropist and Nevada multi-millionaire of yeast and margarine fame asked that the school not be named after Fleischmann, who died in 1951, because a street in Carson City and other features in the state had already been named for him. She asked that the new school on Corbett Street be given another name from the list produced by the naming contest. Instead, the school district officially adopted the street name, Corbett, for the elementary school.

So how and when did Corbett Street acquire its name you ask? Let's put it this way, when the Corbett Addition was laid out in 1874 with its Corbett Park and Corbett Street, James J. Corbett was a mere child growing up in San Francisco. He embarked on his boxing career at the age of eighteen, and two years later, in 1886, he turned professional. In 1892, "Gentleman Jim" knocked out the great John L. Sullivan in New Orleans for the world’s heavyweight title.

Actually two Canadians of Scottish ancestry from Nova Scotia, Daniel G. and William H. Corbett, were responsible for the naming of Corbett Street. The young brothers arrived in Carson City by late 1860, and the carpenters and joiners rapidly became successful businessmen. They constructed the Corbett House in 1865 and it was among the principal hotels in Carson City, along with the original Ormsby House and the St. Charles Hotel, until it burned down in August 1876. By 1877, the Corbetts were proprietors of the Arlington House, constructed on the site of the former Corbett House, just south of the U.S. Mint Building. The location has served as a parking lot for the Carson Nugget Casino since 1966.

Both men raised large families -- all of the children were born in Carson City -- and they were active in the Presbyterian Church. William was a trustee with Orion Clemens --Mark Twain's brother and Secretary of Nevada Territory -- and instrumental in the construction of the church which still stands today on Nevada Street. William was also a Deputy Grand Master of the Odd Fellows, and Daniel served as a Treasurer. In 1868, William was elected to the State Assembly from Ormsby County.

Daniel Corbett died at his brother's residence in San Francisco on November 7, 1888 and was buried in Carson City's Lone Mountain Cemetery. William died in San Francisco on May 16, 1890. By the turn-of-the-century, all the Corbetts had moved to California where descendants live today in Novato and elsewhere.

So what actually happened that people would claim that boxer "Gentleman Jim" Corbett, and not the pioneer Corbett brothers, was the namesake for the Corbett Elementary School? Clearly, Carson City's institutional memory failed to remember the Corbett brothers. At the same time, there was nobody left in Nevada from the Corbett brothers’ family to protest when it was "logically" assumed that the school owed its name to the famous boxer because he fought here. The "George Washington slept here" syndrome had struck again.
Worse yet, when a teacher at the Corbett School discovered the Corbett brothers' connection to the school name during the U.S. Bicentennial Celebration in 1976, she was told to keep silent and not "rock the boat." Rather than expose the fact that "Gentleman Jim" Corbett had no connection to the school and spoil all the fun, a cover-up and fraud was knowingly perpetrated and perpetuated.

In this case, the descendants of Daniel and William Corbett would challenge us to do the right thing. They occasionally visit Carson City and were surprised, and more than a little disappointed, when told of the long-standing myth surrounding the naming of the Corbett School. The Corbett family is quite proud of their family's role in early Carson City -- and they have not forgotten!

Photo: by Cheryl Mathwig

An Associated Press (AP) story ran in Nevada newspapers late in 1995 that claimed, among other things, that the Goldfield Hotel "boasts the first electric elevator built west of the Mississippi." The aging Goldfield Hotel was again for sale and an article first appearing in the Lahontan Valley News & Fallon Eagle Standard clearly mistook myth for reality. Folklore was promoted as fact with the tired claims that Wyatt Earp worked at the hotel and President Teddy Roosevelt stayed there after its completion in 1908. However, now the story's writer went so far as to repeat the fallacious assertion that somehow the Goldfield Hotel was equipped with an electric passenger elevator before hotels in St. Louis, Kansas City, Denver, and San Francisco, to name but a few cities much larger than Goldfield's 20,000 peak population.

What makes the claim all the more preposterous was that the electric elevator was first used commercially in 1889 in New York City. Goldfield was not established as a mining camp until 1902 and the Goldfield Hotel would not come along for another six years. Why wouldn't cities west of the Mississippi have electric elevators installed in their buildings long before 1908?

I called the Otis Elevator Company Historic Archives in Farmington, Connecticut, as the Otis firm pioneered the new technology. The corporate archivist told me that the first electric elevator west of the Mississippi was sold to a party in Spokane, Washington, on September 12, 1890. Continuing his review of their sales records, the archivist noted that Los Angeles and Oakland got their first elevators in 1892, and the first one in San Francisco was at the Alcazar Hotel in 1893.

The Goldfield Hotel did not have the first electric elevator in Nevada, nor did Tonopah's Mizpah Hotel which still has an operating electric passenger elevator built in 1907 by the Otis Elevator Company. The oldest extant electric passenger elevator--dating back to 1906--is located in the five-story Belvada Building in Tonopah.

However, Nevada's first electric elevator was installed at Harry J. Gosse's new Riverside Hotel in downtown Reno in 1902, fifteen years after electricity was first used in the town on the Truckee River. According to the January 25, 1903 issue of the Nevada State Journal, "the electric elevator is the finest make and the only hotel elevator in the State." While Virginia City's six-story International Hotel had an elevator before the building burned to the ground in 1914, the conveyance installed in 1877 was a hydraulic elevator. Fire consumed Gosse's four-story hotel and Nevada's first electric elevator in 1922. The bottom line is that any good reporter or writer needs to approach their story with some rigor and fact-check whenever possible. These myths have been making the rounds for years and are kept alive in newspaper morgue files, chamber of commerce materials, amateur "history" publications, video and DVD productions, and websites. Making matters worse, these stories find their way into the schoolroom and are unknowingly passed off as history rather than folklore or legend.

Beware the superlative claim that something or somebody was first, last, youngest, or oldest. More often than not, it isn't true!

Postscript: On August 23, 2003, the Goldfield Hotel was sold at auction to a buyer hoping to renovate and reopen the building as a hotel.
Who hasn't heard ad nauseam that our state was admitted to the Union on October 31, 1864 because its silver and gold production was needed to help finance the Civil War? Anyone who has attended Nevada's schools has heard the story from a teacher or read it in a textbook. It's a wonderful tale, but nothing could be farther from the truth. Our state's history has too often been embellished and transposed into myth, and the claim of Nevada's mineral wealth triggering statehood ranks as one of the most pervasive fictional stories in the annals of the Silver State. The reasons for Nevada's statehood were political, not economic. Earlier writers were so caught up in romanticizing Nevada's role in the Civil War they decided to re-invent history.

**FACT:** Nevada Territory was a federal territory, a part of the Union, and President Abraham Lincoln appointed Governor James Warren Nye, a former Police Commissioner in New York City, to ensure that it stayed that way. Governor Nye put down any demonstration in support of the Confederacy, and there were some. What federal taxes there were at the time that could be effectively collected went into Union coffers. Therefore, Nevada's creation as a TERRITORY on March 2, 1861 by the United States Congress ensured that its mineral riches would help the Union and not the Confederate cause.

**FACT:** By the time Congress approved an Enabling Act for Nevada on March 21, 1864, the Civil War was winding down. The Union had won decisive victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, and President Lincoln had issued a Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction. Lincoln sought reelection and faced a three-way race against General John C. Fremont, the radical Republican candidate, who had run for the presidency and lost to James Buchanan in 1856, and General George B. McClellan, a Democrat—he had earlier in the war relieved both generals of their commands. If the election went to the House of Representatives as it had in 1825 in a four-way race, Lincoln supporters including Representative James M. Ashley of Ohio, the author of the Nevada Enabling Act, believed Nevada's lone Congressman would support the incumbent president.

**FACT:** In addition, new states, and their popular and electoral vote, were needed to reelect Lincoln in support of his moderate, reconstruction policies for the South. The moderate Republicans believed that Confederate states were in need of reconstruction and many conditions would have to be met before a rebel state could rejoin the Union. Most important, if Nevada were a state, it could ratify the proposed 13th Amendment abolishing slavery and help in the passage of the landmark humanitarian legislation. Fremont and the radical Republicans, however, wanted to harshly punish the South, conducting war crime trials and executing convicted Confederate political and military leaders. Questions were raised if these former Union states had forfeited their sovereignty by withdrawing from the United States. McClellan and the Democrats, on the other hand, wanted to readmit Confederate states back into the Union with virtually no conditions.

**FICTION:** Nevada was singled out to help save the Union. Actually Enabling Acts for three territories, Colorado, Nebraska, and Nevada, were passed by Congress in March 1864. Nebraska's constitutional convention voted against statehood, while Colorado Territory's voters did not approve the proposed state constitution. Thus, Nevada Territory was the only territory to come to the support of President Lincoln. Ironically, after Nevadans voted overwhelmingly in support of the state constitution, General Fremont withdrew from the presidential race on September 21, and Nevada was no longer critical to a Lincoln win. President Lincoln proclaimed Nevada a state on October 31, a week before the national election, and then went on to carry Nevada in a relatively easy win over General McClellan. Only two of Nevada's three presidential electors voted for Lincoln. A.S. Peck, found himself snowbound in Aurora and no law provided for a replacement because the first state legislature had not met yet.
FICTION: Despite the scenario depicted in an episode of the “Bonanza” TV series entitled “The War Comes to Washoe” (first aired November 4, 1962), the delegates at the constitutional convention held in Carson City in July 1864 debated over whether or not Nevada would remain a territory or become a state in the Union and not whether it would leave the Union and join the Confederacy as a state. This episode has shaped the thinking of many Americans and helped confuse an already confusing story of why Nevada became a state in the Union.

FACT: Nevada was actually the second “Battle Born” state because of its entrance into the Union during the Civil War. “Battle Born” West Virginia was admitted to the Union on June 20, 1863.

FICTION: While it is true that Nevadans gave the beleaguered president three Republican members of Congress to help rebuild the nation, ironically our two U.S. Senators James W. Nye and William M. Stewart arrived in Washington, D.C. too late to vote on the 13th Amendment. Congressman Henry G. Worthington did vote on the amendment, and it was ratified by Nevada on February 16, 1865, two months prior to Lincoln's assassination. Senator Stewart would prove to be a key player in the drafting of the 15th Amendment giving African-American males the right to vote.

Historians today recognize that the discovery of the Comstock Lode in 1859 was a critical factor influencing Nevada's territorial status. However, making the leap to statehood because wealth from Nevada's mines was desperately needed to save the Union during the Civil War keeps stubbornly recurring as perhaps our state's #1 legend.

For an excellent, detailed account of Nevada's statehood efforts, see "Union Made" by Professor Jerome Edwards in the October 1989 issue of Nevada Magazine.

Photo: Library of Congress

Myth #13: George W.G. Ferris, Jr. and the Ferris Wheel by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

The story of onetime Carson City resident George Washington Gale Ferris Jr., Ferris Jr. often is confused with Reno architect George A. Ferris. A 1996 article in the Reno Gazette-Journal about the former McKinley Park School in Reno credited architect George A. Ferris with inventing the Ferris Wheel. Even Nevada's former First Lady, Sandy Miller, had at one time confused the two men. It happens all the time because of the same first and last names. Yet, by the time George A. Ferris designed the “Spanish Quartet” schools in Reno, and the governor's mansion in Carson City in the early 1900's, George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr., a civil engineer who had spent much of his childhood in Nevada, had long-since died. Nor were the two Nevada families related!

Once again, let's set the record straight. George W. G. Ferris, Jr. was five years old (born February 14, 1859) when his family moved from Galesburg, Illinois to Carson Valley, Nevada Territory in the summer of 1864. One story goes that his inspiration for the Ferris Wheel came from his fascination with the operation of the large undershot water wheel near the Cradlebaugh Bridge on the Carson River -- others say the big water wheel near the Mexican Mill. Presumably, he imagined what it would be like to be riding around on one of its buckets. George W. G. Ferris, Jr. with his family lived on a ranch about two miles north of present-day Minden, before moving to Carson City in 1868.

George W. G. Ferris, Sr.'s residence was on the southeast corner of Third and Division streets (the restored house is still there at 311 W. Third) and he surrounded his house with trees imported by rail from Illinois. The legacy of this Ferris family included not only the Ferris Wheel, but much of the landscaping of Carson City in the 1870's including the capitol grounds - the spruce that has been the state Christmas tree since 1937 was planted by Ferris, Sr. in 1876. George Sr. and his wife moved to Riverside, California, in 1881.

George Jr. attended the California Military Academy in Oakland from 1873 to 1876. In 1881, he graduated from Rensslelear Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, with a degree in civil engineering.

George Jr. began his professional work in New York City and designed bridges, tunnels, and trestles throughout the industrial northeast and midwest. He headed a civil engineering firm in Pittsburgh when he came up with the idea of the Ferris Wheel for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. When the 264-foot-high Ferris Wheel finally opened on June 21, it was an overwhelming success and the fair's primary attraction. During the 19 weeks it operated, the Ferris Wheel carried 1,453,611 paying customers. Its gross take was $726,805.50. The wheel was duplicated for the 1900 Paris Exposition and, in 1904, the original wheel was moved to St. Louis for the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. On May 11, 1906, the wheel was dynamited and scrapped, a Chicago newspaper referring to it as "America's rival to the Eiffel Tower". However, George W. G. Ferris, Jr. did not live to see what happened to his Ferris Wheel, dying on November 22, 1896 in Pittsburgh at the age of 37.

So who was George Ashmead Ferris who sometimes gets credit for the Ferris Wheel? This George was born in Philadelphia on January 31, 1859, two weeks before George W. G. Ferris. He was educated in Quaker schools and Swarthmore College, later coming to Colorado and northern California. In 1906, he opened an office in Reno as an architect. George A. Ferris designed most of the schools in Reno after his arrival as well as high schools in Las Vegas, Eureka, and Austin. His design for the Governor's Mansion was accepted by Acting Governor Denver Dickerson in 1908. In the mid-1920's, Ferris, and prominent architect Frederic J. DeLongchamps, jointly supervised the plans for the State Building in downtown Reno where the Pioneer Auditorium stands today. George A. Ferris died at St. Mary's Hospital in Reno on August 12, 1948, leaving a son, Lehman A. "Monk" Ferris, to carry on the architectural firm. Lehman died in 1997 at the age of 103.

Nevada State Library, Archives and Public Records
Myth #13: George W.G. Ferris, Jr. and the Ferris Wheel by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

The moral to this story: don't just assume because two names are similar that they are one-in-the-same person. A little homework can go a long way in not inadvertently playing tricks on the living and the dead. For more information on George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr., and the Ferris Wheel, read Lois Stodieck Jones' *The Ferris Wheel* (1984).

Photo: Nevada Historical Society

Padre Pedro Font, during an expedition to Spanish-controlled northern California in 1776, named and mapped the Sierra Nevada for the first time. Sierra means saw-toothed mountain range in Spanish and Nevada means snow-covered. How many times have TV and radio commentators referred to the Sierra Nevada as the Sierra Nevadas? National news accounts rank among the worst examples when reporters make a plural out of Sierra Nevada akin to the Rocky Mountains becoming the Rockies (that's acceptable in English). Many times a journalist or writer, when mistakenly referring to the Sierra Nevadas, has compounded the problem by geographically placing nearby Carson City in the Carson Valley (it's in Eagle Valley) and situating Reno in Washoe Valley (it's in the Truckee Meadows).

Here is something that might surprise people who have lived in the area for some time and know to call the Sierra Nevada the Sierra Nevada or just the Sierra: technically the Sierra Nevada crest line and the mountains descending to the west and east are wholly and solely in California. It's true that the 19th century California-bound immigrants crossing the Great Basin, upon seeing the huge mountain range looming in front of them, assumed it was the Sierra Nevada. An 1874 map of Lake Tahoe describes the feature as "Sierra Nevada (eastern Summit)." Another name for the feature was the "Eastern Slope." While most people refer to the Sierra Nevada when they look at Job's Peak, King's Canyon, or Mount Rose, geographers and geologists will tell you that what you are viewing is the Carson Range. Officially named in 1939 for pioneer frontier scout Kit Carson, the mountain range east of the Sierra Nevada crest line was described as early as 1855 as the "Great Carson Spur."

The Sierra Nevada crest line is clearly west of Lake Tahoe. All of this would have been so much easier had California agreed to the language in Nevada's Organic (1861) and Enabling (1864) Acts and given Nevada the land east from the crest of the Sierra. Of course, California was not about to relinquish Lake Tahoe and a significant portion of its eastern border which now includes the communities of Susanville, Truckee, Tahoe City, South Lake Tahoe, Markleeville, Coleville, Bridgeport, Lee Vining, Bishop and points south.

In the end, remember Sierra is plural for mountains; Nevada is not to be made plural. And the Carson Range is a majestic, breath-taking eastern spur of the Sierra Nevada.

See History of the Sierra Nevada (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965)

Photo: Credit: The Sierra Nevada: The Range of Light (1947)

An editorial column appeared in a Nevada newspaper in 1997 discussing unusual places and how they received their names. Lyon County was among them. Citing Helen Carlson's *Nevada Place Names* (1974), the column noted there was some confusion as to whether the county was named for General Nathaniel Lyon or Captain Robert Lyon. In the ensuing years since the publication of *Nevada Place Names*, we have come to know how Lyon County received its name and who is responsible for all the confusion. Here, then, is the rest of the story!

Nobody was confused on November 25, 1861 when the Territorial Legislature, demonstrating its loyalty to the Union, named Lyon County in honor of fallen Civil War General Nathaniel Lyon. Lyon, a Connecticut native and West Point graduate, had recently died at the battle of Wilson's Creek, near Springfield, Missouri, on August 10, 1861. All the 19th century sources have the facts straight including Myron Angel's well-known *History of Nevada* (1881, p. 494). So when did the confusion begin?

We can start with Samuel Post Davis' *The History of Nevada* (1913). Davis, a long-time Carson City resident, former State Controller and State Publicity Agent, and one-time journalist and editor with the *Carson City Appeal* fancied himself an historian. In his state history, Davis published an article by Major G.W. Ingalls on "Indians of Nevada" that claimed, among other things, that Lyon County was named "after Captain Robert Lyon of the pioneer army". The early Great Basin pioneer survived the Pyramid Lake Indian War of 1860 and later served as Douglas County Assessor and Recorder. For Ingalls, logic seemingly dictated that Lyon County was named for Robert Lyon, a Pyramid Lake "war-hero", because the 1861 Territorial Legislature had named Ormsby and Storey counties for fallen comrades, William Ormsby and Edward Storey. So it appears G.W. Ingalls, appointed by President U.S. Grant as Indian Agent for Nevada in 1872, and years later returning to Nevada to serve as the director of the Nevada Chamber of Commerce in Reno, authored the confusion.

We can also blame Ingalls for making the erroneous statement that Reno, in 1868, was named for General Marcus Reno of Little Big Horn fame. The Battle of the Little Big Horn in Montana Territory, more commonly known as "Custer's Last Stand", was fought in June 1876. Reno, in fact, was named for Jesse Lee Reno, another West Point graduate and fallen Union general dying in 1862. However that is another story!

Other writers would follow to compound the problem of how Lyon County got its name. Dr. Effie Mona Mack, a prominent educator and head of the social studies department at Reno High School; and Byrd Wall Sawyer of Fallon, a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, and the step-mother of future governor Grant Sawyer, collaborated on a Nevada history text, *Our State; Nevada*, for the public schools. Published in 1940, we find that "Lyon County (was) named for a hero of the Indian wars..." A subsequent book co-authored by the two educators, *Here is Nevada* (1965), perpetuated the error twenty-five years later. At least two generations of Nevada students grew up believing that someone other than Nathaniel Lyon was Lyon County's namesake. Not surprisingly, Sam Davis' *History of Nevada* is included on the "Reading List".

Until recently, Lyon County residents were still confused about the origin of the county's name. But all that has changed now with State Library and Archives staff working with the Mason Valley News and the Fernley Leader-Dayton Courier in their production of *Lyon County Reflections: A Look At Our Historic Past*. In 1991, a territorial seal for Lyon County was found among the holdings of the State Archives and, lo and behold, after comparing a likeness of General Lyon with the image on the county seal we found it to be one and the same person.
And now, hopefully, all will come to know who’s Lyon now! In fact, the Iowa, Kansas, and Minnesota legislatures also named counties in honor of General Nathaniel Lyon.

Photo: Sheet music honoring Nathaniel Lyon, killed in battle in Missouri in 1861.

For over sixty years beginning in 1929, Nevada's state flag had a design that the legislature did not adopt! Even that long ago the length of the session sometimes exceeded the constitutional provision for 60 days in which the legislators would be paid. A hurried amendment to the bill changing the position of the name “Nevada” on the proposed flag was misplaced in the final hours of the session. Apparently nobody knew of the snafu until researcher Dana Bennett of the Legislative Council Bureau, and staff at the State Library and Archives, made the discovery in advance of a bill modifying the design of the flag in 1991. SB 396, sponsored by Senator Bill Raggio of Washoe County and signed by Governor Bob Miller, finally provided for an official state flag.

This story begins in 1926 when Lt. Governor Maurice J. Sullivan sponsored a contest offering a $25.00 prize for the winning design of a new state flag. Sullivan argued that the state flag adopted in 1915 was much too detailed and had an excessive amount of colors rendering its manufacture expensive.

The 1927 legislature followed up Sullivan's prize offer and created a flag selection committee. The design chosen was submitted by "Don" Louis Schellbach III (spelled Shellback in the area newspapers). Schellbach was an artist and draftsman initially employed by the State Highway Department in Carson City in 1923; later active in the excavation of the Anasazi villages at Lost City in southern Nevada; and custodian and curator at the State Building in Reno at the time he won the flag contest. Schellbach, an associate of Democrats Governor James Scrugham and Lt. Governor Sullivan, had enjoyed their patronage.

However, when the Republicans virtually swept the 1926 elections, Schellbach lost his job at the State Building despite a plea to Governor Fred Balzar to keep his position. At the same time, there must have been some controversy over the flag design, or maybe its designer, as a bill failed to be introduced in the 1927 session. By May, Schellbach was employed at the Museum of the American Indian in New York City.

Senator William Dressler of Douglas County resurrected Schellbach's design in 1929. Conspicuously, the proposed new state flag did not include the name of the state. Senate Bill 51 passed the Senate by a vote of 13 yeas, no nays, and 4 absent.

The Assembly Committee on Education recommended SB 51 be passed, but the same day Assemblyman Neil McGill of White Pine County asked that the bill be re-referred to his committee. Later that day, the Education Committee proposed an amendment, credited to Cada C. Boak of Nye County, to add the word "Nevada" to the flag and inscribe the letters between the points of the star. The bill passed the Assembly the next day by a vote of 29 yeas, no nays, 6 absent, and 2 not voting.

However, the battle lines were drawn as the session was rapidly coming to a close. The Senate refused to concur with the Assembly amendment, and the Assembly refused to rescind the amendment. A conference committee was appointed which included Assemblyman McGill and Senator Noble Getchell of Lander County. A compromise amendment was agreed upon which designated that "the word 'Nevada' shall appear immediately below the sprays in silver Roman letters to conform with the letters appearing in the word 'Battle Born.'" The Assembly and Senate adopted the conference committee amendment.

Finally, on the last day of the 60-day session, March 21 -- actually in the wee hours of the morning on Friday, March 22 after the legislative clocks had been covered -- a tired Senate Committee on Enrollment reported that it had compared the enrolled bill with the engrossed copy, and finding it correct, had delivered the bill to Governor Balzar.
IT WAS NOT CORRECT! In the legislature’s haste to adjourn, the enrolled bill still included the superseded Assembly amendment, and the engrossed bill signed by the governor at 3:10pm on March 26, 1929 did not contain the conference committee amendment. Nevada’s state flag did not reflect legislative intent -- the letters ending up being inscribed between the points of the star instead of below the sprays -- and for some unknown reason this mistake went undetected for some 60 years. So much for doing business in the hectic, waning days of the legislative session, particularly before the advent of the Legislative Counsel Bureau and professional staff in 1947.

Our flag today continues to reflect Schellbach’s design except the added letters spelling “Nevada” are below the star and above the sprays.

Postscript: "Don" Louis Schellbach Ill died on September 22, 1971 in Tucson, Arizona, at the age of 83 after working for more than 24 years at Grand Canyon for the National Park Service. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes appointed Schellbach Chief Naturalist for Grand Canyon National Park in 1941. He retired at age 70 in 1957. The principal “father” of Nevada's current state flag was fondly remembered as "Mr. Grand Canyon" in his obituary.

Photo: Nevada State Museum

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, April 1997)
For years when you traveled down this old thoroughfare in Carson City's west side historic district, you found that the street signs between King and Washington streets spelled the name Philips or Phillips depending on the intersection. How long the signs had two spellings is a matter of conjecture, although it indicates the street's namesake has long-since been forgotten. So was it Philips or Phillips, and who was the street named after?

After pursuing some diligent research among government records, U.S. decennial census, and city directories, it became clear that Henry Smith and Elizabeth Mary PHILLIPS were among Carson City's earliest pioneers. Shortly after the couple and their four sons arrived in Eagle Valley, Utah Territory, from California in late 1859, they bought up large tracts of land in fledgling Carson City. The sellers included three of Carson City's founders: John J. Musser; Frank M. Proctor; and Proctor's father-in-law, Benjamin F. Green. Before long the enterprising couple involved themselves in dozens of land transactions, among those a substantial deal in September 1860 with attorney William M. Stewart who would serve in Nevada's territorial legislature (1861, 1864) and later as a U.S. Senator for Nevada (1864-73, 1887-1905).

By 1862, Carson City's real estate business was so dynamic with all the mining excitement on the Comstock, that Henry and Elizabeth Phillips laid out the Phillips Addition in the territorial capital's northwest town limits. Among the streets named in the subdivision were Phillips, Elizabeth, and Mountain streets. Henry and Elizabeth soon moved their family into an attractive house in the Phillips Addition on the northwest corner of Caroline and Division streets.

Times were good for awhile, however, by 1867 the Phillips were in financial trouble. Henry G. Blasdel, Nevada's governor, filed a lawsuit against the couple to recover a $1,000 loan. The Phillips' house and lot served as collateral, and the governor was prepared to foreclose on the property. The couple paid the debt and settled out of court. This action apparently only bought them some time. In the 1868 city directory only Elizabeth, working in real estate, is listed. By 1870, the property was sold and the Phillips family had departed -- the U.S. decennial census does not enumerate them as Carson City residents.

While the pioneer family left the scene for Sacramento--Henry is working there as a life insurance agent--the streets named after them and their house remained. The house at 706 N. Division had many owners; some of them quite distinguished. Thomas Porter Hawley, Nevada Supreme Court Justice (1873-90) and federal judge (1890-1906), bought the Phillips house in 1872 and lived there until the early 1890's. In 1904, Dr. Charles W.R. Von Radeskey moved from the San Francisco area, opened a medical practice in Carson City, and purchased the former Phillips house from area resident Walter Harris. Later, Patrick A. McCarran lived in the residence while serving as Supreme Court Justice (1913-1919). McCarran would go on to serve in the U.S. Senate (1933-1954). By the 1920s, rancher John R. Schulz had acquired the house and his son Raymond was born there in 1925.

In the ensuing years, the house would be sold several times, subdivided into apartments, and allowed to deteriorate. An historical property survey in 1980 produced for Carson City failed to even identify the structure as one of the town's oldest residential properties! Today what is left of the house after substantial demolition has been incorporated into a medical complex that encompasses most of the block. A "Letter to the Editor" writer in the Nevada Appeal, characterized the Phillips/Hawley house as having been ". . . turned into historic 2x4's."

With the house virtually gone, only Elizabeth and Phillips streets remain as visible reminders of Carson City pioneers Henry and Elizabeth Phillips. Elizabeth died on July 7, 1874 and Henry died on December
14, 1902. They are buried next to each other in the old Sacramento City Cemetery. Looking at old fire insurance maps and city directories, the misspelling of Phillips Street goes back to at least the early 1900s and is not a product of the modern era.

An article in the December 20, 1997 edition of the Reno Gazette-Journal pointed out the spelling inconsistencies on a number of Carson City street signs including Phillips Street. Only days after learning that some of the street signs were misspelled, crews from the city’s sign shop removed the incorrect markers and installed new ones.

Today, all the green signs at intersections along the five-block-long Phillips Street are spelled correctly. What a wonderful history-related Christmas gift to Carson City and its residents in setting the record straight.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, May 1997 and September 2005)
Why all the fuss about Nevada's birthday on October 31? The battle lines were drawn between "traditionalists", and the "grinches" who would steal Nevada Day by calling for the last Friday of October to be the state's official holiday. The parade and other festivities would follow on Saturday; thus making for a three-day weekend for some Nevadans as well as state and local government employees. With the passage of AB396 by the 1997 legislature, Nevada voters, on November 3, 1998 advised the 1999 legislature they wanted to celebrate Nevada Day on the last Friday in October beginning in 2000. The legislature, after much heated debate, complied.

The myth in this story is that the celebrating of Nevada's admission into the Union in 1864 has been anything but traditional. Carson City's Nevada Day parade and festivities date back to 1938. In the state's earliest years, it appears only the Pacific Coast Pioneer Society on the Comstock celebrated admission day. It was not until 1891 that "Admission Day" was legislatively declared a judicial holiday with no court business to be transacted on October 31. Outside occasional parade activities in Virginia City and Reno, Nevada's birthday went virtually unnoticed. Efforts by the State Federation of Women's Clubs in 1908 to have Admission Day declared an annual legal holiday failed.

However, the 50th anniversary of Nevada's statehood in 1914 was officially observed. Governor Tasker Oddie issued a proclamation declaring Saturday, October 31, a onetime public holiday. Reno hosted the grand event. The outgrowth of Nevada's semi-centennial was the creation of a Nevada Pioneer group called the "Society of Nevadans" who for some twenty years sponsored Nevada's Admission Day in Reno.

The legislature changed the name of Admission Day to Nevada Day in 1933 and made it a discretionary state holiday. However, the festivities in Reno were on the decline with the old pioneers dying off, and weekday Nevada Day events not generating enough money and attendance.

Fortunately, Tom Wilson, a Reno advertising executive, and Carson City's Judge Clark Guild, the "father" of the State Museum, saved Nevada Day. Carson City became its new home in 1938, and a law passed the following year made Nevada Day an official state holiday which helped to further the success of the birthday event.

Ironically, just as the tradition of annually celebrating Nevada Day in the capital city was underway, World War II precluded conducting any celebration in 1942, 1943, and 1944. Then, in 1948, October 31 fell on a Sunday for the first time and Nevada Day officials decided that the parade and other events would be held on Monday, November 1. The legislature followed suit the next year, making Monday the state holiday when Nevada Day fell on a Sunday.

If that wasn't untraditional enough, when Nevada Day again fell on a Sunday in 1954, parade officials decided to hold the birthday events on Saturday, October 30; Halloween was observed on Nevada Day; and Monday, November 1, was the state holiday. Nevada Day has been celebrated in this manner in 1971, 1976, 1982, 1993, and, for the last time, in 1999. Moreover, when the Nevada Day Committee overrode religious sentiment in 1965 and held the parade and activities on Sunday, October 31, public outcry ensured that this was the first and last time Nevada Day was celebrated on the Christian Sabbath. An effort in 1969 to move the Nevada Day holiday to the last Friday in October, died in committee. However, in 1971, the legislature made Friday, October 30, the state holiday when Nevada Day fell on a Saturday.
What we can conclude from all of this? Since the Nevada Day celebration moved from Reno to Carson City in 1938, there has been no long-standing tradition of the Nevada Day events or the state holiday being consistently on October 31. The Nevada Day Committee made exceptions, the state legislature made exceptions, and World War II made for exceptions. What seems to be playing among "traditionalists" was a general backlash against the modern tendency to create three day weekends, the general public forgetting why and what we are celebrating, and the perception that business interests dictated the agenda.

However, Nevada Day on weekdays had become a losing proposition in recent years. The event was principally a regional celebration in the northwestern part of the state. Parade entries and visitors from eastern and southern Nevada were few and far between. When they participated it was during a three day holiday. Californians at one time came in large numbers, but no more. While Nevada and Carson City's populations were bigger than ever, the Nevada Day celebration had gradually declined in comparison.

While three states have statehood public holidays (Hawaii, Nevada, and West Virginia), the annual Nevada Day parade and celebration in Carson City is one of a kind.

Nevada Day is something special, or at least it used to be. What the ultimate solution is, if there is one in today's world of virtual reality and hotel/casino theme parks and entertainment venues, is unclear. However, it would be very sad indeed if Nevada Day event goes the way of the American frontier and passes into history as we proceed into the 21st century.

Photo: Nevada State Library and Archives

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, June 1997; reprinted in November 2005)
"Yerington received its name in the 1800s when residents hoped to flatter Carson and Colorado Railroad director H.M. Yerington into building a station there," wrote Elaine Wilson in Lyon County Reflections: A Look at Our Historic Past (1994). "The effort failed, but the name remains."

Well, not exactly! The confusion linking the official naming of Yerington to the original construction of the C&C Railroad has been around for as long as most old-time Nevadans can remember. Even author David Myrick repeated it in his landmark work Railroads of Nevada (1962, p. 214). However the real story is much more complex and confusing.

Relying on the recollection of Lyon County Senator Bernard H. Reymers, Florence Bray, a University of Nevada history student, unknowingly promoted the myth in a thesis on Lyon County names published by the Nevada Historical Society in 1913. Actually, the railroad was built through Wabuska in the north end of Mason Valley in 1880-81, and bypassed "Greenfield" as Yerington was then known. The successful effort to change the town's name in 1894 had to do with renaming a post office.

The tale begins in Mason Valley, named for pioneer cattleman Nathaniel A. "Hock" Mason, when the valley was still a part of Esmeralda County. By 1870, a rancher named William R. Lee had settled upon 160 acres adjacent to the Walker River near where Yerington is today. Others soon followed, and the federal post office established on August 15, 1871 at David Cooper's nearby ranch was named Mason Valley.

At the time, the tiny agricultural crossroads had one store, a blacksmith shop, and a saloon run by James Downey. An Irishman born in Liverpool, England, Downey had recently moved with his family from the Esmeralda mining camp of Pine Grove.

Dayton's Lyon County Times of May 22, 1880 published an article on how the village received the curious name of Pizen Switch. "It was named by one James Hayes," according to a correspondent of the Reno Gazette. "He got on a terrible drunk there, and he said the whiskey was poison. So he commenced to drink Vinegar Bitters, and read the advertisement about the Railroad from Intemperance to Ruin. This suggested to him the idea of calling the place "Pizen Switch." As reporter and informant, the newspaper correspondence concluded, "I know this to be true, for I have been a resident of Mason Valley, and was there when the Switch was named."

The folklore abounds, and the facts are few. An essay on the history of Lyon County by Yerington attorney Nelson W. Willis published in Sam Davis' History of Nevada (1913) seriously confused the issue on the who, what, when, where, and why of Pizen Switch.

Through the 1870s, the rustic little burg grew to include some 200 residents, a one-room school, over twenty businesses, a mail and stage connection to Carson City, and a Methodist Church. It also acquired a new name. An effort beginning in 1879 to find a more suitable name than Pizen Switch culminated on November 20 with a formal christening of Greenfield and its new dance hall. Nevadans from miles around, including Virginia City and Gold Hill, celebrated the new name commemorating the green fields of Mason Valley. According to the Virginia Evening Chronicle, "...an organization was formed to be known as the Committee of Vengeance, whose duty it shall be to murder and scalp any and every citizen who shall hereafter call it Pizen Switch..."

However, the Carson & Colorado Railroad bypassed Greenfield in 1881. While the Lyon County Times of March 5, 1881 noted that the railroad company had purchased forty acres near "Hock" Mason's ranch for
the site of a proposed town of Mason, the C&C abandoned the idea of building the railroad and the town due south of Wabuska and veered eastward before continuing in a southerly direction.

Greenfield still benefited by the nearby rail service and continued to prosper. In 1883, the state legislature extended Lyon County's southern boundary to include all of Mason Valley, as well as Smith Valley. Greenfield's citizens now traveled to Dayton, less than 2 hours by rail from Wabuska, to do their county business instead of remote Aurora (or Hawthorne after 1883).

An effort was made to change the post office name to Greenfield from Mason Valley in 1893, however federal postal authorities informed the petitioners that there were already too many Greenfield post offices throughout the country. In a petition signed by 100 citizens, the name Yerington, as a second choice, was resurrected in early 1894. "Yerington was suggested as a pretty name for our village and post office," wrote the Mason Valley Tidings on March 22, 1894 "and also as a compliment to one of Nevada's most representative men, who has been identified with almost every enterprise of importance inaugurated in western Nevada for many years."

The Lyon County Times of Dayton wildly speculated that perhaps H.M. Yerington might construct a branch line of the C&C Railroad to the town of Yerington because of the name change; perhaps even lobby to move the county seat from Dayton to Yerington. There is no evidence of any official overture to the railroad baron or that he even contemplated a branch line with Nevada in the depths of a depression and the railroad losing money. The Legislature designated Yerington the county seat in 1911, less than a year after H.M. Yerington died and two years after the Lyon County courthouse in Dayton burned to the ground.

Fittingly, the town of Greenfield and the Mason Valley post office became Yerington on April 1, 1894 -- April Fools' Day. People have been confused as to how Yerington received its name ever since.

Photo: Nevada Historical Society

One of the most conspicuous women in Nevada’s history is Comstock prostitute, Julia Bulette. In her brief lifetime, the “soiled dove” was a colorful, minor figure in Virginia City’s early heyday. However, with her brutal murder in 1867 and the hanging of the alleged killer the following year, Julia became a bigger-than-life legend. The myth-making and “fakelore” continues today in spite of the facts.

Author Marla Kiley, in her article “The Immoral Queens of the Red Light District,” has filled the pages of the July 1997 issue of True West magazine with the accumulated fiction and fable associated with Julia Bulette. "Almost instantly," Kiley writes, "Julia was wearing silk, velvet, and sable furs. Shortly after her arrival on the scene she was making $1,000 a night and also accepted payment in the form of bars of bullion, diamonds, or rubies." Absolute nonsense and pure poppy-cock! While Bulette had seen better days, she died in debt, according to estate records, her bills exceeding her assets. Kiley then describes Julia “as a beautiful and willowy woman who seemed to float as she walked,” when in fact she was neither wealthy, beautiful, willowy, nor did the rather heavy-set woman seemingly float when she walked.

Kiley’s imagination runs wild in painting an exaggerated, glamorized portrait of Julia Bulette’s life. We know that in the some four years that Julia lived on the Comstock she was a well-known prostitute and had worked in the best brothels, however she was certainly no rich, gorgeous courtesan. Earlier writers even elevated her to the position of madam and "the ‘queen’ of Virginia City’s sporting row".

Kiley claims Bulette’s two-room crib near the corner of D and Union streets in Virginia City was a small parlor house "referred to as Julia’s Palace." Then in a flight of fancy we are told that Julia rode “around town in a lacquered brougham with side panels emblazoned with a crest of four aces, crowned by a lion couchant” and attended events "at the Opera House cloaked in a floor length purple velvet cape lined with sable..." Nothing could be farther from the truth!

So who was this woman who looms larger than life some 140 years after her untimely demise? Like most prostitutes now and then, there is much mystery to Julia Bulette’s life. Some versions of her life story have her as an Englishwoman who immigrated to Louisiana where she married, then left her husband and entered prostitution, although she may have come to New Orleans from France where she had been recruited as a prostitute. Recent research indicates she was actually born near Natchez, Mississippi, and worked as a prostitute in New Orleans. Julia would travel to northern California to ply her trade before arriving on the Comstock by 1863.

We do know she quickly became a favorite among Virginia City’s Fire Engine Company No. 1. According to contemporary accounts, the firemen elected her an honorary member "in return for numerous favors and munificent gifts bestowed by her upon the company." Other accounts in the Territorial Enterprise noted Bulette’s enthusiastic support of the fire department and her presence at fires where she worked the brakes of the hand-cart engines. Fire Engine Company No. 1 participated in Julia’s funeral procession through the streets of Virginia City in January 1867.

Clearly, Julia was more than a run-of-the-mill prostitute before dying in her early 30s. Journalist Alfred Doten attended a ball hosted by "Jule" in June 1866. The Territorial Enterprise bemoaned her tragic death claiming “few of her class had more friends,” although the “good” women of the community were generally relieved to see her leave the scene. Law enforcement officials diligently pursued the person who had robbed and killed her, ultimately hanging one John Millian after the convicted murderer had exhausted all his appeals. On April 24, 1868, more than 4,000 spectators, including Mark Twain who was touring the country following a trip to Europe and the Middle East, witnessed the execution.
Susan James in her excellent *Nevada Magazine* article, the “Queen of Tarts” (Sept./Oct. 1984), traced the romance, myth-making, if not downright lying, linked to Bulette back to 20th century writers of Nevada history, George Lyman, Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg, and Effie Mona Mack (aka Zeke Daniels, *The Life and Death of Julia C. Bulette*, 1958). Others include Carl B. Glasscock, Duncan Emrich, Katherine Hillyer, Katherine Best, Oscar Lewis, and Paul Fatout. Marla Kiley, who borrowed liberally from Lyman’s potboiler *The Saga of the Comstock Lode* (1934), is among the most recent, but certainly not the last, to play tricks on the living and the dead in recounting Julia Bulette’s colorful and controversial career as a prostitute. The fakelore will never die, but those of us who do our homework know better. Hopefully, one day we may learn much more about the facts of Julia’s short life. We have certainly had more than our fair share of fiction and fable.

Photo: believed to be of Julia Bulette.

Marilyn Monroe, the blonde "sex-goddess" died a tragic death on August 5, 1962 in Los Angeles. The coroner ruled the actress' death at age 36 a suicide, albeit under mysterious circumstances.

There were many connections to Nevada during her short life, beginning with the divorce in Las Vegas in September 1946 from first husband James Dougherty at the tender age of 20, to her last visit in July 1962 to Frank Sinatra's Cal-Neva Lodge at Crystal Bay, Lake Tahoe, with actor Peter Lawford, a member of Sinatra's colorful "Rat Pack" and John F. Kennedy's brother-in-law.

The biggest mystery...more likely myth...associated with her Nevada connection is that Marilyn Monroe's now well-known affair with President Kennedy included a tryst at the Cal-Neva Lodge. Local reporters tried to determine the last sitting president to visit Lake Tahoe prior to Bill Clinton and focused on John Kennedy. "The juiciest piece of the Kennedy rumors," wrote the Tahoe Daily Tribune/North Lake Tahoe Bonanza (July 27, 1997), "stems from an alleged secret rendezvous with actress Marilyn Monroe on the North Shore." The story has been resurrected again with the proposed destruction of the vintage cabins at the Cal-Neva Lodge by its current owner.

The one documented account of John Kennedy visiting Lake Tahoe was as a Massachusetts U.S. Senator seeking the Democratic nomination for the presidency of the United States. Governor Grant Sawyer had arranged for Kennedy to address a joint session of the state legislature in Carson City on Monday, February 1, 1960. A reception was scheduled for Sunday evening at the Governor's Mansion followed by a talk at the civic auditorium. "When Kennedy and Pierre Salinger and their party got to Reno," according to Governor Sawyer in his oral history Hang Tough (1993), "they eluded the press and sneaked off in a car and went up to Lake Tahoe and looked it over before coming to Carson City."

According to Richard Ham, a Sawyer aide and senior adviser, Kennedy was staying at the Riverside Hotel. The Senator asked Ham to provide him with a car that he could drive alone to Lake Tahoe before going to Carson City. Kennedy apparently visited the Cal-Neva Lodge after a stop at Squaw Valley, the site of the 1960 Winter Olympics.

However, it was virtually impossible that Marilyn Monroe was there at Lake Tahoe to greet the aspiring presidential candidate. Monroe, by all accounts, was in Hollywood at the time rehearsing scenes for the movie "Let's Make Love". Her marriage to third husband, playwright Arthur Miller, was clearly troubled and would soon end in divorce. At the time, she pursued a short-lived affair with co-star Yves Montand.

Some writers conjecture that Monroe was also having an affair with Senator Kennedy while he was campaigning in the Los Angeles area. Donald Spoto, the most rigorous and careful of Marilyn's biographers, wrote in 1993 that the so-called "love affair" between Kennedy and Monroe was fleeting and did not begin until after the first documented meeting in October 1961 at Peter and Patricia Kennedy Lawford's Santa Monica beach house. In fact, Spoto claimed Monroe was intimate only once with Kennedy on March 24, 1962, when both the president and Marilyn were Bing Crosby's house guests in Palm Springs.

If Spoto is right that any other claims to the contrary cannot be substantiated, then Marilyn Monroe's getaways to Lake Tahoe during and after the filming of Arthur Miller's "The Misfits" had nothing to do with John Kennedy, and more to do with her attraction to Frank Sinatra. Filming in Nevada began in July 1960 in Reno, and concluded in October after scenes had been shot in and around Dayton and Pyramid Lake.
At long last, Monroe worked with her childhood film idol Clark Gable, who from an early age growing up in Los Angeles represented the father she never knew. Ironically, both Monroe and Gable had experienced Las Vegas divorces, Gable from his second wife Ria Langham in 1939, and Monroe from James Dougherty in 1946. Meanwhile, in the summer and fall of 1960, John Kennedy was busy campaigning for the presidency of the United States after winning the Democratic nomination at the Los Angeles convention in July.

There is nothing on record at the JFK Presidential Library in Boston that identifies President Kennedy, officially or unofficially, visiting Lake Tahoe or northern Nevada prior to his assassination in Dallas in November 1963. Marilyn Monroe is known to have made her last visit to Lake Tahoe at the invitation of the Lawfords during the weekend of July 27-29, 1962 just prior to her apparent suicide. The events surrounding Marilyn's short stay at Sinatra's Cal-Neva Lodge are controversial, confusing, and contested, making it very hard to separate fact from fiction. We know that she met Dean Martin briefly to discuss a movie project. Joe DiMaggio, her second husband was there, and according to one account there was a reconciliation and talk of marriage. Still other accounts have Peter Lawford telling Monroe that all communication with John and Bobby Kennedy was cut off. There have even been unsubstantiated claims that Monroe tried to commit suicide or was drugged while staying at the Cal-Neva.

The truth in its entirety will likely never be known about the JFK-Monroe affair. However, the stories about a liaison between John Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe at Lake Tahoe are unsupported, and may well represent a titillating, modern-day presidential version of the "George Washington slept here" myth.

“The claim to being Nevada’s first settlement has caused a number of debates between residents of Genoa and Dayton,” wrote Nancy Dallas, former Lyon County Commissioner, in the *Nevada Appeal* (September 19, 1997), "but any true Daytonite knows the correct version of this part of Nevada's history."

The communities of Genoa and Dayton are longtime rivals competing for this distinction. While the definitive answer will probably never be agreed upon, the article prompted me to wade into the long-standing controversy.

Bill Dolan's column in the July 28, 1997 edition of the *Nevada Appeal*, "Past Pages," noted that in 1947 Salt Lake City's Deseret News published a news story on "the first white man's cabin in Genoa." According to Dolan's synopsis of the article, Hampton Sidney Beatie and some companions established "Mormon Station" in 1849 as a trading post along the California emigrant trail. Today, thanks to Professor Russell Elliott of UNR and noted Utah historian Juanita Brooks, we know the 1849 date is wrong.

Actually Hampton Beatie and his party arrived in Carson Valley at the base of the Carson Range, in the spring of 1850. Brooks pointed out that the Mormon convert first came from the eastern United States to Salt Lake City in September 1849, and wintered there. Although the Mormon party had initially planned to settle in Carson Valley in 1850, with the approaching winter Beatie and his associates decided to sell Mormon Station. In September, according to San Francisco's *The Daily Alta California*, some of the group left for California and others for Salt Lake City. The last documented activity at the station was in October. So where does that leave us in the way of a permanent settlement?

Now if we believe pioneer John Reese's memoirs, dictated to historian Hubert Howe Bancroft in 1884, the distinction of the first permanent, non-Indian settlement in western Utah Territory (now Nevada) could go to the mouth of Gold Canyon, the precursor of Dayton. Abner Blackburn, a member of the Mormon Battalion in the Mexican War, had discovered gold in Gold Canyon near the Carson River in 1849; however he did not stay long. Emigrant accounts note a flurry of activity at the newly-established Mormon Station and nearby Gold Canyon in the summer of 1850. Reese, arriving in Carson Valley from Salt Lake City on or about June 6, 1851, claimed in his memoirs that only Indians were living in the area when he arrived. "[T]he nearest white man, he recalled, was a man in Gold Canyon who had a trading post there before and he wintered there in a kind of small dug-out . . . . The man who lived in Gold Canyon was nick-named Virginia and it was after him that Virginia City was named. . . . I know of no other white man that settled 50 or 100 miles of there before him." Stephen Kinsey, who accompanied Reese, also stated in Myron Angel's *History of Nevada* (1881) that there was no one living in Carson Valley.

However, John Reese is generally credited with establishing the first permanent, non-Indian settlement in what was to become Nevada. For example, federal postal authorities issued a centennial commemorative stamp in 1951. In completing Mormon Station in July 1851--considered the first permanent structure and trading post in the present state of Nevada, Reese laid the foundation for a settlement that Mormon elder and Carson County Probate Court Judge Orson Hyde renamed “Genoa” in 1855. By then, it had grown into a small town with a federal post office and was designated Carson County, Utah Territory's first county seat. Six years later, Genoa became Douglas County, Nevada Territory's first county seat.

At the same time the encampment at the mouth of Gold Canyon where James "Old Virginny" Finney wintered in a rude, make-shift shelter in 1850-51 grew and prospered. By spring 1851, according to California newspapers, emigrant diaries and secondary sources, as many as two hundred miners had joined Finney. Some of them, augmented by newcomers, spent the following winter in the canyon. Many of the new settlers upstream on the Carson River, including John Reese, spent much of their first winter mining in Gold Canyon. Nathaniel R. Haskill and Washington Loomis, who kept a trading post at the canyon's mouth, helped organize the provisional government at Mormon Station in November 1851.

In 1852, placer mining was booming in the canyon. Andrew Spofford Hall, late of Ft. Wayne, Indiana, acquired Haskill and Loomis' trading post after first partnering with them. Hall's Station was purchased by
employees James and Alice McMarlin in early 1854 after Hall suffered a serious injury and returned to the Midwest. Judge Hyde appointed James McMarlin a Carson County Selectman and brother John McMarlin the Gold Canyon Justice of the Peace in 1855.

The Grosh brothers, Allen and Hosea, recognized as the first discoverers of silver in the area, began prospecting in Gold Canyon in 1853. Long-time area resident Laura Ellis and her husband arrived in June 1853 at the mouth of Gold Canyon and found Walter Cosser, his wife, and 12-year-old daughter; Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Pitt; and many miners working in the vicinity. According to Myron Angel's History of Nevada, the first dance by non-Indians was held on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1853, at Hall's Station.

By 1858, the location was generally known as "Chinatown" because of the virtually all Chinese population reworking the placer deposits and digging ditches to convey water from the Carson River up Gold Canyon. On November 3, 1861, the many new town residents voted to rename the community "Dayton" in honor of surveyor John Day. Shortly thereafter, the first Nevada territorial legislature designated Dayton the county seat of Lyon County.

In which community did people first winter—that is, sustain the encampment over an entire winter? That is generally the test of permanence of a community and threshold competitors for the title of Nevada’s first settlement must first cross.

Despite the evidence presented here, the debate will surely continue between residents of Genoa and Dayton over who gets to wear the mantle of Nevada’s first permanent, non-Indian settlement. After all, in this case it’s all about how you define your terms and present the facts.


Few persons recall the days before radios. Fewer yet remember Nevada's first radio station. Was it really KOH of Reno as we've been told over the years?

The technology dates back to 1895 when Guglielmo Marconi became the first person to send radio communication signals through the air. Eleven years later, Reginald Fessenden first transmitted voice and music by radio. By 1910, experimental radio broadcasts were coursing over the airwaves, and the Radio Act of 1912 called for the federal licensing of radio stations. Stations WWJ of Detroit and KDKA of Pittsburgh made the first regular commercial broadcasts in 1920. Licensed radio stations came to Nevada during the "Roaring 20s."

Contrary to popular belief, KOH was not the first licensed radio station in the Silver State, although it was the longest continuously running radio station in Nevada. The first official broadcast was transmitted from the Elks Building in downtown Reno on October 27, 1928. In pre-broadcast tests conducted by the small, 100-watt station, the signal had been heard clearly and distinctly in San Francisco.

However, there were radio stations before KOH in Nevada and some were licensed. Among the earliest was a wireless station at the University of Nevada in 1916. In April 1922, the university was issued a license to operate radio station KOJ, however the station never officially went on the air. In addition, radio hobbyists had small transmitters that could be heard over short range by the growing number of crystal sets.

According to the Nevada State Journal, "Nevada's first radio broadcasting station, KDZK, officially started operations last night [July 21, 1922] . . . . The first program was broadcasted from the Majestic [Theater] between the hours of 8 and 9 and from reports from radio enthusiasts, the program was heard very easily." Credit electrical engineer Frank O. Broili and his brother Julius, who owned Nevada Machinery and Electric Company in Reno, for recognizing the potential of radio for entertainment and news, and underwriting the station's operation.

Initially, the 20 watt station broadcast phonograph music, but soon aired only live music. “The musicians' union was strong enough to prevent the transmission of any music other than that performed by live orchestra,” wrote June Broili in "Frank Broili: The Transformer" (Nevada Historical Society Quarterly, Spring 1975). KDZK increased its output to 50 watts and its air time to three hours per day. Boosting the station, the newspaper claimed that the normal broadcast radius was 500 miles during the evening. KDZK also expanded its format to include a 30 minute news program and featured interviews of guest speakers at the university.

In spite of all KDZK’s efforts, competition for the airwaves proved to be its undoing. A rival station, KFAS of Reno, was issued a license on July 7, 1922 and soon competed for listeners. Hadley S. Beedle owned and operated the station.

Beginning in April 14, 1923, Sparks High School, known then for its manual and technical training, operated a licensed station with the call letters KFFR. As the radio industry dramatically grew, and more powerful stations in California provided enhanced programming through network broadcasting, the Nevada audience expected better programing than KFFR or KDZK could afford to produce.

KOH, 1370 AM, filled the void locally after KDZK left the air. University of Nevada football was first broadcast on September 28, 1929 (BYU 10 - Nevada 7). The station affiliated with the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) the following year and moved its studio and 500 watt transmitter to the north side of Reno. KOH also changed its location on the dial to 1380AM. In 1931, KOH affiliated with the
Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), switching back and forth between NBC and CBS over the years until its current affiliation with the American Broadcasting Company (ABC). The station relocated again in 1940, increased its broadcast output to 1000 watts, and moved to the other end of the radio dial at 630 AM where it remained until 1994.

Today 50,000 watt superstation KOH is now licensed as KKOH, 780 AM, and is no longer the longest continuously operating radio station in Nevada because it was issued a new license in 1994.

Photo: Nevada Historical Society

Western Historic Radio Museum

No! Carson City is not in Carson Valley, despite what some uninformed newcomers to our area may believe. We trust editor Myron Angel's *History of Nevada* (1881) when we are told that Eagle Valley, where our state capital is located, was named by December 1851. Eagle Valley acquired its name from the trading post in the southwest end of the valley where Frank Hall shot and killed an eagle, then stuffed the bird and mounted it over the station entrance door. Hall, who sold his interest in Eagle Station and Ranch in 1853, died in Carson City in 1902. Three years before his death, Hall repeated the story of Eagle Valley's naming to journalist Alfred Doten who published it in his history of Nevada's capital.

But should we always trust Myron Angel's ground breaking work? The myth in this story relates to the sale of Eagle Ranch in 1858 and the events that immediately followed. Virtually every account of the transaction has John B. Mankins selling the ranch, which composed a large portion of Eagle Valley, to Abraham Curry, John J. Musser, Frank M. Proctor, and Benjamin F. Green for a $1,000, "the payment being $500 coin and some mustangs." The story is found in Angel's *History of Nevada* (pp.532-33) and cites Carson City's *Nevada Tribune* of July 17, 1876. Doten, in 1899, claimed it was "... half a dozen mustangs."

Well, what's wrong with this story since the sources are relatively contemporary to the event?! Abe Curry had been dead some three years in 1876, Musser died in 1871, and Proctor and Green had left Nevada. So who related this story to the newspaper, or had the myth of Abe Curry and the founding of Carson City already begun? Clearly, it had!

If one examines the deed transferring the property from "J.B. Mankin[s] to Curry, Proctor & Musser" on August 12, 1858, and filed with the Ormsby County Recorder on June 11, 1862, a number of facts stand out. First of all, B.F. Green, Frank Proctor's father-in-law, was not a partner in the transaction, however he witnessed it and had the deed recorded. Other reliable sources tell us that after the completion of the deal, Proctor gave Green one-half of his one-third holding in the Eagle Ranch. More importantly, while the selling price was $1,000, the down payment was $300 and the balance was to be paid within thirty days. There is no mention of mustangs in the deed, although that does not rule out the possibility that Mankins later took the horses in lieu of cash. Whatever the case, only Doris Cerveri, in writing her biography of Abraham Curry (1990), ever examined the deed to confirm the legal terms of the sale. Angel's account of the Eagle Ranch sale has been repeated *ad nauseam* in publications, and now we find it broadcast throughout the world on history-related websites.

It is also Angel's History of Nevada that gives Abe Curry the status of Carson City's principal founder in 1858 and relegates Musser, Proctor, and Green to the shadows. The truth be known, Curry would not emerge as a mover and shaker in the new town until 1861 following Congress' creation of Nevada Territory. John Musser and Frank Proctor, both prominent attorneys in Sierra County, California, before relocating to western Utah Territory, were far more active than Curry in the political effort to create a new territory. Musser, the former Sierra County District Attorney who ran unsuccessfully for the California State Senate in 1858, was selected as president of a constitutional convention in July 1859. The objective: secede from Utah Territory and create a provisional Nevada Territory. Following the convention in Genoa, he was elected the provisional territory's delegate to Congress and traveled to Washington, D.C. Proctor, the former Sierra County Assessor, while serving as a convention delegate from the Humboldt District was chosen as a vice-president and declared his candidacy for Chief Justice of the Territorial Supreme Court. Curry, too, served as a delegate, yet the records of the convention portray him as a minor player from Eagle Valley.

Abraham Curry, the last to arrive to the California gold country and Sierra County, was indeed the least prominent of the four men who laid out Carson City in Utah Territory. Even Benjamin Green, who was not a full partner in this business consortium, had recently served as Sierra County Treasurer. Curry's
business acumen and perseverance ultimately propelled his career in eclipsing those of his partners prior to his death in 1873.

Looking back, we can say that Curry clearly deserves to be called the “Father” of Carson City for all he did to promote and develop the town. However there were other principal players in the drama and intrigue surrounding the purchase of Eagle Ranch, the founding of Carson City, and the establishing of Nevada Territory that for too long have been overshadowed by the much-deserved tributes to Abe Curry. Curry has a statue on the legislative mall and a street name to remind us of his accomplishments, Musser and Proctor only street names, and Green has been all but forgotten.

Credit Myron Angel for shaping our perceptions over the years and, at times, inadvertently misleading us!


Thanks to the honesty and good work of the late Italo "Pete" Gavazzi of Reno, we now know the claim that Italian opera star Enrico Caruso sang at Virginia City's Piper's Opera House is a classic example of fakelore. Gavazzi grew up on the Comstock, and a letter to this writer explained how as a young boy he was an innocent party to the commercial hoax first perpetrated in the mid-1930s. The Virginia City native, with a penchant for the truth, came forward after some diligent research to set the record straight.

According to Michael Scott, author of The Great Caruso (1988), Enrico Caruso made his American debut on November 23, 1903 at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City, appearing in "Rigoletto." As the world's foremost tenor, he traveled throughout the United States until the end of 1920, exciting crowds with his inspiring vocals. However, he made just two trips to the west coast, playing only San Francisco and Los Angeles.

In 1906, Caruso, appearing in "Carmen," had a one-night appearance in San Francisco on April 17. On the following morning the great earthquake struck, the opera company's properties were destroyed in the subsequent fire, and Caruso and the company considered themselves lucky to escape the holocaust the next day. Caruso refused to ever visit San Francisco again and never returned to the west coast to sing. He died in Naples, Italy in 1921 at the age of 48.

It seems unfathomable that people would believe the "Great Caruso" ever sang in Virginia City, a dying mining town since the 1880s with scarcely 2500 residents by the time Caruso toured the west coast. Piper's Opera House could not have afforded the Metropolitan Opera Company at the time. Besides consulting the comprehensive chronology of Caruso's appearances in Scott's detailed biography, Italo Gavazzi examined issues of the Territorial Enterprise for 1905 and 1906 and found no mention of Caruso on the Comstock.

So how did this hoodwinking of the public get started? Clearly, the public's memory was short. Within fifteen years of Caruso's death, one Paul Smith directed Gavazzi, then a teenager, to hand-letter a sign stating that Caruso was among the many celebrities who appeared at Piper's Opera House. Following in the tradition of P.T. Barnum, Smith, who had the concession for taking tourists through the Opera House at the time, figured that no one would or could expose his deception. And like Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, who for awhile was duped by the Duke and the Dauphin's hucksterism before he exposed them as frauds, Gavazzi late in life demonstrated that Caruso never played Virginia City's Piper's Opera House. In his letter Gavazzi labeled the whole charade "a figment of Paul Smith's imagination."

If we can forgive Huck for his innocent role in the Duke and the Dauphin's duplicity, we can certainly find it in our hearts to hold Gavazzi blameless for Paul Smith's trickery. Mark Twain, who spent time on the Comstock in the 1860s and perpetrated a few hoaxes of his own, certainly had a place in his heart for the wronged innocent.

There must be something special about claiming you have the first whatever west of the Mississippi River, especially elevators. I debunked the myth that the Goldfield Hotel, completed in 1908, had the first electric elevator west of the Mississippi. In fact, the Otis Elevator Company, after perfecting the new technology in 1889, sold the first electric elevator west of the Mississippi to a party in Spokane, Washington on September 12, 1890. Probably every western state has examples of their bogus firsts, however it seems to me Nevada takes it to the extreme in hyping its past for tourist and newcomer consumption.

Another claim of an "elevator-first" appeared in the Reno Gazette-Journal on January 12, 1998. The story which focused on an effort to build "a 204-room reincarnation of the original [International Hotel in Virginia City]," noted that "[t]he third and final International opened in 1877 and was considered one of the finest in the world, featuring the only elevator west of the Mississippi, until it, too, burned down in 1914." Why Virginia City would have a passenger elevator before much larger cities west of the Mississippi like St. Louis and San Francisco is difficult to fathom. Wells Drury, in his book An Editor On The Comstock Lode (1936), played it safe and noted "[t]he International Hotel in Virginia City had one of the very first elevators west of the Mississippi River" (p. 121).

The source of the claim was the developer himself who had heard the story after coming to Nevada. A check of the excellent history of the hotel, Elegance on C Street, Virginia City's International Hotel (1977) by Richard C. Datin, would have saved everyone the embarrassment of perpetuating this promotional hype. According to Datin, "[i]n one corner of the lobby was the first hydraulic elevator ever erected in Nevada, which worked on the same plan as those in San Francisco, but with nearly three times the pressure at 125 pounds to their 45." Hydraulic elevators had just been invented and the passenger elevators in Virginia City and San Francisco were among the first in the country.

Pre-hydraulic passenger elevators had been invented by 1857 and the Otis Elevator Company installed their first one in a store in New York City in the same year. By 1875, according to the Otis Elevator Company Historic Archives in Farmington, Connecticut, the company had installed passenger and freight elevators throughout the United States including in New Orleans, St. Louis, and at the Occidental Hotel in San Francisco. In addition, the Otis Company was not the only elevator manufacturer in the country at the time. San Francisco's Palace Hotel, which opened on October 2, 1875, had five elevators.

Repeating and expanding on my warning from "The First Electric Elevator West of the Mississippi" story, beware the claim that something or somebody was first, last, youngest, oldest, biggest, or smallest. More often than not, it isn't true! Anyway, it never hurts to ask how do they know and can they prove it. People can say anything, and generally do.
Myth #27: Is Carson City the Largest Capital Area-Wise in the USA? by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

While Carsonites have reluctantly relinquished the title of America’s smallest state capital (population-wise our capital city lost that distinction almost 50 years ago to Montpelier, Vermont), one misperception seemingly has replaced another. It is sometimes heard around town that when Ormsby County and Carson City were consolidated in 1969 into one political unit, the new and bigger Carson City, at 155.7 sq. miles, had become the largest capital, if not the largest city, area-wise in the United States.

Such was not the case. In 1968, the city of Jacksonville, Florida, and Duval County consolidated into one government. With an area of some 885 sq. miles, Jacksonville is the largest city in the continental United States.

During the 1960s, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma’s state capital, annexed many surrounding communities, briefly becoming the nation’s largest capital. Oklahoma City was much larger than Carson City when the Silver State’s capital became a consolidated government in 1969. Today, Oklahoma City, at 621.2 sq. miles, is the second-largest state capital in physical size.

When Alaska’s state capital, Juneau, merged with the City of Douglas and the Juneau Borough in 1970, Jacksonville and Oklahoma City lost their respective "largest city" and "largest capital" titles. Today, Juneau is the largest city and the largest state capital in the United States. Its political boundaries include 3,255 sq. miles, making it larger than Rhode Island (1,545 sq. miles) or Delaware (2,489 sq. miles).

Try as we might to promote our state capital’s uniqueness, Carson City is neither the smallest capital in population (ranked 38th in population in the 2000 U.S. Census) nor the largest in physical size (currently ranked 9th in size). While other cities and state capitals continue to annex lands and grow ever larger, it is unlikely that Carson City will someday expand its boundaries at the expense of Douglas, Lyon, Storey, and/or Washoe counties. At the same time, much of the land in Carson City is federally-managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, the Washoe Tribe maintains two colonies, and a small portion of Lake Tahoe is within the capital’s borders.

However, we can take great pride in the fact that Carson City has been Nevada’s first and only capital since 1861 -- that is if the state legislature does not move the capital to Las Vegas. Dating back to their pre-statehood beginnings, only ten states have managed to keep their seat of government in only one place (the last time any capital was moved was in 1910 from Guthrie to Oklahoma City).

Photo: Nevada State Library and Archives

So why all the talk about changing the state constitution and moving the capital to Las Vegas? Going back to 1861, Nevada's territorial and state capital has always been Carson City. Surprisingly, only ten states including the Silver State can claim having just one capital during their colonial, territorial and/or statehood periods.

Las Vegas and Clark County's population have grown so fast and so large in the last 20 years, almost two million residents in the metro area, that some people expect Las Vegas legislators to move the capital to southern Nevada. In January 2001, a Las Vegas newspaper columnist made a statement proposing the move to provoke a reaction. The assumption is when any city gets big enough it may take the state capital by political force similar to a county seat battle. But is that really how the scenario has played out in American history?

It has been 100 years since a state capital has been relocated in the United States. In 1910, Oklahoma's capital was moved from Guthrie to Oklahoma City. The effort to remove Juneau as Alaska's capital shortly after statehood in 1959 proved abortive. When capitals have been moved, it occurred not long after statehood, and almost always to a city considered more centrally located in the state.

For example, Alabama, admitted to the Union in 1819, had three capitals before finally settling on Montgomery in 1847 near the center of the state. Columbus in the heart of Ohio became the third capital 13 years after statehood in 1803. Other examples of moving the state capital to a more central location include Pennsylvania (Philadelphia to Harrisburg), South Carolina (Charleston to Columbia), Michigan (Detroit to Lansing), Illinois (Vandalia to Springfield), Iowa (Iowa City to Des Moines), and California (Benicia to Sacramento). Most importantly, all these moves were made so early in the states' histories there was practically no capital infrastructure--principally buildings--to abandon.

Nevada's Constitution prohibited an appropriation for a state capitol until 1869 in case the capital was moved to a more central location after statehood was conferred in 1864. The capitol building was completed in 1871. However, some legislators still held out for moving the capital. With the completion of the Virginia & Truckee Railroad to Reno in 1872, The Daily Nevada Tribune of January 2, 1875 editorialized, "It is now a foregone conclusion that Carson City will for all time to come be the seat of government of the State of Nevada. The location is by far the best in the state," the Tribune continued, "and as easy of access as any place, now that the railroad runs direct to it." The 1875 legislature approved monies for a fence and landscaping around the capitol after the Tribune complained that it was "a disgrace to the state to let the grounds remain longer in their present condition."

When the last significant efforts were made to move the capital to Winnemucca or Goldfield in the first two decades of the 20th century, the capitol complex in Carson City included only the capitol, printing building, orphan's home, and prison. Today the capital infrastructure in Carson City is composed of scores of buildings, including separate edifices for the Supreme Court (1937 and 1992) and the legislature (1971 and 1996-7) which were once housed in the capitol. Moreover, thousands of state employees live in and around Carson City.

State capitals just are not moved anymore, whether or not new metro areas emerge, or the existing capital is not central to the state's citizens. Florida's capital located in the state's panhandle, for example, has not moved from Tallahassee, the territorial and state capital since 1823, either to Miami (although much of the state's population is in south Florida over 400 miles away), or, more recently, to booming Orlando in the middle of the state. Texas has not relocated its capital from Austin, the state capital since 1845 and the Republic's capital before statehood, to Dallas or Houston. And our neighbor to the west, California, has kept the capital in Sacramento since 1854 despite the tremendous growth in southern California over the last 100 years.
In major cities like New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Miami that do not serve as capitals, and are not centrally-located like long-standing capitals Denver, Phoenix, and Indianapolis, there are sizeable satellite office complexes. Las Vegas has the Grant Sawyer and Lewis Bradley buildings, and many other structures to meet the state governmental needs of southern Nevadans. Surely, more buildings will be constructed in the 21st century in and around Las Vegas without having to move the capital for the first time in Nevada's history.

Photo: Nevada State Library and Archives

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, May 1998 edition)
Myth #29: Wanted: The Real Reno by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

Who was Reno, Nevada, named after? And for that matter, Reno, Pennsylvania; Fort Reno, Wyoming; Reno County, Kansas; and El Reno, Oklahoma?

Those who don't know generally say Major Marcus Albert Reno, the officer who, until his exoneration in recent years, bore the blame for the defeat of Lt. Colonel George Armstrong Custer's troops at the Little Big Horn in June 1876.

But, there was another Reno—Union General Jesse Lee Reno who was shot off his horse and killed on September 14, 1862 at the battle of Fox's Gap, South Mountain, Maryland, during the Civil War. Charles Crocker, the railroad construction superintendent for the Central Pacific Railroad, and his partners at the behest of General Irvin McDowell, officially named the new town at Lake's Crossing on the Truckee River for Jesse Reno, not Marcus Reno. The public first learned of the naming in the April 23, 1868 issue of the Auburn, California, Stars and Stripes:

The name of the new town on the C.P.R.R. at the junction of the contemplated branch road to Virginia City in Nevada, is Reno, in honor of General Reno, who fell gloriously fighting in defense [sic] of the flag against the assault of traitors in rebellion . . . .

Predating the founding of Reno, Nevada, the Kansas state legislature created Reno County, near Wichita, on February 26, 1867 to honor the fallen war hero who had also served in the Mexican War. Fort Reno, in the Wyoming country of Dakota Territory, was named for Jesse Reno in 1865. It burned in 1868. Reno, Pennsylvania, clearly was named for Jesse Reno, who lived in nearby Franklin, Venango County, during the 1830s with his family. The new town of Reno was named in his honor in 1865. El Reno, founded in 1889 in central Oklahoma, was named after nearby Fort Reno, and yes, you guessed it, Ft. Reno was named after Union General Jesse Reno in 1874.

So why all the confusion? Because people generally remember Marcus Reno for the controversial Little Big Horn campaign, and few persons know today there was an army general by the name of Jesse Reno who died in the Civil War.

We can lay some of the blame for the erroneous connection in Nevada on the doorstep of Sam Davis' History of Nevada (1913). Editor W.W. Booth of the Tonopah Daily Bonanza wrote in 1914 that the two-volume chronicle was "not a correct or true history of Nevada." An article published in the state history by Major G. W. Ingalls, a former military officer and director of the Nevada Chamber of Commerce, claimed that Reno was named for Marcus Reno, although the founding of the railroad town was eight years before the battle of the Little Big Horn in Montana Territory.

Marcus Reno prior to "Custer's Last Stand" in 1876 was just another commissioned officer. Major Ingalls had a rich and varied career; however, he was no historian and failed to properly identify Reno's namesake just 45 years after the town began.

A comprehensive article on how the community of Reno acquired its name appeared in the fall 1984 issue of the Nevada Historical Society Quarterly. In addition, Reno resident Colonel Bill McConnell authored a biography of Major General Jesse Lee Reno (1996) and has done much to set the record straight.

An impressive statue of General Reno was dedicated on Memorial Day, May 29, 2006 at Powning Park - one hundred and thirty-eight years after the town was named.


Photo: Nevada Historical Society

Myth #30: Seeing Justice in Virginia City by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

Justice is blind. Well, not in Virginia City. A statue of Lady Justice on the Storey County Courthouse wears no blindfold. For years, Comstock residents claimed that their Justice was some kind of rarity, if not downright unique.

Thanks to Ron James, Nevada's State Historic Preservation Officer, we know better. In his work *Temples of Justice: County Courthouses of Nevada* (1994), James noted that the Storey County Commission ordered an unblindfolded justice to adorn the courthouse built to replace the one burned in the great fire of October 1875. Alfred Doten's *Gold Hill Daily News* was inspired to comment on the proposed Lady Justice:

"The facade will be ornamented by a figure representing Justice, with scales and sword that are orthodoxly supposed to belong to her. In the drawing she is represented without her eyes being blindfolded, which may be objected by some as unconventional, but when one considers that this representative dispenser of awards and punishments will be compelled to stand out and take all the sand thrown in her eyes by the Washoe zephyrs, it will be readily conceded that her eyesight would not last long enough for her to get so much as a glimpse of the great wealth to be obtained by wickedly swaying the scales of Right and Wrong. It makes but little difference whether the blind is on or off."

Some argued that Storey County's Lady Justice without a blindfold was some kind of commentary on frontier justice. "For the Greeks and the Romans," James counters, "Justice was a virgin with an unerring instinct for fairness. She did not need a blindfold. German artists of the sixteenth century had a different point of view. Appalled by the courts, they satirized Justice as blindfolded and staggering around the courtroom." James goes on to note that "Justice eventually shed the negative meaning of her blindfold, which became a standard part of her image. Still, some artists have rejected it. After all, if Justice is truly just, she need not be blind."

While the large zinc statue on the 1877 Storey County courthouse is unusual, it is not rare.

James in a cursory survey of Lady Justices in North America and the United Kingdom found over twenty similar unblindfolded statues scattered from Benton, County, Oregon (1888-89) to the Old Bailey in London, England (1907). Among the most recent was a statue sculpted by W. C. "Brother Rat" Stanton unveiled for the Madison County, North Carolina courthouse in 1973.

So, in the end, justice is not blind in Virginia City. However I can't help but wonder what Mark Twain would have written if he knew about the conspicuous courthouse statue in his old stomping grounds.

Photo: by Ronald M. James

Surely the Silver State's capitol "dome"--technically it's a cupola--was once covered with silver! It was, if you believe virtually every tour guide and bus driver talking to unsuspecting tourists. The literature on the state capitol is replete with references to a "silver dome." After all, other state capitols have cupolas or domes covered with gold or made of copper, and Nevada's Comstock was queen of the silver camps in the mid-19th century.

The oft-repeated story notes that with the seismic retrofitting of the capitol in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the "silver dome" was replaced with a silver-colored fiberglass cupola. However, the tale continues, when the capitol was completed in Carson City in 1871, the octagonal bell-shaped cupola gleamed in the sun because it was made of silver from Nevada's booming mines. Silver seemed to be everywhere then, and the Carson City mint was turning silver bullion into American coins, so why wouldn't the capitol cupola be made of silver. It only stands to reason.

Or does it? What seems a logical assumption is dead wrong! The State of Nevada has seldom been one for extravagance, and the metal used to cover the capitol cupola bears it out. In referring to the new capitol in Carson City, Virginia City's Territorial Enterprise (January 3, 1871) pointed out that "[t]he cupola has a curved roof, covered with tin, and is formed in sections to suit the octagon base of the structure." That's right, the "silver dome" was made of tin (actually tin-plated steel called charcoal tinplate). It only looked like silver because of the shiny surface painted silver in color (before 1876 the cupola was painted with "Princess Red" fireproof paint). If the cupola had been made of silver, its surface would have oxidized with prolonged exposure to air and moisture and turned black. Maintenance costs to keep the cupola gleaming would have been prohibitive. The Capitol Annex dome and two other small cupolas dating to 1906 are still covered with tin-plate panels painted silver.

When and where the story of a "silver capitol dome" started is a matter of conjecture. The why is probably because a silver cupola sounds a lot better in the Silver State than a tin cupola. And if it wasn't true, it should have been! However, construction-related records in the Nevada State Library and Archives bear out the truth to the story behind the "silver dome" of the capitol, and so do the workers who peeled the metal covering off the old cupola in March 1978.

Photo: Nevada Magazine

For more than a century, popular lore has given one of Jim Butler's burros credit for the Tonopah mineral discovery in 1900. It's a great story and the tale has been incorporated into the Jim Butler Days celebration held in the Nye county seat since 1970. But was it true?

It's certainly not the first story of a wayward burro accidentally discovering great riches. On September 4, 1885, supposedly prospector Noah Kellogg found his missing burro at a silver outcropping in northern Idaho. The property became the highly-productive Bunker Hill and Sullivan mines. The nearby town of Kellogg has a humorous sign which proudly proclaims: "This is a town founded by a jackass and inhabited by his descendants."

One widely-accepted version of the Tonopah story can be found in the *White Pine News* of August 6, 1911:

"On the 19th day of May, 1900, the donkey, a restive little beast, was the direct means of bringing the desert's wealth to Butler's attention. The latter, picking up a bit of rock, was about to hurl it through space with the intent of fetching the errant son of Balsam to his senses; but the rock looked so much like the real thing, that instead of throwing it at the donkey Butler took it to town for assay. It showed values as high as $152 in gold and three hundred and fifty-five ounces in silver; so he and Belle [Butler's wife] went out to locate properties."

However, if one reads Butler's own account of the find in a November 19, 1902 letter to the State Land Register, there is no mention of a donkey or burro playing a role in the discovery that inaugurated Nevada's 20th century mining boom and reinvigorated the dying state:

"Tonopah is an Indian name, which I learned when a boy, signifies a small spring. The Indians, on their periodical trips from the Cowich [Kawich] Mountains and other places to Rhodes' Salt Marsh, camped at this spring. Rich mines had been discovered in the San Antonio range, and the country being highly mineralized, I long considered the mountains in the vicinity of the spring a good field for the prospector. Attention to other matters kept me away from the range until May, 1900 when I left Belmont, the county seat of Nye County, on a prospecting expedition to the south. I passed over the Manhattan Mountains, left Rye Patch and traveled all day to the spring known by the Indians as Tonopah, near which I found quartz. I followed up the float and found leads. There was bold, black croppings of fine-grained quartz, showing a great quantity of mineral, so much in fact that I considered it of very little or no value. However, I took several samples, passed over a great number of ledges, went on about four miles and camped on May 19th near what is now known as the Gold Mountain mines, and I saw those leads also, but, as they were small compared with the large ledges I had discovered early in the day, I did not think much of them, though I took samples with me which I afterwards had assayed. The first sample from Tonopah which I had assayed contained 395 ounces in silver and 15 ounces in gold to the ton."

There is more to the letter. Suffice it to say Butler said nothing to embellish the discovery, and he had ample opportunity to mention a wayward burro. Other accounts of the prospecting foray more concerned with fact than fable, particularly Sally Zanjani's *A Mine of Her Own* (1997), suggest that Western Shoshone tribespeople and probably one Tom Fisherman, told Butler, fluent in the Shoshone language, that he might find precious minerals at and around Tonopah. According to Robert McCracken in *A History of Tonopah, Nevada* (1990), "Thus, the tale of Jim Butler camping in Sawtooth Pass and picking a black stone to throw at his burro, then noting the unusual weight of the stone, is probably myth."

Looking back today, it is interesting to note that people in the early 1900s were more than willing to credit a burro over an Indian in playing a role in the discovery at Tonopah. Equally as noteworthy is that Belle Butler, escorting Jim on a return visit on August 25, 1900 to locate claims, identified and named the Mizpah location which would become the richest property in Tonopah.
In the end Tom Fisherman, a Western Shoshone, and Belle Butler, a woman, had as much to do with the discoveries at Tonopah as Jim Butler. Maybe Jim Butler Days can celebrate the real contributions of Tom and Belle as well as Jim at the expense of the legendary burro.

Photo: Nevada Historical Society

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, September 1998 edition)
Following the lead of Myron Angel's trailblazing *History of Nevada* (1881), many historians, journalists, and just about anybody with an interest in Reno's history concluded that 1863 was the year Myron Charles Lake established Lake's Crossing in Nevada Territory. As the story goes, the enterprising Lake traded his Honey Lake property in nearby California to Charles William Fuller for the land now occupied by downtown Reno. Fuller had arrived in the Truckee Meadows late in 1859, following the discovery of the nearby Comstock Lode, and by early the next year had built a hotel and a bridge across the Truckee River.

Other dates have been claimed for Lake's permanent move to Nevada, and included every year from 1859 to 1862. Ironically, the mystery could have been solved years ago by examining old newspapers. On June 29, 1861, Lake placed an advertisement in Virginia City's *Territorial Enterprise* with the headline "Bridge and Hotel at Fuller's Crossing." The ad ran for three months, noting Lake's purchase of the hotel and bridge that Fuller had built in early 1860. With many people traveling from California to the booming Comstock, Lake's most attractive selling point was the strategic location of the crossing. The transcontinental Central Pacific railroad connection and the founding of Reno would come in 1868, followed by the Virginia & Truckee railroad link to the Comstock in 1872.

Not long before his death in Reno, noted Nevada Artist Cyrinus B. McClellan depicted Lakes Crossing and Myron Lake in 1882 in an oil painting entitled "Reno 20 years ago." The historic illustration of the Truckee River crossing may have been McClellan's last work. Lake, who died in Reno in 1884 at the age of 56, has long been considered the town's founding father.

The lesson to be learned in this little vignette is that one should corroborate with primary documentation whenever possible. For more than a century, people unquestionably trusted Myron Angel's *History of Nevada*, assuming virtually everything in the book was accurate because it was a revered, old history text.

A word to the wise: when studying early Nevada history you should start with Angel's book, but don't finish there! There is more homework to do!

Note: For more detailed information on this subject, see "Reno's First Robber Baron" by Guy Rocha in the March/April 1980 issue of Nevada Magazine.

Photo: Nevada State Museum

Probably no hotel in Nevada has claimed more has happened within its walls when, in fact, it didn't happen there at all. For years promoters, managers, and owners of Tonopah's Mizpah Hotel, about halfway between Las Vegas and Reno on U.S. Highway 95, have taken great liberties with the past to enhance the history of the business and attract more patrons. The marketing strategy is an old and unsophisticated one and incorporates the "George Washington slept here" approach. As is almost always the case, the burden of proof lies with the consumer proving the claim wrong, rather than the person disseminating the information demonstrating with some evidence that the assertion is true.

Let's start with famed gunfighter and lawman Wyatt Earp. Despite the claim to the contrary, Earp had no verifiable association with the Mizpah Hotel. Yes, Wyatt, and his wife Josie, lived in Tonopah in 1902 running a saloon, prospecting, and pursuing other business. However the Mizpah Hotel only dates back to 1907-08. By then the Earps were long gone, living virtually the rest of their lives in the Los Angeles area and prospecting along the Colorado River. Brother Virgil had died in nearby Goldfield in 1905, and while Wyatt and Josie may have left LA to visit Virgil prior to his death in October, there is no record of the couple ever returning to central Nevada after 1905. The truth in this story probably relates to the Mizpah Saloon and Grill, a landmark wood-frame structure, located at the site of the Mizpah Hotel before it was built. Earp may have frequented the business before it was moved to the south end of Tonopah to make way for the Mizpah Hotel in 1907.

In another column, I demonstrated the claim was preposterous that long-time Democratic U.S. Senator Key Pittman of Nevada had died prior to the 1940 general election and his body kept on ice at the Mizpah Hotel. Records, newspapers, and an interview with Dr. "Bart" Hood, Pittman's personal physician, clearly indicate that Key died in Reno's Washoe General Hospital some 4 days after the election. The November 5 edition of the Nevada State Journal noted that Pittman was hospitalized and would not be able to travel to Tonopah to cast his vote as was his custom. The senator's wife, Mimosa, arrived at his bedside on Election Day from Washington, D.C. Her journal stated that she saw her husband alive and conscious: "Went straight to hospital with Dr. Hood. Key happy."

Despite the bogus frozen body tale repeated in the controversial book The Green Felt Jungle (1963), and, at one time, on the hotel's Key Pittman Restaurant menu, the story is really about keeping the news of Pittman's terminal illness, linked to a massive heart attack, from the voters. Following Pittman's death, Governor "Ted" Carville, a Democrat, could then appoint another Democrat to the vacant seat—which he did in appointing Berkeley Bunker of Las Vegas.

Moving ahead in time 17 years, a myth has seemingly developed around multi-millionaire and eccentric Howard Hughes's secretive second marriage to Hollywood actress Jean Peters in Tonopah. We know from marriage records and other later biographical accounts that early in the morning on January 12, 1957, Hughes, Peters, and a few select Hughes' associates, flew from the LA area to the former Tonopah Army Air Base in a new 120-passenger TWA Constellation (Hughes owned TWA at the time). The commonly-accepted story goes the troupe was shuttled to the Mizpah Hotel, where several rooms had been reserved. Under the assumed names of G. A. Johnson of Las Vegas (Hughes) and Marian Evans of Los Angeles (Peters), the couple was married. Their first honeymoon night was not spent in Tonopah, but rather in LA following a quick return flight. According to the account in Empire, a Hughes biography published in 1979, "[t]he entire operation took about three hours."

Hughes' veil of secrecy lasted for quite some time. Rumor abounded in Hollywood and elsewhere of the marriage, but no press accounts appeared until March 1957, and they were full of distortions as to when and where the couple were wedded. Tonopah was not mentioned in any of the stories. In fact, the Nye County marriage certificate with the fictitious names was not filed in the county recorder's office until May 27 by District Attorney William P. Beko (later long-time district judge).
Eventually the facts came out that Hughes and Peters were actually married in Tonopah. Yet according to LeRoy David, a Nye County Democratic Assemblyman at the time, Mr. and Mrs. Hughes, a.k.a. the Johnsons, were married in his apartment at the L&L Motel (razed in 2005) and not at the Mizpah Hotel (the biography Empire referred to a second-floor room in "a nondescript motel"). David, late in life, had mistakenly credited Justice of the Peace Tom McCulloch with marrying the couple—McCulloch was not elected JP until November 1958. Actually the marriage certificate shows long-time JP Walter Bowler conducted the brief wedding ceremony. In an interview in 2002 with Associated Press reporter Martin Griffith, a former Hughes attorney, D. Martin Cook, said, "the only people in the motel room other than the happy couple and himself were Hughes aide James Arditto and Justice of the Peace Walter Bowler, who performed the five-minute ceremony." Arditto had arranged the Tonopah wedding with the assistance of Las Vegas City Attorney Howard Cannon, who was later a long-time U.S. Senator from Nevada.

Jean Peters obtained a divorce from Howard Hughes in Hawthorne on June 18, 1971.

So has anything happened at the Mizpah Hotel that corresponds with the claims made over the years?

Well, some people claim Jack Dempsey held a job at the Mizpah Hotel. Dempsey, who won the world's heavyweight title in 1919 from Jess Willard, fought a number of fights in Nevada including against Johnny Sudenberg in Tonopah on June 13, 1915. Dempsey, originally from Colorado, got into the fight game in 1911 and bounced around Nevada for a few years until Tex Rickard, one of the great boxing promoters of the day, took him to the big time. There are no known published sources to prove conclusively whether or not Dempsey worked at the Mizpah, and he has been dead since 1983. However, he wrote in his 1960 autobiography "I never was a saloon bouncer in my life," casting considerable doubt on the widely-publicized claim that he was once a bouncer in the bar of the Tonopah hotel. William Pettite of Fair Oaks, California—a friend and associate of Jack Dempsey late in Dempsey's life—wrote in a letter dated January 12, 2001, that "[Dempsey] was never a bouncer anywhere… never worked at the Mizpah Hotel… and never met Tex Rickard until 1919 in New Jersey."

Photo: Nevada Historical Society

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, November 1998 edition)
That's right, Mormon Station in Carson Valley, Utah Territory, was renamed Genoa in 1855 not 1856! An excellent master's thesis written by Albert R. Page at Brigham Young University, entitled "Orson Hyde and the Carson Valley Mission, 1855-1857," set the record straight in 1970. Once again, the source of the error is the venerated History of Nevada, edited by long-time journalist Myron Angel and published by the well-established firm of Thomas Thompson & Albert West in Oakland, California in 1881. Virtually every Nevada history book since Thompson and West's publication has repeated the mistake.

Anyone who consults History of Nevada should read respected author David Myrick's excellent introduction to the 1958 edition to understand how the first history of Nevada came to be. In 1880, Thompson & West hired the equivalent of an army of editors, writers, and clerical staff to research, write, and publish the History of Nevada over a sixteen month period.

It was a tremendous undertaking fraught with logistical challenges. So much so that Angel after taking over the editorial duties from Col. Frank Gilbert and faced with the daunting task of editing the accumulated information, wrote that "[a] mass of material had been gathered by different parties from many sources, often conflicting, contradictory and irrelevant . . . ." Thompson and West, in praising the work of some of the contributors, went on to note, "[o]f those of our employees who proved themselves incompetent or recreant to the trust, and whose work required entire revision and rewriting, the less said the better."

Despite all of Angel's diligent double-checking of facts and copy-editing, errors crept into the history text. Myrick mentioned a number of them in the 1958 introduction. I identify many more inaccuracies in this and other myth-busting columns.

Angel claimed that Orson Hyde, Carson County's probate judge and one of the twelve apostles of the LDS Church, surveyed Mormon Station, made a town plat, and named the community Genoa in the spring of 1856. On the other hand, a letter dated September 30, 1855 from Hyde to church president and territorial governor Brigham Young announced that Genoa had been recently named:

They voted [on September 20] however for the very place which my mind was fixed as the most suitable place for the county seat. Consequently I am satisfied, and the people are satisfied, and I am relieved of the responsibility; and conscientiously confirmed and honored the vote of the people. It is named "Genoa," after the birthplace of Columbus, him who discovered this glorious land.

Hyde does not take credit for the naming of Genoa, although he is generally credited by others including Mormon Station founder John Reese in his memoirs (1884). Myrtle Stevens Hyde wrote in her biography Orson Hyde The Olive Branch of Israel (2000), "Orson surveyed the streets of Genoa....This gave him the distinction of naming the first town and laying out the first streets in what would later become the state of Nevada."

One uncorroborated story suggests that the location was named Genoa because of its similar appearance to Genoa, Italy's harbor and mountainous backdrop. While there appears to be some mystery surrounding the origin of the name, thanks to the good work of Albert Page we know that Genoa was named in 1855, and not in 1856. In the end, Page in writing his thesis had access to Orson Hyde's letters to Brigham Young housed in the LDS Church Archives in Salt Lake City. Myron Angel and his staff, ninety years earlier, were not as fortunate.

Photo: Nevada Historical Society; Orson Hyde (1805-1878) One of the Twelve Apostles of the Mormon Church, Hyde established the first official local government in Nevada in 1855, when Nevada was still part of Utah Territory.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, December 1998 edition)
The Nevada Trivia Book (1998) asks the question, "When did Las Vegas get its first post office?" The answer: "In 1892 the U.S. Postal Service opened an office in the then-tiny hamlet of Las Vegas." Actually, the Nevada post office known as Los Vegas--perhaps to distinguish it from Las Vegas, New Mexico Territory--was established on June 24, 1893. The remote post office in the Mojave Desert went by that name until December 9, 1903, according to Nevada Post Offices: An Illustrated History (1983), when its name was changed to Las Vegas. Less than two years later, the town of Las Vegas was founded by the San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake Railroad Company.

But, there is more to the story. Las Vegas' first post office by another name dates back to August 1, 1855, only eleven years after American explorer John C. Fremont camped in the valley. The post office was named Bringhurst. On June 14, William Bringhurst, at the direction of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day-Saints' President Brigham Young, had established a Mormon colony at Las Vegas--"the meadows" in Spanish--near the Old Spanish Trail. The LDS settlement in western New Mexico Territory, it was hoped, would prosper and serve as a supply point for travelers on the Mormon Trail between Salt Lake City, Utah Territory and Los Angeles, California. While the post office name honored Bringhurst, the name also may have been chosen to distinguish it from the other Las Vegas in eastern New Mexico Territory.

The colony lasted less than two years. The harsh climate, alkaline soil, crop raids by southern Paiutes, internal dissension over lead mining at nearby Mount Potosi, and other matters, doomed the colonization effort. Mormons assigned to the Las Vegas mission were released from their obligation in the spring of 1857. Within two years all had left. The Bringhurst post office, however, was not officially discontinued until September 22, 1860. Others settled in the Las Vegas Valley following the exodus of the Mormons, and the area changed hands from New Mexico Territory to Arizona Territory in 1863 and then to Nevada in 1867, but the numbers and activity did not justify reestablishing a post office until 1893.

Now we know Las Vegas' first post office dates back to 1855, was named Bringhurst not Las Vegas, and, to borrow a well-known phrase from radio personality Paul Harvey, "that's the rest of the story."

Note: For additional information see Ralph Roske and Michael Green's article, "Gass' Station," in the September/October 1989 issue of Nevada Magazine.

Photo: University of Nevada Las Vegas Library

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, January 1999 edition)
"It's far better the legislature meet every sixty years for two days than every two years for sixty days." This hilarious quip makes the rounds seemingly every legislative session in Nevada. Samuel Clemens, a.k.a. Mark Twain, not surprisingly, is generally credited for the humorous quote (and not cowboy humorist Will Rogers or former New York Yankee Yogi Berra who get credit for virtually everything Twain doesn't). A Reno newspaper editor asked me if Twain, who lived in Nevada Territory and covered two legislative sessions for Virginia City's *Territorial Enterprise*, actually authored the witty saying.

Persons familiar with Samuel Clemens' career in Nevada contacted by telephone and e-mail, including biographer Margaret Sanborn and Mark Twain Papers staff at the University of California's Bancroft Library, had never heard of the quote. "None of them knew the quote," wrote doctoral candidate Louis Suarez referring to the senior editors of the Mark Twain Papers, "and all of them thought it very clever indeed." Twain aficionados, writer and reporter Jon Christensen and journalist Professor "Jake" Highton of the University of Nevada, Reno, said that if he didn't say it, he would have!

Be that as it may, an exhaustive search of Twain's extant writings, including *Roughing It* (1872), failed to uncover the quote about Nevada's legislature. There is no record of saying the quote while "Governor" of the "Third House," a body created to lampoon and satirize the 1861, 1862 and 1864 territorial sessions and the first Constitutional Convention in 1863. Someone else may have made the pithy observation, but if there is another author, then he or she remains unknown.

The irony in attributing the quote to Mark Twain is that when the young reporter was covering the sessions, the territorial assemblage was meeting about once a year and not every two years. Referring to the 1864 Territorial Legislature in *Roughing It*, he remarked "there was no longer satisfying variety in going down to Carson to report on the proceedings of the legislature once a year...." The biennial sessions began in 1867 almost three years after Twain left Nevada for California.

However, Twain had choice things to say about legislatures. In an address entitled, "Americans and the English," delivered on July 4, 1872 after leaving Nevada and California forever and taking up residence in Hartford, Connecticut, he said: "I think I can say, and say with pride, that we have some legislatures that bring higher prices than any in the world." There are persons who agree with Twain and argue little has changed.

Photo: *Gold Hill Daily News*, February 11, 1864

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, February 1999 edition)
An Associated Press (AP) story—datelined San Francisco, January 11, 1999—noted that Levi Strauss & Co.’s president had just stepped down. The news article also gave Levi Strauss credit for inventing the prototype for 501 jeans. “San Francisco-based Levi’s, founded in 1853 by a Bavarian entrepreneur who designed the riveted work jeans for Gold Rush miners,” the news report stated, “increasingly has been looking outside the company to fill its management positions.”

The reporter failed to do his history homework. While Levi Strauss sold work jeans, it was an obscure, Jewish tailor working at 31 Virginia Street in Reno who added the rivets. A federal patent-infringement case filed in February 1874 in the U.S. Circuit Court of California (Levi Strauss, et. al. vs. A.B. Elfelt, et. al.), and housed in the National Archives regional branch in San Bruno, south of San Francisco, contains the facts.

Born in 1831, Jacob Youphes was a native of Riga (now the capital of Latvia) near the Baltic Sea. The German Jew changed his name to Jacob W. Davis after immigrating to the United States in 1854 and operated a tailor shop in New York City and Augusta, Maine. In 1856, he arrived to San Francisco and shortly thereafter moved north to Weaverville to work as a tailor. With the gold rush to Fraser River in 1858, he left California for western Canada where he lived for nine years, married, and started a family.

Davis returned to San Francisco by ship from Victoria, British Columbia, in January 1867. He soon traveled to Virginia City, Nevada where he first opened a cigar store, but within three months he again turned to his trade as a tailor. In June 1868, he relocated once again, this time to the fledgling railroad town of Reno. Investing in a brewery, he lost virtually everything. By 1869, he had opened a tailor shop on the town’s main thoroughfare, Virginia Street. He began fabricating wagon covers and tents from a rugged off-white duck cloth sold by San Francisco’s Levi Strauss & Co.

Events in January 1871 changed Jacob Davis’ life forever and made him a wealthy man. His trial testimony told of a woman who needed a sturdy pair of pants for a husband too big to wear ready-made clothes. “She, his wife, said she wanted to send him to chop some wood,” Davis testified, “but he had no pants to put on.” The wife, claiming her enormous husband was too ill to visit the shop to be measured, tied knots in a piece of string provided by Davis and took the requisite waist and inseam measurements and brought them to the tailor.

Davis went on to testify that he was paid three dollars in advance for the pants which he made of white duck purchased from Levi Strauss & Co. The woman wanted the trousers made as strong as possible. There were copper rivets in the tailor’s shop used to attach straps to horse blankets made for local
teamsters. "So when the pants were done--the rivets were lying on the table--and the thought struck me to fasten the pockets with rivets," Davis recounted. "I had never thought of it before."

As word of the new pants began to spread, orders first trickled in, but soon Davis was deluged with requests. In the following eighteen months, he made and sold 200 pairs to persons in need of heavy work clothing. Some of the pants were made of denim. Concerned that his idea might be pirated, Davis asked Levi Strauss to help him with a patent application. A preliminary application was approved in July 1872 and the full patent granted on May 20, 1873. By then, Davis had been named the San Francisco production manager. (The Davis family still lives in the Bay Area, owns the Ben Davis Company in Novato, and maintains a web site.) Davis sold his tailor shop property to Levi Strauss on May 27. The frame building was destroyed on October 29, 1873 in Reno's first great fire.

The truth in this story lay undiscovered for 100 years until Ann Morgan Campbell, chief of the San Bruno branch of the National Archives, brought it to light in an article in the Nevada Historical Society Quarterly in 1974. For over thirty years now, the story has received considerable attention in Nevada appearing in newspapers, books, and other historical journals. Davis is also mentioned in a brief biography of Levi Strauss in the World Book Encyclopedia. Actually all the AP reporter in San Francisco needed to do was call the corporate headquarters of Levi-Strauss & Co. Historian, Lynn Downey, would have set the record straight.

Just the same, there are persons other than the AP reporter in 1999 that have added to the confusion. Journalist Wells Drury, in his book An Editor on the Comstock Lode (1936), wrote that "legend" had it that Levi Strauss in "about 1872" learned of the use of copper rivets from the colorful, Carson City stage coach driver Hank Monk, and went on to make a fortune. According to Drury, "When on the road, Hank Monk was wont to mend his clothing with copper-harness rivets in lieu of buttons" (p. 139).

Anyway, we now know the facts thanks to a federal court case. The next time you look at your Levi 501 blue jeans, think of Jacob Davis and Reno, Nevada.

On May 20, 2006, an historic marker sponsored by the Reno Historic Resources Commission was dedicated at 211 N. Virginia Street at the historic location of Jacob Davis' tailor shop.

NOTE: For further information, see "In Nineteenth Century Nevada: Federal Records as Sources for Local History", by Ann Morgan Campbell, Nevada Historical Society Quarterly (Fall 1974).

Photo: Photo before July 4, 1905, courtesy of the Nevada State Museum

http://www.bendavis.com/

http://www.levistrauss.com/about/history/jeans.htm

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, March 1999 edition)
Virtually every community wants to promote something special, and maybe unique, about their locale or town. If it's not the first whatever, it's the oldest, largest, smallest, and so on. Mix some community pride with local boosterism and many times one finds a well-meaning claim that falls short of being accurate.

A case in point was a long-standing claim, since resolved a few years ago, that the Dayton school building was the oldest schoolhouse in Nevada. However, Truckee Meadows residents saw it differently. They claimed that the Glendale school, built in 1864 four years before Reno existed, was the oldest extant schoolhouse. The school had operated until 1958 near the Truckee River in Sparks. By 1976, the building had been moved to the Centennial Coliseum grounds (today's Reno-Sparks Convention Center), and since 1994 it presumably has found a permanent home in Sparks' Victorian Square.

The old-timers and newcomers in Dayton sincerely believed their school was older, yet no one seemed to know when it was actually constructed. I was flattered when members of the Dayton Historical Society turned to me for an answer to their question. The answer was chronicled in the pages of the Lyon County Sentinel, Dayton's newspaper in the 1860s. Examining the microfilm copies of the Sentinel at the State Library & Archives in Carson City, I found that the contract for the schoolhouse was awarded in September 1865 and the school opened in December.

Clearly, the Glendale school--the first public educational institution in the Truckee Meadows and built shortly before statehood--was a year older than the Dayton school. The Mill Station School, however, still standing on a privately-owned ranch in southwest Washoe Valley, may have been erected in 1861, predating the Glendale school.

I pointed out that the Glendale school had been moved from its original site. If the Daytonites still desired to make a claim--one that could be supported--then why not assert that the school, now home to the local historical society, is the oldest school structure in Nevada still located on its original site.

A little homework can go a long way, and that's a fact!

Photos: Nevada State Museum and the Nevada Historical Society

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, April 1999 edition)
My last myth-a-month demonstrated that the Glendale schoolhouse, built in 1864 and now in Sparks, was a year older than the Dayton schoolhouse, built in 1865. Now a claim has been made that the Mottsville schoolhouse, moved from its original site, and greatly modified over the years, dates back to ca. 1855. Could this be true?

"The first school in western Utah [Nevada], wrote Myron Angel in the History of Nevada (1881)," was kept by Mrs. Allen, at the residence of Israel Mott, during the winter of 1854-55." The Motts of Mottsville (1974) asserted that Eliza Mott "is also reputed to have been the founder of the first school in the state, the Mottsville School, which was conducted in her kitchen with the assistance of Mrs. Allen." Whatever the case, the first documented effort in formal education was in a private residence and not funded by tax dollars.

The story goes that the former Mottsville schoolhouse, now located at 1201 Foothill Road in Carson Valley, dates back to sometime shortly after this first private effort at formal education. Why? Did anybody do the rigorous homework, or was this assertion based on assumption? Although the sources for answers are sparse in this early period of Nevada's history, I took the challenge.

J. Wells Kelly in his First Directory of Nevada Territory (1862) reported “There are two schools [in Douglas County], one in Genoa, and the other farther up the valley [south of Genoa], both in a flourishing condition.” There was no indication the schools were being conducted in schoolhouses constructed using public school funds.

The first extant Douglas County Superintendent of Public Instruction report dates to January 13, 1864. Superintendent Charles D. Daggett, M.D., noted there were three school districts: District No. 1, Jack's Valley; District No. 2, Genoa; and District No. 3, Mottsville. Jack's Valley and Mottsville school districts had schoolhouses, Genoa did not.

However, Douglas Co. School Superintendent and attorney Albert T. Hawley-- appointed by the county commissioners on March 7, 1864 following Dr. Daggett's death--reported that a new school district had been created out of the southern end of the Mottsville District. The schoolhouse at the mouth of Olds Canyon was now in the Fairview District, and Mottsville, with the construction of a schoolhouse in Genoa in 1864, was the only district without a schoolhouse.

According to The Douglas County Banner, Mottsville finally got its schoolhouse in 1865. "After many vexatious delays and false starts the trustees of this district have at last contracted for the erection of a comfortable and commodious schoolhouse," wrote the weekly Banner on October 7, "and we hope in the course of five or six weeks to be able to announce its completion, and the recommencement of studies among the children of the District." Two weeks later under the heading of "Mottsville School District No. 3," The Banner noted, "The new School House in this District is being rapidly pushed to completion. Next week we will give our friends of that District an estimate of its probable cost and a statement as how the expense is to be met."

The follow-up story did not appear, and The Banner, despite A. T. Hawley's efforts to promote it, published its last issue in Genoa on December 23, 1865. The Mottsville schoolhouse was completed, probably in late November or December, because school records show $888.71 expended by the Mottsville District "for Sites, Buildings, Repairs, and School Furniture" in the school year ending August 31, 1866.

So now we know that the Mottsville schoolhouse like the Dayton schoolhouse dates back to late 1865.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, May 1999 edition)
Visit Dayton's well-manicured cemetery overlooking the town and Carson River, and you will find the grave of James "Old Virginny" Finney. Legend has it that the mining town of Virginia City, at the head of Six-Mile Canyon, was named by the hard-drinking prospector who, it is said, discovered that portion of the Comstock Lode in June 1859.

The *Territorial Enterprise* saw it differently. "And the name 'Virginia' city is warranted only by this fact, that James Finney, or 'Old Virginny,' had worked the surface diggings at that place since 1853," argued the *Enterprise* of December 24, 1859. "He had sold out and gone to Gold Hill at the time the quartz was struck. So much for the 'bob-tailed horse'." Despite the newspaper's on-the-spot myth-busting, the apocryphal story that has Finney selling his interest in the Comstock Lode "for an old horse, a pair of blankets, and a bottle of whisky" still makes the rounds.

A whiskey bottle is also critical to the many tall-tale versions of Virginia City's naming. "[O]ne midnight Old Virginia, going home with the boys and a bottle of whiskey," wrote Charles Howard Shinn in *The Story of The Mine* (1896), "after an unusually protracted revel, fell down when he reached his cabin, broke the bottle, and rising to his knees, with the bottle-neck is his hand, hiccoughed, 'I baptize this ground Virginia Town!'" Ron James, in *The Roar And The Silence* (1998), pointed out the earliest source for the story is Dan DeQuille (William Wright) in his work *The Big Bonanza* (1876). "Whether this happened or not," James noted, "evidence clearly indicates that local miners decided in a meeting to name the community Virginia City."

So where did this colorful character come from? Some accounts, including that of Mormon Station founder John Reese in 1884, have Finney residing in what is now Nevada as early as 1850, placer mining and operating a trading post in Gold Canyon. Dan DeQuille claimed, "He came [to Gold Canyon in 1851] from the Kern River country, California, where he had a 'difficulty' with a man and, believing he had killed him, took a little walk over the Sierra Nevada Mountains, dropping the name of Fennimore and calling himself James Finney." Myron Angel's *History of Nevada* (1881) presents another story: "When the Reese party reached western Utah [in June 1851], not over six miners were at work in Gold Canon; but some twelve of those accompanying him joined the six, among them were two of the teamsters, named Joseph Webb and James Fenimore, the latter known as 'Old Virginia'."

Myth, misspellings of his name and misinformation in abundance surround Finney's obscure life. We may never know the truth about his early years and arrival to Gold Canyon. William Hickman Dolman met "Old Virginia" in Johntown, some four miles up Gold Canyon, in the winter of 1857-58. Dolman described Finney in his memoirs (ca. 1900) as a "frontier hunter, and miner, a man of more than ordinary ability in his class, a buffoon and practical joker; a hard drinker when he could get the liquor, and an indifferent worker at anything." What is known for sure is the colorful, Virginia native, age 43 in the U.S. Census for Gold Hill, Utah Territory, on August 22, 1860, died in 1861, and not 1865 as was once engraved on his gravestone.

Charles H. Lincoln, in a *San Francisco Call* article republished in the *Lyon County Times* of March 12, 1881, wrote from Santa Cruz, California:

> I see some inquiries are being made as to the death and burial of "Old Virginny," in Dayton, Nevada. About the 26th of April, 1861, I went on horseback from Virginia City to Dayton. I went up to an old adobe hotel kept by a man named Tyler, at Dayton, to get dinner, and tied my horse outside. While at dinner "Old Virginny" untied my horse, got on him, and was thrown off before he had ridden over 100 yards. He died the next day from the injuries received by being thrown from the horse, and on the following day was buried on the hill to the west of Dayton, south of the road as it then ran. I could easily find it now.
Eliot Lord wrote in his work, *Comstock Mining and Miners* (1883), that Finney lost "his life, at length, June 20, 1861, by falling from his horse and fracturing his skull." Lord's source was the Territorial Enterprise for April 19, 1863, which reproduced a sketch published in 1861.

Grant H. Smith in his monograph, *The History of the Comstock Lode* (1943), also places Finney's death after being thrown from a horse, on June 20, 1861. Smith's evidence was a story from the *Territorial Enterprise* reprinted in the Sacramento Union on July 8, 1861.

Dan DeQuille stated that Finney died in Dayton in July 1861, "by being thrown from a bucking' mustang that he was trying to ride while a good deal under the influence of liquor." August Koneman, as executor of Finney's estate, had begun proceedings in the probate court of Carson County, Nevada Territory, by August 26, 1861 according to records in the State Archives.

Lincoln's letter was prompted by an effort to relocate Finney's body from its original burial site to the Dayton cemetery. The old acquaintance suggested raising $150 for the move. Lincoln also mentioned that if there was any question about the right body being relocated, "[t]his doubt could be easily removed by exhuming the body said to be 'Old Virginny's,' as he had iron gray hair, . . ." The other body relocated a few years before, and presumed to be the brother of former Nevada legislator William H. Claggett, had red hair Lincoln insisted.

In the end, James "Old Virginny" Finney, Virginia City's namesake and probably Nevada's oldest pioneer settler, has found a final resting place in the Dayton cemetery. A new gravestone reflecting the actual date of Finney's death was unveiled in 2001 befitting Finney's contribution to Nevada's mining history.

Vandals broke the gravestone and bent the supports some time during New Year's weekend 2009. Fortunately, the Comstock Cemetery Society came to the rescue and repaired the marker.

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, June 1999 edition)

Nevada hotel mogul Charles W. Mapes, Jr., who died on May 13, 1999, was credited for "building the first hotel in the world after World War II," according to a column in the Reno Gazette-Journal. Opened on December 17, 1947, the twelve-story Mapes Hotel, poised on the Truckee River overlooking downtown Reno, was Nevada's first true high-rise building. The tallest buildings prior to the Mapes were Reno's six-story Riverside Hotel (1927), Ely's six-story Hotel Nevada (1929) and Reno's seven-story El Cortez Hotel (1931). Historic preservation advocates were unsuccessful in saving the high-rise, art-deco building that changed Reno's skyline and ushered in an era when Reno thrived as America's gambling mecca; the building was imploded on January 30, 2000. But was the Mapes, with its Sky Room casino, really the first hotel built in the world after World War II?

Not quite. War restrictions on building prevented the erection of new hotels. With war's end in August 1945, much of the world, and particularly Europe, had to rebuild. Building materials were in short supply. Industrial plants, civilian housing, and public works were first priorities, not hotels. Existing hotels in the US, virtually filled to capacity during the war, by 1947 were deluged with tourists. After so many years of war, people were excited about traveling again.

Charles Mapes clearly saw the opportunity for a resort hotel/casino in post-war Reno, however so had William "Billy" Wilkerson in southern Nevada. The Flamingo Hotel on the LA highway, now the world-famous "Strip," was Wilkerson's vision. It was only after his getting into financial difficulties during the construction of the lavish hotel, that mobster Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel, of "Murder, Incorporated" fame, coerced Wilkerson, Los Angeles restaurateur and publisher of the "Hollywood Reporter," to give up his interest in the venture. Siegel, with his mob money and political connections, opened the Flamingo Hotel & Casino on December 26, 1946. Cost overruns and the mafia bosses' belief that he and his girlfriend, Virginia Hill, were pocketing some of the money ultimately cost "Bugsy" his life. On June 23, 1947, Siegel was gunned down at Hill's house in Beverly Hills.

"Bugsy" Siegel beat Charles Mapes to the punch. In all probability, the Flamingo Hotel, and not the Mapes, was the first hotel constructed in the world after World War II, although its tallest building was only four stories.

A review of the New York Times index and post-war publications make no mention of any new hotels prior to the Flamingo in Las Vegas. According to Business Week (July 5, 1947), Houston's eighteen-story Shamrock Hotel was "one of [the] few hotels in the nation under construction," however the high-rise building opened on March 17, 1949 more than a year after the Mapes. A hotel/casino began operations in the summer of 1947 in San Cristobal, Dominican Republic, and the Thunderbird Hotel opened on the Las Vegas Strip on September 2, 1948 (the building was imploded on October 3, 2000). Neither operation included any high-rise structures.

In the end, it appears that the Mapes Hotel was the first high-rise hotel completed in the world after World War II and Nevada's tallest building until the fifteen-story Fremont Hotel and Casino opened in Las Vegas in 1956. And while not the first post-war resort hotel/casino, the Mapes Sky Room casino on the twelfth floor was unique in its day.

Charles Mapes deserves to remembered as a pioneer in the hotel industry, albeit a controversial one.

Photo: Nevada Historical Society, Reno

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, July 1999 edition)
At Fort Churchill State Historic Park there was a sign for many years stating that, in August of 1861, the First Regiment of Dragoons became the First Regiment of Cavalry, thereby making the fort "the first post in the nation to have cavalry." Most claims to being a historical first are subject to debate; this particular assertion was completely in error.

From the American Revolution through the War of 1812, the Regular Army usually included at least small mounted units, commonly called "light dragoons." In the strict sense of the term, dragoons were mounted troops who fought dismounted; in the American experience, however, dragoons were, in effect, cavalrymen. In 1833 Congress created the Regiment of Dragoons, renamed the First Regiment of Dragoons in 1836 when the Second Regiment of Dragoons was organized. Another regiment, the Third Dragoons, existed only during the Mexican War. The Regiment of Mounted Riflemen came into being in 1846. In 1855 Congress established the First and Second Cavalry Regiments. So, at the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, the Regular Army had five horse regiments. The Third Cavalry, organized in May 1861, brought the number to six, three of them designated as cavalry.

So what happened in August of 1861? On the third day of the month an act of Congress redesignated the First and Second Dragoons and the Regiment of Mounted Riflemen as the First, Second, and Third Regiments of Cavalry, respectively, and the old First, Second, and Third Regiments of Cavalry became, respectively, the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Regiments of Cavalry.

In August of 1861, Company A of the First Dragoons was at Fort Churchill, the remaining companies of the regiment being garrisoned at various posts in California, Oregon, and Washington Territory. Similarly, at that time the several companies of the other five mounted regiments were scattered throughout the country. (In the nineteenth century it was rare for all the companies of a Regular Army regiment to be at the same place at the same time.) Even if we ignore (which we can't) the fact that the First, Second, and Third Cavalry already existed before August 3, 1861, no one military post could claim to be the birthplace of the cavalry as of that date.

After the error was brought to the attention of Nevada State Parks, the sign was changed in 2002 to read "In a stirring ceremony on the parade ground in late August 1861, the name of the First Regiment of Dragoons was officially changed to the First Cavalry."

Photo: Nevada Historical Society, Reno

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, August 1999 edition)
Thank goodness, the historic building housing Jack's Bar survived the April 19, 1998 fire in downtown Carson City. The conspicuous sign on the vintage structure at the northwest corner of Carson and Fifth streets says "A Saloon Since 1859." The Kit Carson Trail map makes a similar claim. Virtually everyone believes that the building and the business date back to the beginning of the town. But is it true?

In a word, no! The sign is misleading. While it is true the site of Jack's Bar has been home to various drinking establishments since 1859, the current building only dates back to 1899 when it was first known as the Bank Saloon. The tavern has been known by many other names including the Bank Resort, Hernando's Hideaway, the Y-NOT Bar, Angelo's, and, beginning in 1966, Jack's Bar.

Still, the site is a pioneer location. Less than a year after the founding of Carson City, a dance hall opened there on July 4, 1859. The two-story frame structure changed hands over the next few years. By 1862, it was known as the Frisbie Hotel and, in 1873, it was called the Fifth Avenue House. The building remained the property of the Frisbie family until 1892, when it was torn down, prompting a local newspaper to observe that the Frisbie building was "one of the oldest landmarks of the city."

The lot remained vacant for over seven years until the Frisbie heirs sold the land to business partners Meyer and Sanger on June 30, 1898. John Meyer and Elizabeth Sanger had been leasing the Sacramento Saloon on the southwest corner of Fifth and Carson--where the Ormsby House is today--and now planned to build their own saloon. Composed principally of sandstone quarried and chiseled at the State Prison, the Bank Saloon opened on August 19, 1899. "Today Johnny Meyer will open his new saloon and he deserves all success in the new building," reported the Carson Appeal. "The place is without exception the handsomest building in this city and is an ornament that will remain for years to come, as it is built of stone and in a substantial manner."

Despite at least three fires on the block, the building has remained standing for over 100 years. The Bank Resort sold bootlegged alcohol during Prohibition when Pete Pierini and Virgil Buchianeri, Sr. ran the operation, and served as one of the principal bars adjacent to Carson City's red-light district before the brothels were closed by federal order in 1942. With the State Capitol and Legislative Building across the street, nobody will ever know how many business and political deals have been made in the popular watering hole!

Jack's Bar has now been closed since June 2002 and, despite its listing on the National Register of Historic Places since 1980, its fate is uncertain. However, the claim to be the oldest continuously operating drinking establishment in Carson City can no longer be made. "A Saloon Since 1859" always was a stretch!

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, September 1999 edition)
How many times have you heard that Virginia City in its heyday was the biggest city west of the Rockies—sometimes even west of the Mississippi? Well, I heard the Rockies version again while listening to a Reno television news broadcast. The story focused on reopening a mine on the Comstock, the once-great mining region in northwestern Nevada with Virginia City as its "Queen" city. A television news anchor, speculated if a new bonanza of gold and silver was found, "would it [Virginia City] end up as the largest city west of the Rockies again?"

Clearly, the anchor did not believe that a Virginia City mining boom today would ever lead to its growing larger than Los Angeles, San Francisco, Las Vegas, or even Reno. But what he was saying is Virginia City had the largest population of any city west of the Rockies when it was one of the premier urban, industrial centers in the nation. So when was that? Currently the Virginia City area and nearby Gold Hill have about 1,500 residents. We know that the big bonanza years were in the mid-1870s. Census figures during mining booms usually represent an undercount because of all the comings and goings. With that in mind, the figures for Virginia City and Storey County (which includes Virginia City, Gold Hill, American Flat, and some outlying communities) were 7,048 in Virginia City (11,359 in the county) in 1870, 19,528 in the county in 1875 (state census), and 10,917 in Virginia City (16,115 in the county) in 1880.

Why anyone believes that Virginia City was ever larger than San Francisco is hard to fathom! In 1870, San Francisco's population was 149,473, and in 1880 it was 233,959. Can you say that Virginia City was the largest city between the Rockies and San Francisco, actually between the Rockies and Oakland since the East Bay city had almost 35,000 residents in 1880?

How about Sacramento then? California's state capital had a population of 16,283 in 1870 (26,830 in the county), and 21,420 in 1880 (34,390 in the county). Comparing Sacramento's population with that of Virginia City, Sacramento was clearly the larger of the two cities. Storey County may have grown larger than the city of Sacramento in the mid-1870s, however that's not what people say when they make claims for the size of Virginia City. OK, so maybe Virginia City was the largest city between the Rockies and Sacramento.

If we don't count Denver because technically it's east of the Rockies, what about Salt Lake City? Utah's territorial capital had 12,854 residents in 1870 (18,337 in the county), and in 1880 it was 20,768 residents (31,977 in the county). Salt Lake City appears to have been slightly larger than Storey County in the 1870s, and even if it wasn't quite as large at the peak of Storey County's population in the mid-1870s, Salt Lake City was still significantly larger than Virginia City.

So where does that leave us? Based on US and state census data, Virginia City, between 1870 and 1880, was definitely the largest city in Nevada. To claim that Virginia City was once the largest city between Salt Lake City and Sacramento is correct, however it does not mean much. Exaggerated claims for the size of communities began with local boosterism, and continue today when people wax nostalgic about the past and add thousands, or even tens-of-thousands, to the population figures.

In the end, virtually every "Wild West" boomtown, if you believe most of what you hear or read, was much bigger than it actually was. And that is the stuff of myth and legend!

Photo: Library of Congress

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, October 1999 edition)
It seems every western town claims the first or oldest something west of the Mississippi. The boast has something to do with community pride, bragging rights, and bringing civilization to the frontier. The truth in the assertions is another matter. Anybody can make a claim, proving it to be true is the challenge.

In previous columns I have dismissed as nonsense that Virginia City's International Hotel had the first elevator west of the Mississippi. The same is true of the Goldfield Hotel having the first electric elevator. These were in all probability the first elevators of their type in Nevada. However, from there the claims are exaggerated to first on the West Coast, then west of the Rockies, and then finally the whopper, west of the Mississippi. If nobody contradicts you, you move up to the higher claim.

Is the oldest United Methodist congregation and church west of the Mississippi in Reno, Nevada? The answer is yes if you believe the myths perpetuated in the Reno media.

How could this be? Reno was founded in May 1868. The Methodists were probably the first congregation in the Truckee Meadows according to John Townley's *Tough Little Town on the Truckee* (1983). F.M. Willis was appointed pastor of the Truckee Circuit of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1863. The first Methodist church in Reno was built in 1870. However, American expansion and settlement westward from the Mississippi River dates back to the early 1800s including Missouri, Texas and the Oregon country in the far West.

I contacted the United Methodist Church national archives in New Jersey and the University of Pacific in Stockton, California (UOP was founded by Methodists). The archivists and historians I spoke with told me that the Methodist denominations were unified in 1968 taking the named United Methodist Church. Prior to that there were a number of Methodist sects throughout the country. Methodism was being routinely preached in Missouri by 1806. The McKendree Chapel, constructed in Jackson, Missouri in 1819, still exists today.

Jason Lee founded the first Methodist mission in Oregon in 1834. Other Methodist missions were established near Kansas City in 1830, in San Francisco in 1847, in Santa Fe in 1850, and in Denver in 1858 according to a work entitled *200 Years of United Methodism An Illustrated History* (1984) produced under the auspices of the Archives and History Center of the United Methodist Church.

In fact, Reno's downtown Methodist congregation is not even the oldest in Nevada. A Methodist congregation existed in Eagle Valley and Carson City by 1859 and celebrated its 140th anniversary in 1999. The Carson City church was dedicated on September 8, 1867. The historical marker on the front of the building proclaims the congregation as "The Cradle of Nevada Methodism." At the same time, the first Methodist church in Nevada was erected in Virginia City in 1861 by that town's congregation.

The truth be told, the oldest Methodist congregation or church west of the Mississippi is not even remotely associated with Reno.

Photo: Nevada State Museum, Carson City

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, November 1999 edition)
Myth #47: Who Was the First Woman to Run for the U.S. Senate? by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

According to University of Nevada, Reno, Professor Anne Howard in her biography of Anne Martin, even Miss Martin believed she was the first woman in U.S. history to run for the Senate when she campaigned in 1918. “She determined to run for the Senate,” Howard wrote in *The Long Campaign* (1985), “encouraged by her friends, excited by the chance to be a ‘first,’ and eager to try her hand in practical politics on a national scale.” Virtually every reference to Martin's political career in Nevada notes that she was the first female in American history to run for the U.S. Senate, but it's not true.

Born in the small, Carson River mill town of Empire just east of Carson City in 1875, Martin and her family moved to Reno in 1883, after a two-year stay in San Francisco. She attended the Bishop Whitaker School and Nevada State University. The aspiring young woman acquired a master's degree in history at Stanford and subsequently accepted a teaching position at Nevada State University in 1897.

By 1905, Martin had left the university in Reno. Wanderlust and family history inspired her to visit Ireland and England. She took an interest in Socialism and women's suffrage. She attended lectures featuring controversial playwright George Bernard Shaw and associated with the Fabian Socialist Society in London. Martin joined the Women's Social and Political Union, headed by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, Christabel and Sylvia, and in 1910 was first arrested in a London suffrage demonstration.

"Anne Martin returned to the United States in time to carry the Nevada banner in a suffrage parade in New York City in 1911," wrote biographer Anne Howard. Her efforts in Nevada in concert with other suffragists resulted in women, age twenty-one and over, getting the right to vote and hold office in 1914. Montana also granted woman suffrage and the right to hold office in 1914. Two years later, Montana voters elected Jeannette Rankin the first woman to serve in Congress. In 1918 Rankin ran for the U.S. Senate, was narrowly defeated in the Republican primary, launched a third party race, and lost by a large margin in the general election. An inspired Anne Martin ran for the U.S. Senate in 1918 as an Independent in a four-way race. She failed in her initial bid to be the first woman elected to the Senate, garnering only eighteen-percent of the vote. She ran in 1920 and, after another hard-fought campaign, lost again. The votes cast for Martin in this close race probably cost the incumbent Democrat, Charles B. Henderson, his office. The 1920 defeat extinguished her political aspirations. Martin died on April 15, 1951 in Carmel, California claiming she was the first woman to ever run for the U.S. Senate.

In fact, the first woman known to run for the U.S. Senate was a famous one. According to biographer Kristen Iverson, Margaret “The Unsinkable Molly” Brown, aspired to be a U.S. Senator four years before Jeannette Rankin and Anne Martin. The sinking of the Titanic in 1912, and Molly's colorful role in the maritime tragedy, made the Denver socialite a national celebrity and a potential political figure. Colorado had granted women the right to vote and hold office in 1893, and the ratification of the seventeenth amendment in 1913 provided for the direct election of U.S. Senators. Supporters in 1914, including national women's groups like the Congressional Union, backed her running for either a House or Senate seat. Brown briefly ran for the U.S. Senate in the summer of 1914, however within a few weeks she dropped her campaign with the onset of World War I. Apparently Brown did not file for office, and her name never appeared on the Colorado ballot.

It seems Anne Martin was unaware of Margaret Brown's brief run for a U.S. Senate seat in Colorado. Martin probably considered herself the first female to run for the U.S. Senate because she declared her candidacy a few weeks before Jeanette Rankin. However, because Rankin's name appeared on the 1918
Republican primary election ballot in August, she deserves to be recognized as the first official female candidate for the U.S. Senate.

Anne Martin lived to see Hattie Wyatt Caraway of Arkansas win a U.S. Senate seat in 1932 and become the nation's first elected female U.S. Senator. Over the first 200 years of the nation--from the inaugural Congress in 1789 until 1989--only four women have been elected to the Senate for full terms without succeeding husbands who had died in office. A record seventeen held the office in 2011.


(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, December 1999 edition)
"Did you know... one of Nevada’s mining towns, Virginia City, was once so rich that its streets were paved with silver?" You will find this question in an elementary school text written by Karen Sirvaitis entitled Nevada. The book was published in 1992 by Lerner Publications Company of Minneapolis, Minnesota for its "Hello U.S.A." series.

Well, do you believe Virginia City’s streets were once “paved with silver?” Sirvaitis cites a Jack Lindstrom in her acknowledgments for the story. She certainly believed Lindstrom, however the question posed to young school-age children is misleading. In fact, you might call it a trick question!

Chester W. Cheel in his work The Truth About Virginia City, 1850-1940, claimed that the streets of Virginia City and Gold Hill in the early 20th century had been “built-up and filled-in with material from the dumps of the old mines in the district... a very conservative estimate places the gold and silver value at about $1,000,000.”

During Virginia City and the Comstock’s boom days in the 1860s and 1870s, silver and gold in the hundreds of millions of dollars were mined. In the early years, the mills were not efficient in extracting the silver and gold ore from the rock. The tailings left from the milling process did contain some precious metals. Some of the silver-bearing rock and tailings may have been used in road building, but clearly it is a stretch of the imagination to say Virginia City’s streets “were paved with silver.”

What image does such an assertion conjure up in the minds of elementary school students in Miami, Boston, Seattle, San Diego, and cities in between? The nuance of the statement is not explained. Will these children expect to see silver streets if they visit Virginia City, or at least find evidence of silver streets in old photos of the town? Is this really more a hoax based on hyperbole the likes of which Mark Twain and Dan DeQuille might have perpetrated?

It's a fun story, but should it be used in a school text without explanation? Should error-riddled books like this one--and there are more errors--be in school libraries throughout the country? Or, in the end, much like the internet and websites, should free speech prevail even if it is error-ridden? In the meantime, let the librarian, teacher, and student beware in the virtually unregulated information marketplace.

Photo: Nevada State Museum, Carson City

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, January 2000 edition)
We can thank the Saturday Evening Post for giving us the long-standing myth that "America's Sweetheart," film actress Mary Pickford, was divorced in Reno. In a story published on December 11, 1937, the popular national magazine declared, "Mary Pickford gave Reno its best ad when she established residence and bought a house there in 1920 to divorce Owen Moore. When she left she gave the house to her lawyer. It is the home today of United States Senator Pat McCarran. He was her lawyer."

The bell had been rung and to this day journalists and others claim that Pickford was divorced in Reno.

A publication entitled The Reno Divorce Racket generated confusion as early as 1931. Reference is made to Mary Pickford, "who first made Reno divorces famous." However, other text and a photo caption note that her residency in Nevada was "at Genoa." The assumption being implied was that Genoa and Reno were in the same county when, in fact, the two communities are some 45 miles distant, in two different counties, with a county separating them.

Maybe the initial source for the confusion was the Associated Press (AP) stories concerning the Pickford divorce in 1920 that had a Reno dateline.

Among the recent stories listing Mary Pickford in a string of celebrity Reno divorces is a Smithsonian Magazine article published in June 1996 (posted on its website) and an article in the April 22, 2002 edition of the New York Times entitled "A Push to Preserve Reno's Landmarks as Divorce Capital."

Can you ever "unring" a bell once rung?

It is true that McCarran, a former Nevada Supreme Court Justice, represented the twenty-seven year old Pickford, nee Gladys Louise (aka Marie) Smith, in the divorce suit against her husband actor Owen Moore. However, after McCarran greeted Pickford at the Southern Pacific Railroad passenger station in Reno on February 15, 1920, he transported the well-known, silent-film star by automobile to the Campbell Ranch outside Genoa. The divorce papers were filed in the Douglas county seat of Minden, 45 miles south of Reno. State law in 1920 required a residency of 6 months before a district judge could grant a divorce, or so it was believed until Mary Pickford came to Nevada ostensibly to live here.

"This case not only created a public sensation but also raised some important and disturbing legal questions," wrote McCarran’s biographer Professor Jerome Edwards. "Pickford's divorce in Nevada had several unique and peculiar aspects which at first glance appeared to violate both the letter and spirit of the state divorce law," Edwards continued. "But McCarran skillfully discovered a loophole in the law large enough to shepherd the popular Miss Pickford through her divorce travails, at least five months sooner than might have been the case with less wealthy or famous clients."

On March 2, Mary Pickford explained to Judge Frank Langan that she had permanently relocated to Genoa to regain her health, and had not come to Nevada to get a divorce. The judge was told that her husband Owen Moore, who had deserted her after a stormy marriage, was making a movie in Virginia City and "just happened" to be found in Douglas County when he was served papers notifying him of the divorce proceedings. She testified that she and Mr. Moore had at no time colluded to avoid the six-month residency requirement. However, according to Pickford biographer Scott Eyman she gave Owen Moore $100,000 to play along with their divorce scheme. Granted a divorce on the same day, Pickford was driven back to Reno and took the train bound for California on March 3. "America's Sweetheart" married her lover and motion picture leading man Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. on March 28.
"Miss Pickford never gave a finer performance," claimed Professor Edwards. "Despite her sworn statement, the divorce appears to have been planned between her and Owen Moore from the beginning, and McCarran must have been party to the deception." The divorce generated an uproar in Nevada, however the language of the law was ambiguous and the Nevada Supreme Court upheld the divorce in 1922, over the objections of the Attorney General, arguing it could not legislate a remedy. The voters in the 1922 general election passed a 1921 legislative substitute for an initiative petition which amended Nevada's divorce law and eliminated the loophole McCarran had so adeptly used in garnering Pickford's divorce in 16 days.

Two months following the Pickford divorce, McCarran bought a mansion on a small bluff overlooking the Truckee River in Reno. In all likelihood, his attorney fees from the controversial divorce helped purchase the imposing residence. In countering the Saturday Evening Post's erroneous story in 1937 in a letter to the magazine that was never printed, McCarran emphatically denied that Pickford had anything to do with Reno or the ownership of the house:

... Mary Pickford never lived in Reno. Mary Pickford never owned nor possessed a house in Reno. Mary Pickford never secured a decree of divorce, nor did she ever apply for a decree of divorce in Reno. Mary Pickford did not give her lawyer her house or any other house located either in Reno or any other place in Nevada. ... The records in the County Recorder's Office in Reno, the county seat of Washoe County, will bear out and confirm every statement I have made here.

"Still," Edwards wrote in 1976, "the Pickford divorce case long titillated attorneys, the state, and the nation with its notoriety and unfounded rumors." Those "unfounded rumors" claiming Mary Pickford was divorced in Reno are now very much a part of the lore of Nevada. The myth may never be divorced from the truth, but if so, certainly not as easily as Mary Pickford was divorced from Owen Moore in 1920.

Mary died of a cerebral hemorrhage in Santa Monica, California on May 29, 1979 at the age of eighty-seven.

Photo: Carson Valley Historical Society

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, February 2000 edition)
Myth #50: Taking Things For Granted: Dayton and U.S. President Grant by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

An historic marker prominently displayed on the front of Dayton's Odeon Hall claims Ulysses Simpson Grant, two years after leaving the office of President of the United States in 1877, spoke from the balcony of the prominent downtown building. Writers have repeated the story for years taking for granted the text of the historic marker. The tale in all likelihood is even older than the marker that was first placed on the building by the E. Clampus Vitus, Julia Bulette Chapter, on June 29, 1974.

In fact, U.S. Grant was the first president to visit Nevada, although the two-term chief executive was no longer in office. His traveling party, including his wife and son, reached the Comstock on Monday, October 27, 1879 on the last leg of a world tour. A tremendous crowd in Virginia City greeted the former Civil War general and president, and a gala celebration and reception took up most of the remaining day. The mayor, Governor John H. Kinkead, U.S. Senators John P. Jones and William Sharon, and two of the Bonanza Kings John Mackay and James G. Fair welcomed Grant to Nevada's largest metropolis.

The ex-president spent three days attending functions at Piper's Opera House and the Savage Mansion, making speeches and taking photographs, going down into the mines, and traveling the length of the recently completed Sutro Tunnel from the town of Sutro to Virginia City. On October 29, Grant and his wife boarded the V&T train bound for Reno on their way home to Galena, Illinois. He died on July 23, 1885 in Mount McGregor, New York and his final resting place is in Grant's Tomb overlooking the Hudson River.

The pages of Nevada newspapers were filled with reports on President's Grant's visit to the Silver State. If the parties responsible for the marker on the Odeon Hall had done their homework they would have discovered that Grant never spoke in Dayton. The Lyon County Times in its November 1, 1879 issue noted that Grant did not stop in Dayton, "General Grant . . . passed through Silver (City) about half-past 7 o'clock last Wednesday morning, and passed through Dayton half an hour later. He did not stop or pause in either place, but hastened to Sutro . . . . The population of the town assembled at the (Sutro) mansion, and General Grant spoke a few words."

The townspeople in the Lyon County seat of government were dismayed. According to the Times, if Grant would have stopped in Dayton the residents "would have given him one of those receptions which have made the country famous, which in war times earned it the name of the banner Republican county of the state . . . . As it was the citizens hardly got a glimpse of him as he went through," the newspaper opined, "that they were not given an opportunity to receive him in a style worthy of him will doubtless be, with them, a matter of life-long regret."

The Odeon Hall marker text is another example of a George Washington slept here story, however in this case it is a U.S. Grant spoke here myth. James Loewen in his book Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong tells us marker texts, monuments and other site information throughout the
country—he visited all fifty states—are interspersed with misinformation, omissions and, sometimes, outright lies. One must be careful believing everything one reads, particularly knowing that virtually anyone can mark a site and tell you what happened there. Or so they say!

See “General Grant's Visit to the Comstock,” by Phil Earl in This Was Nevada (Reno: Nevada Historical Society, 1986), pp. 126-29.

Photo 1: Gen. Grant, center, and party after leaving the Bonanza Mines, Virginia City, Nevada, Oct. 28, 1879. Photo: Nevada State Museum, Daun Bohall Collection

Photo 2: Another error—Governor Nye actually visited Dayton August 9, 1864 to investigate the hanging of James Linn by vigilantes. Contemporary newspaper accounts make no mention of Nye speaking from the balcony of Odeon Hall. Photo: Nevada State Library and Archives

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, March 2000 edition)
A long-standing belief shared by many capital residents is what may be Carson City’s oldest tree dates back over 200 years. In fact, during the nation's birthday celebration in 1976, the massive cottonwood on the northwest corner of Division and Washington streets was designated the “Nevada Bicentennial Tree.” It is still marked as such with a wooden plaque. A story published in a Reno newspaper on Nevada Day, October 31, 1981, mistakenly suggested that the eight-foot thick Fremont Cottonwood (Populus fremontii) was “so named because famed ‘pathfinder’ John C. Fremont reportedly observed it while passing through this area.” Actually, the species was named in Fremont's honor by Botanist Sereno Watson in 1875 and had nothing to do with Fremont observing the tree in question.

The truth is Fremont in all of his 19th-century expeditions never passed through Eagle Valley, now the home to Carson City. The widely held notion that the controversial American military commander saw this area, then claimed by Mexico, and the cottonwood tree in question during his expedition of 1843-44 is mistaken. The exploration party encountered the Carson River in January 1844, downstream from where the Ft. Churchill State Park is today, and proceeded west to the north end of the Pine Nut Mountains. Fremont's expedition, including scout Kit Carson, then headed southeast to the Mason Valley and the East Walker River. From there they traveled to the West Walker River and Antelope Valley before crossing the Sierra Nevada near today's Carson Pass. Fremont's journals, later published and annotated, measured locations in degrees of latitude, precisely down to minutes and seconds. The expedition had bypassed Eagle Valley.

For the sake of argument, let's conjecture what Fremont would have seen if he had visited Eagle Valley in 1844. Washoe Indians roamed the area and no settlements intruded on the landscape. According to descriptions from the early 1860s, the valley with its fledgling community of Carson City was virtually barren except for some trees lining the river and dotting the foothills. If the “Nevada Bicentennial Tree” existed at all in 1844, possibly nourished by water from a nearby spring, how large it must have been to have captured Fremont's attention while traveling southwest along the Carson River miles away! Some stories actually have the exploration party camping under the cottonwood that, at most, could have only been a sapling!

In all probability, there were few, if any, cottonwoods in the middle of Eagle Valley until Aaron D. "Farmer" Treadway planted scores of trees on his ranch beginning in the 1860s.

Part of the ranch became a popular destination resort known as Treadway's Park in 1866. The hardy cottonwood near the southeast boundary of "Farmer" Treadway's property survived years of smoke and cinders belched forth by the Virginia & Truckee Railroad locomotives pulling trains between Carson City and Reno (1872-1950). Nevada foresters dispute the claim the tree has been around for some 200 years and place the age of the tree between 125 and 150 years old. Even in that age range, the “Nevada Bicentennial Tree” is not the oldest cottonwood identified by foresters in the state. The largest and presumably the oldest cottonwood tree in Nevada identified to date is in the Steamboat Springs area south of Reno.

People's imagination too many times has little to do with common sense, science, or historical reality. Folklore is fun, but it shouldn't pass for history. Be careful in going out on a limb, especially when it comes to the history of a tree.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, April 2000 edition)
"Jarbridge is often mistermed ‘Jarbridge’ by the unitiated [sic], or the newcomer to northeast Nevada," wrote the authors of *Nevada’s Northeast Frontier* (1969), "much to the pained annoyance of Elko County old-timers." The issue in this story is not so much myth but misnomer.

The isolated, former mining town is situated near the scenic, west fork of Jarbridge River, on the Snake River-Columbia Basin side of the Jarbridge Mountains near the Idaho border. Located some 100 miles north of Elko, the tiny community recently has been the focus of hostile confrontations between Elko County residents and U.S. Forest Service officials over closed roads, threatened fish, and the town cemetery. News stories and broadcasts many times have referred to JARBRIDGE instead of JARBIDGE. The history of getting the town's name wrong and the clashes with the federal government are as old as the community itself.

The name Jarbridge is an anglicized version of the Shoshone word "Tsaw-haw-bitts," which identifies a mythical, cannibalistic giant who the Shoshone believed lived in the Jarbridge Canyon. The giant preyed on native people, tossing them into a basket slung across his back, and later cooked and ate the unfortunate victims. The Shoshone supposedly avoided the area until after the mining boom in 1909. "The name was eventually pronounced ‘Ja-ha-bich’ then bastardized to Jarbridge," according to author Howard Hickson in the Spring 1978 issue of the *Northeastern Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*. "Even today people mispronounce its name as ‘Jarbridge’." Prospecting in the Jarbridge Mountains had been going on for years. A location notice for the "Jaw Bridge" placer mining claim was filed with the Elko County Recorder on December 3, 1901. In the summer of 1909, the first major discovery of an ore outcropping ignited the Jarbridge mining rush. The stampede that followed brought some 1500 people to the area seeking their fortune. A log-cabin post office was established on March 5, 1910 in the predominately tent mining camp. Among the newcomers was Lorin Otho Ray who had made a name for himself in the turn-of-the-century Tonopah/Goldfield/Rhyolite mining booms in south central Nevada.

"Judge" Ray, as he was called, reportedly served as a Justice of the Peace in Tonopah's first years. On Christmas Day, 1901, he founded the nearby mining camp of Ray. He later served in the State Assembly representing Rhyolite and Nye County in 1907. By 1910, Rhyolite was well on its way to ghost town status when Judge Ray decided to seek his fortune in Jarbridge.

"Our main trouble in Jarbridge [sic] is the Forest Reserve which I am fighting here at the present time," wrote Judge Ray to Lt. and Acting Governor Denver Dickerson on September 28, 1910. Dickerson, who had become Acting Governor following Governor John Sparks' death in May 1908, was running for election in November. "I must say if you make a stand with the boys there to have the district excluded from [the] reservation you will get every vote in the camp," Ray promised while attending the American Mining Congress in Los Angeles as a delegate appointed by Dickerson. "However, in the meantime, I will do everything that a good Democrat can do." Dickerson lost the race for governor to Tasker L. Oddie despite Judge Ray's best efforts. Ray was luckier. The residents of Jarbridge Township elected him their Justice of the Peace. Ray later moved to Beatty in southern Nevada, and eventually died in the Nevada State Mental Hospital in Sparks in 1941.

On March 8, 1911, much to Judge Ray's delight, the Secretary of Agriculture issued a proclamation withdrawing the town of Jarbridge from the Humboldt National Forest. By then the initial mining rush was slowing down, although now the remaining residents had access to saloons and stores selling liquor, illegal while Jarbridge was under federal control. What is believed to have been the last holdup of a horse-
drawn stage (in this case a U.S. Mail wagon) in the nation occurred outside Jarbidge on December 5, 1916.

Jarbidge reached its apex as a producing mining camp from 1916 until 1933. All major operations were suspended in the latter year. Some work in and around the town continued until World War II when precious metal mining was prohibited during the war emergency. While modest prospecting and leasing activity continues today, the Jarbidge area is now a popular hunting, fishing, and recreation spot.

The tension between the U.S. Forest Service and Elko County residents has continued off and on for almost 100 years since the creation of the Humboldt National Forest. The mispronunciation and misspelling of the name Jarbidge has been around for just as long, if not longer. It seems unlikely that either problem will ever be resolved to everybody's satisfaction.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, May 2000 edition)
Who hasn't heard of the Ferris Wheel? One can't imagine a carnival or amusement park without one. Ferris wheels have been around since 1893 and the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. What many people don't know is that the inventor of the famous amusement ride, George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr., spent a portion of his childhood in Carson City and the house at 311 W. Third Street in which he lived still stands.

George W. G. Ferris, Sr. moved his family, including five-year-old George Jr., from Galesburg, Illinois to Carson Valley, Nevada Territory, in the summer of 1864. Young George, the tale goes, drew his inspiration for the Ferris Wheel by observing the water wheels on the Carson River and imagining what it would be like riding around on one of the buckets.

The Ferris family did not reside in Carson Valley very long however. According to an entry in the Ormsby County Deed Books, Ferris, Sr. purchased property on the southwest side of Carson City on March 10, 1868. This is where the confusion begins and people's fascination with the inventor of the Ferris Wheel and his family's residence has distorted the facts.

The Historic American Buildings Survey for Carson City, published by the National Park Service in 1974, claimed that the house in which the Ferris family lived was constructed by, or for, Ferris, Sr. circa 1869. "Stylistically," the report stated, "the original portions of the house accord well with this date." The 1868-69 Directory for Carson City lists George W. Ferris as a "Farmer" residing on "3rd, between Nevada and Division" streets.

What the researchers didn't do was consult the tax assessment records to determine if there were improvements, such as a house, on the property before the Ferris purchase.

New Yorkers Gregory A. and Mary A. Sears previously owned the property. Gregory, James, and William Sears had purchased much of southern Carson City in August 1859 from William Ormsby. The Sears brothers and partner James Thompson subdivided the land by February 1860 and began selling lots in the Sears, Thompson, and Sears (S, T&S) Addition.

The first territorial assessment rolls for Ormsby County in 1862-63 show Gregory Sears paying taxes on the land in question, lots 2 & 3 of block 28, S,T&S Addition. There is no reference to an improvement. However, when Sears paid his taxes the next year on property in block 28 the records note an improvement with an assessed valuation of $2,000. A large structure of some type had been built on the property sometime after March 1863, the end of the previous tax year, and January 1864, when Sears again paid his taxes.

Further proof that the structure was his residence is found in the Carson City directories. The 1862 directory has him residing on the southeast corner of Ormsby (now Curry) and King streets, where he owned a brick store identified in the tax rolls. The 1863 directory, on the other hand, lists him living on "Third near Nevada." At the time, Gregory Sears' family included his wife Mary, the couple marrying in Michigan in 1853, and nine-year-old daughter Lillie. Over the next five years, and before Sears sold the land and house to George Ferris, two more daughters, Jennie and Helen, were born to the couple according to census records.

The 1866 tax rolls describe the improvement on Sears' property in block 28, S,T&S Addition as a "dwelling house" and the 1867 tax rolls call it a "residence."

The definitive piece of evidence is found in the April 29, 1870 edition of the Carson City Daily Appeal. A story describing the many fruit trees G.W.G Ferris had planted around his premises on Third Street, referred to his house as "the old Sears place."
Gregory Sears, and not George Ferris, was responsible for the construction of the house at 311 W. Third Street. An examination of later tax rolls do not suggest that Ferris tore down the Sears house to build a new one, or that it may have burned and was replaced. The earliest known image of the house dates back to 1875 and the exterior is essentially the same today although some modifications were made in 1906 by Ferris' son-in-law.

Gregory Sears and his family moved across the street to a new house on the northwest corner of Fourth and Division streets in 1868, before leaving Carson City by late 1870 for Butler County, Kansas, east of Wichita. Sears served as Butler County Justice of the Peace in 1871 shortly after his arrival. In the 1881 session of the Kansas Legislature, he represented the 90th District as a Republican in the House of Representatives. Sears died at the age of 78 on October 16, 1905 in the house of his youngest daughter, Helen H. Gardner, and is buried in Belle Vista Cemetery in El Dorado, the Butler County seat.

In the eleven years the Sears family lived in Carson City, Gregory had served as Ormsby County Public Administrator. Both he and his wife, Mary, were actively involved in the Presbyterian Church. In 1863-64, Gregory, as a ranking member of the Presbyterian Church Board of Trustees, along with Secretary of Nevada Territory Orion Clemens, oversaw the construction of the church two blocks north of his house. Two humorous letters between Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens) and Gregory Sears, dated January 23, 1864, regarding a fund-raiser for the church are published in Volume I of Mark Twain's Letters (1988). Twain's speaking performance on January 27 at the Ormsby County Courthouse was the first of his career before an audience that had paid to hear him.

Pioneers Gregory Sears and his younger brothers are virtually forgotten in Carson City history. While there is a street named after real estate partner James Thompson, no thoroughfare in the capital city bears the name Sears.

Gregory Sears' visible legacy is his house. While all the contemporary literature and maps, and even a marker on the house at 311 W. Third Street, credit George Washington Gale Ferris, Sr. with its construction, thanks to the efforts of Mella Harmon, Architectural Historian at the State Historic Preservation Office, the structure was officially renamed the Sears-Ferris House on July 27, 2000. Sears' descendants in Butler County, Kansas, and elsewhere will surely appreciate setting the record straight.

Photo 1: Gregory Alvin Sears in 1881 (Kansas State Historical Society, Copy and Reuse Restrictions Apply)

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, June 2000 edition)
Myth #54: “Sell The Sizzle And Not The Steak”: Mark Twain In Carson City by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

Virtually every town in the United States having an association with the great American writer Mark Twain has capitalized on his name to market some aspect of his colorful life to tourists. Some communities have made an effort to be faithful to the facts and not represent a good story as actual history. Other towns don't let the facts get in the way of a good story. In the case of Carson City, reinventing Samuel Clemens, AKA Mark Twain, is considered acceptable boosterism.

Samuel Clemens rode by stage to Carson City from St. Joseph, Missouri with his brother Orion, the newly appointed Secretary of Nevada Territory, in August 1861. His job working for Orion didn't last but a few weeks. Over the next year, young Sam traveled all over the new territory, visiting Lake Tahoe, prospecting near Unionville in then-Humboldt County and Aurora in Esmeralda County, before finding his way to Virginia City in September 1862 to take a job as a reporter for the Territorial Enterprise.

Initially Samuel Clemens used the penname "Josh" when writing for the Enterprise. His first major assignment was to cover the second territorial legislature in Carson City beginning in November. Sam was not only reunited with his brother, but also with his sister-in-law Mollie and seven-year-old niece Jennie who had recently moved to Carson City. Orion and his family lived in rented quarters until his wife convinced him to build a house that could serve as the Governor's Mansion. Territorial Governor James W. Nye was out of the territory so much that Orion spent a great deal of time as Acting Governor, making Mollie the "First Lady" (Governor Nye's wife resided in New York and choose not to live in Carson City). "No one on this planet ever enjoyed a distinction more than she enjoyed that one," Sam wrote. A proper house was needed "commensurate with these dignities."

This is where the local license begins. An advertisement promoting Sam Clemens' association with Carson City appeared in the September 16, 1999 issue of Travel Weekly, a trade magazine with a 50,000 circulation. The ad promoted Carson City's historical house walking tour and featured a photo of Samuel Clemens next to the heading "See the House where Sam Clemens gave birth to Mark Twain." The ad continued, "History is just around the corner in Carson City, Nevada's capital. Visit the house where a youthful Samuel L. Clemens created his nom de plume "Mark Twain'-and recreated American Literature."

A check of the Ormsby County deed books reveals that Orion Clemens purchased the property at the corner of Division and Spear streets from George B. Cowing on November 17, 1863. George and his brother Joseph had been living in a small structure on the property. Orion either razed the Cowing abode or incorporated it into his palatial two-story clapboard residence. By early 1864, the house was completed "at a cost of twelve thousand dollars" according to Sam.

Actually Samuel Langhorne Clemens had been known as "Mark Twain" at least a year before his brother Orion's house at 502 North Division Street was constructed. Sam had dropped the penname "Josh" and first signed himself "Mark Twain" in a letter written on January 31, 1863. The Territorial Enterprise published the letter in its Tuesday, February 3, 1863 issue (http://www.twainquotes.com/18630203t.html). Although the letter signed as "Mark Twain" was sent from Carson City while on assignment, the fact is Sam Clemens gave birth to Mark Twain long before Mollie and Orion's "Governor's Mansion" became his capital hangout in the few months before he left Nevada Territory for California in May 1864. Orion sold the house on August 14, 1866 after moving to Meadow Lake, California, with Mollie earlier in March. Jennie died on February 1, 1864 and was buried in Lone Mountain Cemetery.
Ironically, humorist Mark Twain may have approved of the ad with his penchant for hoaxes and hyperbole. Twain as a creative writer had few reservations about playing tricks on the living and the dead--witness the exaggerated account of his time in Nevada, California, and Hawaii in *Roughing It* (1872). However the man Sam Clemens, with his distaste for tomfoolery and trickery would likely have told us the truth, much like Huck Finn did when he exposed hucksters and humbugs the Duke and Dauphin selling their flimflam and flapdoodle up and down the Mississippi River.

Photo: Orion Clemens house, Carson City. Samuel Clemens (AKA Mark Twain) stayed there during the 1864 territorial legislative session. Photo circa 1930, courtesy of the Nevada State Museum

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, July 2000 edition)
The first train robbery on the Pacific Slope took place just west of Reno near what is today the River Inn,” wrote Nevada Historian Phil Earl in his “This Was Nevada” series. Earlier the general area had been known as Hunter's Crossing, a Truckee River crossing on the emigrant trail, a post office from 1867 to 1870, and a connecting point to and from Virginia City and the Comstock mines. Samuel Clemens (AKA “Mark Twain”), in traveling from San Francisco to Virginia City during his second and last Nevada lecture tour, switched from a Central Pacific train to a stagecoach at Hunter's Crossing early on April 24, 1868. Later names included Mayberry’s Crossing; nearby was Granite (Lawton’s) Hot Springs. Today greater Reno encompasses this area. However when the train robbery was pulled off in the wee hours of November 5, 1870, the fledgling town of Reno was some six miles to the east. Contemporary newspaper accounts did not call the heist the Verdi train robbery, rather it was noted that the holdup was “between Reno and Verdi,” or "near Verdi." So why has the train robbery been called the Verdi train robbery when Verdi is some four miles west of the actual robbery site?

Maybe the earliest reference to the “Verdi train robbery” in a secondary source is found in editor Myron Angel's History of Nevada, published in 1881. The probable reason for the convenient naming is that the bandits boarded Central Pacific No. 1 when the Ogden, Utah, bound train slowed down to pass through the small lumber town of Verdi.

According to Earl, the train had left Oakland carrying $41,800 in $20 gold pieces and $8,800 in silver bars. One of the five robbers, A. J. “Jack” Davis, earlier in the day had received a telegram from an accomplice in San Francisco informing him of the valuable cargo, the payroll for Gold Hill's richest property the Yellow Jacket Mine. Following receipt of the message, the gang rode out to a site about a mile northwest of Hunter's Crossing after sunset and built a rock and tie barrier across the railroad tracks. Quietly boarding the train around midnight in Verdi, the robbers hijacked the engine and express car just east of town, setting the rest of the train adrift. The engineer was ordered to proceed to the barricade further down the line toward Hunter's Station. There the gang looted the express car, stuffed the money and bullion into their saddlebags, and rode off into the darkness. Before going their separate ways, Jack Davis and his fellow gang members split the booty at a quarry near Granite Hot Springs.

Wells Fargo, the Central Pacific Railroad, and the State of Nevada, Earl tells us, posted a combined reward of $40,000. The five robbers and three accomplices were quickly captured. Six of the men were convicted of the train robbery and served time in the State Prison. Less than a year later, four of the men, minus ringleader Jack Davis, joined in a bloody prison break. Three of them were soon apprehended, however one remained at-large for five years. While most of the loot was recovered, people still hunt in the vicinity of the robbery for the 150 missing gold coins now estimated to be worth over $500,000.

Logic seemingly dictates that later stories referred to the heist as the Verdi train robbery because Verdi was the closest town to where the holdup occurred, and probably because the gang initiated the robbery while the train was passing through the community. Despite the fact that the settlement of Hunter's Crossing has long ago disappeared into obscurity, we know the first train robbery on the Pacific Slope-
some even claim "the West's first train robbery"-- could have just as easily, and maybe more accurately, been called, the "Hunter's Crossing train robbery."


Photo: Nevada Historical Society

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, August 2000 edition)
If you believe all the stories about who performed at Piper's Opera House, virtually every entertainer in the late 19th and early 20th centuries found his or her way to Virginia City's premier theater. In fact, there are billboards kept at Piper's listing all the great and near-great performers who supposedly graced its stage beginning with the first opera house in 1867.

A front-page news story promoting a Nevada Shakespeare Festival at Piper's claimed "[t]he old Opera House has also played host to some of the best theatrical talent in the history books. . . ." Among those entertainers named in the story was the world-famous escape-artist and magician Harry Houdini, born Ehrich Weiss in 1874 in Budapest, Hungary. His father, Rabbi Meyer Weiss, brought his wife and children to America in 1876. While they lived in various locations in the country, the family considered Appleton, Wisconsin, their home.

Young Houdini began his magic act in 1891, a time when the great Comstock mines were in decline. According to the U.S. Decennial Census for 1890, Virginia City's population included some 8,500 residents. While still the largest town in Nevada, the "Queen of the Comstock" was only a shadow of its former self. Over the next ten years thousands would leave for greener pastures, some to nearby Reno which replaced Virginia City as the state's principal population center. In 1900, only about 2,700 people remained. Big-name performers did not include Piper's Opera House on their tours after the turn-of-the-century.

In reading Houdini!!!, a comprehensive biography of the career of Ehrich Weiss, it appears he played virtually every sizeable community in the country (for example, Houdini first appeared at San Francisco's Orpheum in June 1899). However, there is no mention of him visiting Piper's Opera House. A check of Virginia City and Reno newspapers turned up nothing. Curator Kim Louagie of the Houdini Historical Center in Appleton, Wisconsin, told me after examining all its records of where Houdini performed that there is no indication the great prestidigitator, illusionist, and escape artist ever played anywhere in Nevada (http://foxvalleyhistory.org).

Houdini's only association with the Silver State seems to be when he crossed Nevada by train to get to and from California! However, there are persons associated with Piper's who claim Houdini did "appear" at the Opera House because he was featured in motion picture productions. If we entertain that logic, then every place with a motion picture screen may have had Houdini "appear" in their community. Maybe his greatest feat following his untimely death in 1926 would have been all his worldwide "appearances" in the newsreels recounting his colorful and controversial career.

In fact, the reporter assigned the story was lead to believe that Houdini actually appeared in person at Piper's. Most newspaper journalists are under very short deadlines to complete their stories. They seldom have time to check historical facts or try to corroborate an informant's claim before the article is printed, generally on the next day. Only some have any training in the history field. If a mistake is brought to the attention of the editors, a correction is run on a subsequent day. Few people read the correction primarily because of its placement in the newspaper. The initial story may be used later in a school classroom by a teacher or student; cited by an author writing a paper, article, or book; or retrieved by another reporter from a morgue file or website and the mistake printed again, and again, and again!

Whether a story be folklore, fakelore, or just an error, it becomes "fact" through repetition, an oral or written mantra if you will. And so it goes.
Myth #56: No Disappearing Act for Harry Houdini at Piper’s Opera House by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist


Photo: Houdini poses in restraints for a publicity photo, circa 1918 after achieving worldwide fame with his death-defying escapes. Courtesy of the Sidney H. Radner Collection, Houdini Historical Center, Appleton, WI.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, September 2000 edition)
According to United States census data, the largest Chinatown in frontier Nevada was situated on Carson City's southeast side of town. Only for a few years in the mid-1870s when Virginia City's population was at its height did the overall number of its Chinese residents exceed that of Carson City.

As might be expected, the population figures in popular accounts of Carson's Chinatown are inflated and the location of the racial enclave has been often misidentified. While there is no vestige of the once thriving commercial and residential neighborhood, the Carson City Preservation Coalition marked the site of Nevada's premier Chinatown in 2003.

Many writers have placed Chinatown between E. Musser and E. Second, the northern and southern boundaries, and between Fall and Valley streets, the western and eastern boundaries. A recent newspaper story placed Chinatown where the Legislative Mall is today, extending the boundaries as far west as Carson Street and between E. Second and E. Fifth streets. Close but no cigar!

An examination of an 1875 lithograph of Carson City and a Sanborn Fire Insurance map for 1907 clearly places Chinatown between E. Second and E. Fourth streets, on the north and south, and from Fall Street on the west to the east of Valley Street. The main street was E. Third Street and Chinatown sprawled east and west on both sides of the Virginia & Truckee Railroad tracks. The Supreme Court, Legislative Parking Garage, the State Printing and Employment, Training and Rehabilitation buildings, and a parking lot cover most of old Chinatown today.

Having established exactly where Chinatown existed, it is important to determine realistically how large a population lived there at a given time. Figures have been thrown around that range from as low as 800 to as many as 2,000. In 1870, for example when Carson City was just twelve years old, 697 Chinese lived in the State Capital (769 in Ormsby County). With 3,042 people enumerated as living in Carson City, the number of Chinese is impressive, some 23% of the population or almost one out of every four people in town. The ratio of Chinese to non-Chinese in Virginia City never approached the numbers associated with the smaller Carson City.

The 1880 U.S. decennial census identified 802 Chinese in Carson City (pop. 4,229) and 988 Chinese in Ormsby County. Some of the Chinese enumerated lived in the town of Empire, and others were identified as woodcutters in the Carson Range. The peak population for Chinese in Carson City probably occurred in the late 1870s before the nearby Comstock mining district began its long decline. However, Carson City's Chinatown never contained 2,000 souls, despite population undercounts.

By 1890, like most of Nevada, Carson City was in decline. The city's population fell to 3,950, with 670 of the residents being Chinese, some 17% of the total. Ten years later, so many people had exited Carson City that it had become the smallest state capital in the United States with 2,100 citizens. The Chinese population in the county had shrunk to 152.

With new mining booms throughout Nevada, Carson City grew slightly during the first decade of the 20th century, 2,466 residents in 1910, however the Chinese population in Ormsby County fell to 118. Over the next thirty years, a number of fires burned large portions of Chinatown and its residents died off or left the area. By 1920, Carson City only numbered 1,685 citizens (73 Chinese in the county); in 1930, Carson City had declined to the point that with 1,596 residents the capital was as small as it was in the early
1860s (31 Chinese in the county); and in 1940, despite a small growth spurt to 2,478 locals, the Chinese in Ormsby County numbered only 20. A handful of buildings, including the Chinese Masonic Hall on E. Third Street, were all that was left of Chinatown in the 1940s. By 1950, when Carson City grew to 3,082, only 6 Chinese resided in the county. The State of Nevada bought what was left of Chinatown and the surrounding area in the 1950s for future capitol complex expansion. When in 1960 Carson City's size had increased to its largest in its one hundred-year history at 5,163, there were 10 Chinese living in the county and none of them lived in what was left of Chinatown.

The State of Nevada razed the last of the Chinatown buildings in the 1960s to make way for new state buildings. Only maps, lithographs, and federal, state, and local government records remind us that Carson City's Chinatown was once the largest in number and percentage of population in Nevada.

The Carson City Historical Commission, which had commemorated a number of historic locations in the mid-1970s with markers, planned to mark the Chinatown site on June 24, 1978. However the effort to place the marker on the legislative grounds was not supported. An historic marker recognizing the contribution of the Chinese to Carson City's history was long overdue.

Photo: Remnants of old Chinatown, in southeast Carson City, ca 1930s.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, October 2000 edition)
"David Walley built the place as a health resort, the first in Nevada and one of the first in the West," wrote Basil Woon in the August 30, 1953 edition of Reno's *Nevada State Journal*. A long-standing belief espoused in numerous publications is that Walley's Hot Springs was Nevada's first hydrothermal, health resort. According to David Walley's obituary published in the *Carson Valley News* for March 13, 1875, the spa opened a couple of miles south of Genoa in 1862. A survey was made for Walley, and partners Jacob Jetter and J. W. Brown, on November 20 and filed with the Douglas County Recorder on December 1. With just a tent for shelter, baths sold for 50 cents each. Walley erected the first bathhouse the following year, and in 1864 Walley's wife, Harriet, arrived from the East to help run Genoa Hot Springs resort. "From a mere rock pile has risen a magnificent hotel, bath-houses, stabling and ball room," the weekly *News* proclaimed after Walley's unexpected death at age 56 in Carson City's Ormsby House.

The truth is that Abe Curry's Warm Springs near Carson City, and Steamboat Hot Springs south of the Truckee Meadows, operated as health resorts, with the requisite infrastructure, before David Walley purchased the hot springs in Carson Valley.

A massive geothermal belt interspersed with hot springs, runs north and south along the eastern slope of the Carson Range. Explorers and immigrants trekking across the Great Basin discovered the hot springs in their travels, and bathed in the water if it was not scalding. Heated mineral water was, and still is, believed to have curative properties. By the time communities were established near the western Great Basin's Sierra Nevada in the 1850s-then a part of Utah Territory--early settlers had claimed most of the hydrothermal springs in the region that had long been the domain of the Washoe tribe.

Abraham Curry and his business associates purchased much of Eagle Valley in August 1858, established Carson City a month later, and included in their holdings was the warm springs where the State Prison on East Fifth Street is today. Curry soon acquired his partners' interest in the springs. According to Curry's biographer, Doris Cerveri in her book *With Curry's Compliments* (1990), "Curry walled up the spring and covered it with a hand-hewn stone bathhouse, one hundred-sixty feet long by thirty-eight feet wide." There were six bath areas of various depths and temperatures. A hotel was completed in the summer of 1861. Beginning in October, the hotel and spa served as the site of Nevada's first territorial legislative session.

Like Curry's Warm Springs, Steamboat Hot Springs as a location for a health resort also predates Walley's Hot Springs. "From the 1860s on," according to John Townley's work *Tough Little Town on the Truckee* (1983), "one hotel or resort followed another in futile attempts to merchandise a natural phenomenon either as a miracle-working medical facility or tourist haven surrounded by spa conditions beloved by 19th century vacationers." James Cameron and his associates "already have a hotel near the springs," reported the Territorial Enterprise on March 10, 1860, "and Dr. J. Ellis has taken up the Steamboat Springs and intends to erect vapor baths there soon, as he believes that the escaped steam from the springs can be used with great advantage in the cure of diseases." In 1862 according to Myron Angel's *History of Nevada* (1881), Dr. Joseph Ellis built a thirty-four bed hospital with six or seven bathhouses.

*Territorial Enterprise* reporter and humorist Mark Twain partook of Steamboat Springs in August 1863. He wrote a colorful letter detailing his efforts to improve his health. Young Twain also spent time at Curry's Warm Springs and, it is claimed, at Walley's Hot Springs.
Numerous other geothermal springs have brought pleasure and/or therapeutic benefit to their patrons. For example, Grover Hot Springs in Alpine County, California (John C. Fremont and Kit Carson camped near the hot springs in February 1844); Carson Hot Springs (formerly Swift's, 1879 and later Shaw's Hot Springs, 1882); and both Moana and Lawton Hot Springs in the Reno area, to name just a few.

Taking the risk of getting figuratively into some hot water, the distinction of operating the first health resort business in Nevada actually goes to William P. Cosser. By 1854, according to Paolo Sioli's *Historical Souvenir of El Dorado County, California* (1883), Cosser (spelled Cozart in Sioli's publication) was the proprietor of a "bathhouse at the warm and cold springs, two miles south from the old Mormon Station." Cosser, a Scotsman who with his family moved to Carson Valley in 1852, ran a modest health spa at the site where David Walley would open his business in 1862. Walley clearly did not operate the area's first health resort, however the location two miles south of Genoa was the site of Nevada's first hot springs resort thanks to William Cosser. The Cosser family is buried in the Mottsville Cemetery.

For additional information, see *A Steamboat In The Desert: A History Of Steamboat Springs, Nevada* (1999) by Roger Bowen Weld.

Photo: Walley's Hot Springs in Carson Valley, circa 1915. Courtesy of the Nevada State Museum

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, November 2000 edition)
A myth surrounds the childhood schooling of Albert Abraham Michelson (1852-1931). Michelson grew up to become a preeminent scientist specializing in the properties of light. He won the distinguished Nobel Prize in physics in 1907, the first American to win the coveted award. The story goes that Michelson attended the Fourth Ward School in Virginia City before pursuing his studies at the U.S. Naval Academy. Let’s shed some light on the facts.

Michelson was born in Strelno, a small Prussian village on December 19, 1852. The Jewish family, in search of greater freedom and opportunity, immigrated to the United States in 1854. After a brief time in New York, the family relocated to San Francisco and then moved to the Mother Lode country. At fourteen, young Albert arrived on the Comstock from Murphy’s Camp, Calaveras County, with his father, Samuel, mother, Rosalie, and five siblings. On September 4, 1867, Samuel Michelson purchased a residence at 37 North F Street. Samuel soon opened a dry goods business at 24 South C Street.

In 1870, Albert Michelson graduated high school at the age of seventeen. Historian Phil Earl in his "This Was Nevada" article describing the career of Michelson noted that he took an examination for a Congressional appointment to the U. S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. He tied with another aspirant, and lost the appointment because of some political maneuvering on behalf of his competitor. "Undaunted, he got a letter of recommendation from Congressman Thomas Fitch and set off to Washington, D. C. to try and get one of the ten appointments at large from President Grant," Earl wrote. "He talked with Grant but the appointments had already been made. Going on to the Academy, he so impressed the Commandant with his earnestness that a place was made for him at the school as the eleventh appointment."

Michelson graduated from the Naval Academy on May 31, 1873, ninth in a class of twenty-nine. He completed two years of naval service in the West Indies, and then was appointed an instructor in physics and chemistry, a position he held until 1879.

Meanwhile, back in Virginia City, his father had purchased a house on June 22, 1872 at 17 North A Street and relocated the growing family from the F Street residence. At the same time, "The Queen of the Comstock" was still booming. Despite a disastrous fire in October 1875 that burned much of the city, and a downturn in the gold and silver mining economy, a new school, the Fourth Ward School, opened in 1876.

If one does the math, when the Fourth Ward School opened for its first students, Professor Michelson was teaching students of his own at the Naval Academy. He never attended the Fourth Ward because he was a twenty-three year old college instructor living in Annapolis, Maryland.

The rest is history. Albert Michelson taught at a number of different universities, principally at the University of Chicago, before his death in 1931. The Nobel Prize was awarded to Michelson for his work in spectroscopic and meteorological investigations. According to Phil Earl, "his work with light was later to become part of a new philosophy of science which reached its highest development in Albert Einstein's theory of relativity."

For more information, see Phil Earl's "Albert A. Michelson: Nevada Nobel Laureate" in This Was Nevada (Reno: Nevada Historical Society, 1986), pp. 92-95.

Photo: Albert A. Michelson of Virginia City, winner of the 1907 Nobel Prize in Physics. Courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, December 2000 edition)
Reno was enjoying the last of its glory days as Nevada's premier divorce and gambling city, and received a huge publicity boost, when Academy-Award winning director John Huston and producer Frank Taylor came to town in 1960 to shoot "The Misfits". American dramatist and Pulitzer Prize winner Arthur Miller wrote the screenplay for his seductive wife, actress Marilyn Monroe.

On June 11, 1956, Miller was divorced in Reno from his first wife after spending his six-week residency in Sutcliffe at the Pyramid Lake Guest Ranch. He married Marilyn Monroe some three weeks later. His encountering "misfit" cowboys and the round up of wild horses inspired a short story in Esquire (October 1957) and later the screenplay that captured the end of an era in the American West. Among the actors and actresses featured in the poignant drama were Marilyn Monroe, Clark Gable, Montgomery Clift, Eli Wallach, Thelma Ritter, and Kevin McCarthy. Only Wallach is still alive. Playwright Arthur Miller died February 10, 2005.

"At one time, 'The Misfits' held the title of the most expensive black-and-white film ever made," a recent letter to the editor of the Reno Gazette-Journal claimed, "and, sadly, it was the last film for Monroe, Gable and Clift." While it appears many people subscribe to the tragic notion that the careers of three Hollywood film stars ended with this haunting movie, the truth is more complicated.

It is true that Clark Gable died of a heart attack on November 16, 1960, at age 59, just twelve days after shooting the final scenes in Los Angeles. A month earlier, east of Dayton, at "Misfit Flats," Gable had shot the stallion fight sequence with Gay Langland, Gable's character, being dragged around by the powerful horse. Many believed that this taxing scene took its toll on Gable's health. Expecting to give birth soon, Gable's fifth wife, Kay, was unable to attend a preview of "The Misfits" in Hollywood on January 10, 1961. The "World Premiere" in Reno occurred on January 31 at the Granada Theater.

Marilyn Monroe, after her divorce from Arthur Miller on January 20, 1961, actually started filming another movie in 1962, "Something's Got to Give." Monroe's deteriorating condition, fueled by drugs and personal turmoil, reached a point that she was dropped from the film after many times forgetting her lines and missing numerous shoots.

Meanwhile, every indication is that Twentieth-Century Fox simply did not have the picture ready for filming. Monroe spent much time shooting scenes that had already been shot because the next scenes were not yet written. The studio was in serious financial condition and was looking desperately for ways to cut costs. Monroe's fee for the film was one of the highest of any film then in production.

Her untimely end came on August 5. The Los Angeles County Coroner ruled the thirty-six-year-old woman's death a suicide, albeit under mysterious circumstances. The scenes from "Something's Got to Give" were used in "Marilyn" (1963), a documentary narrated by Rock Hudson.

Montgomery Clift's film career did not end with "The Misfits." Later in the year after the "The Misfits" was released in 1961, Clift also starred in "Judgment at Nuremberg." The following year he played the renowned Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud in Director John Huston's "Freud". In 1965, he was featured in "The Love Goddesses." His last film was a French production released in 1966 entitled "The Defector." Clift's dependency on drugs and alcohol, and also his lifelong bisexuality, profoundly affected him during his career. His life was cut short on July 23, 1966 when his companion Lorenzo James, found...
him dead lying nude on top of his bed in New York City. According to the autopsy, the cause of death was "occlusive coronary artery disease".

Some critics argue "The Misfits" may have been Monroe’s best performance. In playing the vulnerable divorcée Roslyn Taber, navigating between the affection of three men, she really played herself. The rest of the cast including Gable and Clift gave solid performances. However, the movie did not receive wide critical acclaim nor was it a box-office hit. Its popularity has grown with time. There is a melancholy tone to this engaging black-and-white movie that suggests the tragedy that was to consume Gable, Monroe, and Clift.

Photo: Marilyn Monroe as Roslyn Taber and Kevin McCarthy as Raymond Taber on the steps of the Washoe County Courthouse, July 22, 1960 Courtesy of Kevin McCarthy

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, January 2001 edition)
"Today, one can stand where Carson and Fremont stood thanks to a trail running from the top of the Heavenly Ski Resort tram," according to an article in the Nevada Day 2000 Official Program published in Carson City's Nevada Appeal. "The view was ‘awesome’ then, history records Fremont as saying, and it remains one of the definitive vistas around Lake Tahoe today."

Nothing could be farther from the truth! The location where John Charles Fremont and cartographer Charles Preuss viewed Lake Tahoe on February 14, 1844 was some twenty miles to the south of where Heavenly Ski Resort is today. The area is near Highway 88 and Carson Pass. More importantly, Kit Carson was NOT with Fremont and Preuss at the time Lake Tahoe was sighted on their journey to northern California.

Fremont wrote in his journals that, "With Mr. Preuss, I ascended to-day the highest peak to the right [Red Lake Peak]; from which we had a beautiful view of a mountain lake at our feet, about fifteen miles in length, and so entirely surrounded by mountains that we could not discover an outlet." In Fremont's 1845 report he calls the largest lake in the Sierra Nevada "Mountain Lake." Charles Preuss' map of 1848 identifies the magnificent body of water as Lake Bonpland, named in honor of French botanist Aime Jacques Alexandre Bonpland (1772-1858).

The Washoe tribal name, Da ow a ga ("edge of the lake" according to Wa She Shu: A Washo Tribal History), and mispronounced as "Tahoe," was commonly used by the 1860s. However, the breathtaking body of water was also known as Lake Bigler. The name Bigler had been unofficially applied in 1852 to honor California's third governor who led a rescue party into Lake Valley to retrieve a snowbound emigrant party. The following year California Surveyor General William M. Eddy designated Lake Bigler on area maps. Despite the fact former Governor Bigler fell out of favor in California for his pro-Southern views during the Civil War, the state legislature made the name official in 1870. The state legislature did not officially change the name to Lake Tahoe until 1945.

Fremont and Preuss are believed to be the first Euro-Americans to see Lake Tahoe. However, history does NOT record Fremont ever exclaiming that this captivating mountain lake was "awesome".

When this story started circulating is anybody's guess, although it may be traced to after Heavenly Ski Resort opened in 1955. Another example of a "George Washington slept here" story?

You make the call.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, February 2001 edition)
A rugged section of the Carson River valley between Carson City and Dayton is commonly misidentified as Brunswick Canyon. Confusion over the canyon’s name has reigned for years. Recently, a newspaper story noted that “extending the V & T rail from Virginia City, through Brunswick Canyon and American Flats [sic], to the east side of Carson City would not only draw railroad enthusiasts, but provide a scenic trip for everyone.” The truth, geographically speaking, is that the rail excursion will travel through the Carson River Canyon, not the Brunswick Canyon.

The Carson River stretches some 180 miles from the picturesque Sierra Nevada in Alpine County, California, into the Churchill County, Nevada, desert where it disappears in the Carson Sink. Portions of the unnamed river first appeared on a map of the Great Basin drawn by cartographer Charles Preuss in 1845. Explorer John C. Fremont named that feature for his scout Kit Carson and it first appears as Carson River on a map drawn by Preuss in 1848.

Detailed maps show the Brunswick Canyon is located in the northwest Pine Nut Mountains. The canyon stretches for miles in generally a north-south direction before it intersects the Carson River Canyon about a mile east from where the river leaves the Eagle Valley and proceeds northeast to Dayton Valley.

The Brunswick Mill, just east of the milling town of Empire, was constructed in 1863-64 on the Carson River to process Comstock gold and silver quartz. William Sharon of the Bank of California owned the mill, and it was one of the major quartz mills on the Carson River. At the height of its operation, the mill had 76 stamps to crush the rock and reportedly processed 150 tons of ore per day. Despite the decline of the Comstock mines in the latter 1870s, the Brunswick Mill operated late into the nineteenth-century.

The area became a voting precinct in Ormsby County by 1866 and the Virginia & Truckee Railroad established a station called Brunswick shortly after its completion between Virginia City and Carson City in 1869. The sizeable canyon whose mouth is near the Brunswick site, and runs in a southeasterly direction away from the river, apparently received its name from the mill. An earlier name for the canyon appears to have been the Merrimac[k] Canyon for the nearby Merrimac Mill.

It’s anybody’s guess as to when the modern confusion began in referring to the Carson River Canyon as the Brunswick Canyon. Newspaper stories dating back to 1930 make the mistake (Reno Evening Gazette, April 12, 1930, 6:2-5). The misapplication is not found on official maps, and it is interesting to note there are other canyons, including the Eureka and Santiago canyons, that terminate in the Carson River Canyon between Carson City and Dayton. Nobody seems to confuse the names of those features. Maybe because the Brunswick Canyon meets the Carson River so close to where the river leaves Eagle Valley, to course through rugged terrain, before reaching Dayton that people have mistakenly assumed the canyons are one and the same.

In the end, the confusion will likely persist despite anyone’s effort to set the record straight.

Photo: Courtesy Nevada State Museum

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, March 2001 edition)
The origins of the names of many places in Nevada are shrouded in mystery and myth. Jacks Valley, a small valley in northwestern Douglas County, is one of those places. Lying at the base of the Carson Range, the valley is near Clear Creek and Carson City. It extends several miles south and overlooks Carson Valley. Published sources claim the name "Jacks Valley" is associated with Jack Winter, or Jack Redding, or maybe even jackrabbits.

The truth is found in a Nevada Supreme Court case, Jacob N. Winter v. Robert Fulstone. A transcript on appeal filed on November 5, 1888 in Carson City contains the testimony of Stephen A. Kinsey, who had traveled from the Salt Lake City area with John Reese and his company to settle at Mormon Station on June 6, 1851.

According to Kinsey's statement in the water rights case, he was "In Jacks Valley in the Summer of 1851. I had quite a number of horses and cattle there. Jack Redding Valley is called after him."

We know much of Kinsey's life including his holding the positions of Carson County, Utah Territorial Probate Court Clerk and county recorder beginning in 1856. After Douglas County was created in November 1861 by the Nevada Territorial Legislature, he held the positions of county commissioner, county clerk, and county recorder. Kinsey died in Genoa in 1903, a revered Carson Valley pioneer.

On the other hand, we know little of Return Jackson Redden (AKA Jack Redding) when he resided in western Utah Territory. John Reese, in his memoirs dictated to historian Hubert Howe Bancroft in 1884, stated that Redding was a Mormon, a family man, and lived in the valley that bears his name in the winter of 1851-52. A work entitled Our Pioneer Heritage claimed that Redding accompanied LDS Apostle Amasa Lyman to California in 1850 before his stay in Jack's Valley.

Frank Hall, who settled in nearby Eagle Valley in late October 1851, told journalist Alfred Doten, in 1899, that he encountered the Redding family in "Jack's Valley" shortly after Hall's arrival from California.

Dale Morgan in his work The Humboldt: Highroad of the West (1943), claimed young Redding "perhaps was a saint only on Sunday" and pursued some criminal ventures before settling down to a quiet life of respectability in Utah after departing Jack's Valley.

We do know from reports on June 29 and July 10, 1852 in Sacramento's The Daily Union that Redding had been arrested in Jack's Valley by a posse and taken to Mud Springs, El Dorado, California and tried for horse stealing. The charge was predicated on the allegation of one William Hibbard who had been tried, convicted and shot for horse stealing.

Earlier Hibbard had been captured at Redding's residence after selling the animal to Redding. With only Hibbard's accusation and no evidence to support it, Redding was released. Redding and his family probably left Jacks Valley not long after this brush with the law.

The records of the provisional government established in western Utah Territory between 1851 and 1855 contain no entries for Redding, although there is a survey for land in Jacks Valley filed by R. T. Hawkins on May 17, 1853. Neither the Carson County, Utah and Nevada Territorial records (1855-61), nor Myron Angel's History of Nevada (1881), make any reference to this obscure settler.

Redding and his family apparently stayed less than two years in the valley named for him without ever filing a land claim or leaving any other record.
Son Adelbert was born in Coalville, Utah Territory on May 20, 1853. Redding, 73, died in Hoytsville, Summit County, Utah Territory on August 30, 1891 and is buried in the Coalville cemetery.

Jack Redding’s legacy in Nevada is his name and we can thank Stephen Kinsey for remembering.


Congress created National Statuary Hall in the same year Nevada became a state, 1864, and authorized each state to submit two statues. Today there are finally two statues submitted by Nevada standing in the U.S. Capitol. On March 9, 2005, a statue of native daughter Sarah Winnemucca (1844-1891), a Northern Paiute Indian activist, was dedicated in Statuary Hall.

The other statue is of controversial native son, U.S. Senator Patrick Anthony McCarran (1876-1954), a Cold War warrior, zealous anti-Communist, and colleague of Senator Joe McCarthy. The seven-foot, bronze figure depicts McCarran in flowing judicial robes, with a faint smile, standing upon the inscription: LAWYER JUDGE SENATOR A TRUE AMERICAN. Nevada, after five years of effort, gave the statue of Senator McCarran sculpted by Yolanda Jacobsen Sheppard to the Statuary Hall collection in 1960.

Surprisingly, the biographical sketch of Senator Pat McCarran listed on the National Statuary Hall website makes numerous claims about McCarran's life and political career that are clearly untrue.

Born on August 8, 1876 in Reno, Pat McCarran became the first native-born Nevadan to be elected U.S. Senator. He attended Reno High School and was valedictorian of a class of sixteen in 1897. The Statuary Hall website biography erroneously states McCarran graduated from the University of Nevada in 1901. A Senate document entitled Statue of Patrick Anthony McCarran-Presented in the Rotunda United States Capitol (1960) claimed "he was a University of Nevada graduate where he excelled as an athlete, debater, and orator." The earliest source identified with the claim was from the Official Congressional Directory published in 1953, a year before McCarran's death in Hawthorne, Nevada. The senator was credited with an "A. B., University of Nevada, 1901." All the Congressional Directory listings between 1933, when McCarran first took office, and 1952 make no mention of receiving an undergraduate degree.

McCarran did attend then-Nevada State University in Reno until the spring of his senior year. However, he failed to graduate due to dropping grades coupled with his elderly father's injury and McCarran's taking over active operation of the family ranch. According to UNR history professor Jerome Edwards, in his biography Pat McCarran: Political Boss of Nevada (1982), "when the time came for the class of 1901 to graduate, he took his mother to see the twenty-six other members of the class receive their diplomas: she sat in the auditorium with him and cried."

The congressional directories from 1933 to 1954 also stated McCarran had earned an M.A. degree from the University of Nevada. The 1953 Official Congressional Directory claimed the degree was conferred in 1915 while McCarran was serving as a Nevada Supreme Court Justice. According to the Board of Regents' meeting minutes for May 11-12, 1915, he was actually granted an honorary Master of Arts degree from Nevada's lone university. Interestingly enough, the Regents' meeting minutes note that he did not receive the diploma for the honorary M.A. until 1931.

The errors associated with Patrick McCarran's education could be viewed as minor, although numerous writers have relied on the Congressional Directory for biographical information. Renowned New York City journalist A.J. Liebling, in writing articles on McCarran and Pyramid Lake for The New Yorker in 1955, wrote that "I looked in the Congressional Directory... [and McCarran] had taken his A.B. at the University of Nevada in 1901..." The University of Nevada Press published the essays as a book in 2000 entitled A Reporter At Large, Dateline: Pyramid Lake, Nevada.

Of much greater importance is the false assertion on the Statuary Hall website that as "a champion of the working class, he sponsored the country's first law limiting the working day to eight hours" during his one term as a Silver-Democratic State Assemblyman from Washoe County in 1903. "He ran on a platform that
urged passage of an eight-hour-working-day law, to apply to the mines, mills, and smelters of the state," wrote Professor Edwards. "Such an eight-hour law was to be extended to 'other classes of labor so far as it can be made to apply'."

True to his word, Patrick McCarran voted for the Assembly bill providing for the 8-hour day in underground mines, smelters, and ore reduction works. Governor John Sparks, who supported an eight-hour day in his first legislative message, signed the bill into law on February 23, 1903. However, the freshman legislator did not sponsor the bill. Veteran Lincoln County Democrat James A. Denton of Caliente sponsored it. In addition, the bill was certainly not the country's first law limiting the working day in mines and mills to eight hours, contrary to McCarran's assertion on the final day of a Senate Internal Security Subcommittee hearing in Salt Lake City in October 1952 where he called for a perjury investigation of mining labor leaders believed to be Communists.

The Senate document associated with the McCarran statue dedication in 1960 went so far as to state that "he sponsored and fought through passage in Nevada the country's first law limiting a man's hours of work to an 8-hour day - an act whose constitutionality was challenged through to the U.S. Supreme Court, and there upheld."

The truth is the Nevada law dictating an eight-hour day in the mining industry was never appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. A case on appeal, supported by the Western Federation of Miners, was heard in the Nevada Supreme Court in 1904. The Supreme Court, In re Boyce, overruled a district court judgment that had overturned the 1903 law. McCarran, admitted to the Nevada Bar in 1905, was not associated with the case.

In fact, the State of Utah in its inaugural legislative session passed the first eight-hour day law pertaining to underground mines, smelters, and ore reduction works in 1896. This law was appealed all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, Holden v. Hardy, in 1898. The court upheld the law and the landmark ruling served as the basis for the passage of other eight-hour laws in the mining West including Montana (1901) and Arizona (1903).

In the final analysis, Nevada's eight-hour law was not the first in the nation, McCarran didn't sponsor Nevada's law, and Nevada's law was not appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

We may never know why the bogus claims were made in federal publications regarding McCarran's education and political career. We do know people in leaving their mark in the world sometimes claim more for themselves in the way of accomplishments than the record supports, or others, out of devotion, make inflated claims on behalf of those near and dear to them. Such appears to be the case with Patrick Anthony McCarran whose statue resides in the nation's capitol.


(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, May 2001 edition)
Gabbs is no more, well not quite. After 46 years the remote hamlet situated in Gabbs Valley in northwest Nye County ceased being the county’s only city on May 8, 2001. The 2000 U.S. Census listed the town’s population as 318. Its tax base could no longer sustain a municipal government, and for the first time in over 100 years the state legislature has disincorporated a municipality.

Readers may recognize Gabbs as the home of Melvin Dummar, both the city and the controversial figure immortalized in the movie Melvin and Howard (1980). The story revolves around eccentric Howard Hughes’ so-called Mormon Will. Dummar claimed he was included in the will because he had unknowingly saved Hughes while the billionaire recluse was wandering in the desert in the vicinity of Lida Junction and transported the disoriented Hughes to the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas. Veteran actor Jason Robards played Hughes and newcomer Mary Steenburgen received an Academy Award for her performance as Melvin’s wife, Lynda Dummar.

Until Ruth Fenstermaker Danner’s comprehensive work Gabbs Valley, Nevada: Its History & Legend (1992), there was much mystery and confusion on the origin of the name Gabbs, and little history on this isolated area of Nevada. Helen S. Carlson in her book, Nevada Place Names: A Geographical Dictionary (1974), claimed the valley, mountain range, and town were named for a Professor E. S. Gabbs, an engineer. Carlson relied on the study Origin of Place Names. Nevada (1941) produced by the WPA’s Federal Writers Project. The study, in turn, relied on informant Robert A. Allen, the State Highway Engineer, whose department sponsored the federal study in Nevada.

Allen, a powerful government bureaucrat who considered himself a Nevada history expert, was wrong! According to Danner, “It is not known who was responsible for the official naming of the valley, but it seems apparent that both Gabbs Valley and the Gabbs Valley Range were named for William More Gabb.” In an excellent biographical sketch, we learn that Gabb (1839-1878) was a paleontologist and a member of a survey team in California and Nevada under the direction of Professor Josiah Dwight Whitney in 1862-67. Several of his colleagues surveyed and mapped the area now called Gabbs Valley. While apparently never seeing the valley that bears his name, Gabb described fossils that were collected there. The first documented use of the name Gabbs Valley appears on a map in 1871. The Philadelphia-native died seven years later at his home at the age of 39 and is buried at Woodland Cemetery.

The community of Gabbs is a product of the 20th century and owes its existence to the discovery of major brucite deposits in Gabbs Valley in the late 1920s. In fact, the town that sprang up in the mid-1930s was first named after the magnesium-bearing mineral.

Brucite grew slowly, then boomed with the onset of World War II and the need for magnesium in the production of defense weaponry. The mineral ore was transported to the Basic Magnesium, Inc. (BMI) plant in the fledgling town of Henderson south of Las Vegas. By the end of 1942, hundreds of workers and their families lived in new town sites named North Gabbs and South Gabbs.

The first federal post office in the Gabbs Valley opened on December 3, 1942. Initially it was named the Toiyabe Post Office, however the name was changed to Gabbs on June 1, 1943. By the end of the war, magnesium production had declined and so had Gabbs.
The Korean War and the opening of a new BMI plant in 1951 spurred the town’s growth. Gabbs acquired city status on March 29, 1955 when the area mines were still operating at full capacity and the life-blood of the community. The small city fared well for many years and at its peak may have reached 1,000 residents. According to the 1970 U.S. Census, the population was 874. Subsequent census data showed the town steadily losing population. Estimates today give Gabbs about 300 residents.

Now city hall is closed. Whether Gabbs becomes a ghost town like so many other mining towns in Nevada history, time will tell. The place names commemorating scientist William More Gabb, Gabbs Valley and Gabbs Valley Range, will live on--so to the history of Gabbs thanks to the good work of Ruth Danner who grew up there.

Illustration: John M. Graham, Vernon, B.C. Provided by Ruth Fenstermaker Danner

Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, June 2001 edition)
Douglas County has been the most consistently Republican county in Nevada history, only supporting Silver-Democrat William Jennings Bryan in 1896 and 1900, Progressive Theodore Roosevelt in 1912, and Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932. In the latter year, the Minden precinct, the most Republican precinct in the county, held out for President Herbert Hoover.

Today, there are almost twice as many registered Republicans as there are Democrats. A Republican holds every elected, partisan office in Douglas County. Only a handful of Democrats have ever been elected to a partisan public office and almost all of them more than forty years ago.

Perhaps as a reward for years of stalwart support for Republican politics, the Douglas High School band performed at George H.W. Bush’s presidential inauguration ceremony in 1989 in Washington, D.C., and again performed for George W. Bush during his inauguration ceremonies in 2001 and 2005.

The irony in this story is that when the Nevada territorial legislature created Douglas County in November 1861, it was named for one of the great Democrats of the era, Stephen Arnold Douglas, who had recently died. All the legislators were members of the Union Party, essentially Republicans.

Douglas was admitted to the Illinois bar at age 20 in 1833. His good fortune in politics paralleled the growth of the Democratic Party in the state. He sat on the Supreme Court, served in the General Assembly, and briefly held the position of Secretary of State. In 1842, he was elected to Congress from Illinois, and in 1846 he became a U.S. Senator.


On the brink of the Civil War, Douglas gave the new president his unwavering support and worked doggedly in the Senate to preserve the Union. Douglas contracted typhoid fever while on a speaking tour to rally the nation behind its government, and died in Chicago on June 3, 1861.

Only ten months after President Lincoln was assassinated, the state legislature in February 1866 created a new county in southern Nevada and named it after the fallen president in remembrance of Lincoln’s support of statehood. The irony here is that Lincoln County tended to vote Democratic over the years.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, July 2001 edition)
A vintage two-story brick building sits on the southwest corner of Curry and King Streets in Carson City. Local lore has it that the structure at 102 South Curry Street dates back to 1859-60 shortly after the town was founded in Eagle Valley, Utah Territory. Pioneer Edward D. Sweeney, a proud Irishman known for his zealous celebration of St. Patrick’s Day, is credited for its construction.

The story goes the edifice was either the first, or one of the first brick buildings, erected in the fledgling burg. Newspaper stories, photograph captions, historic building tour maps, virtually everything printed about the Sweeney Building makes claims for the age of the building that are not supported in local government records associated with the property. So how did this case of mistaken identity come to pass?

A study published in 1974 by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the National Park Service sheds considerable light on the origin of the confusion. The architects and architectural historians conducting the survey found that townspeople claimed the Sweeney Building was built sometime between 1859 and 1860. The study, entitled The Architecture of Carson City, quoted a biographical sketch of Edward Sweeney in Sam Davis’ History of Nevada (1913) which stated that he “built the first brick building in the city of Carson, wherein was situated the United States Land Register Post, and other Federal offices.” From all indications, Carsonites had misconstrued that the town’s first brick building reportedly built by Sweeney and the Sweeney Building were one in the same.

The HABS survey noted the deed records associated with the property on the southwest corner of Curry and King—the north 1/2 of lot no. 1, Block 7, in the Sears, Thompson, & Sears Division—did not have Sweeney buying the property from James E. and Lottie Wood until February 6, 1864. “Whether the building had been erected by then is not answered by the deed,” the authors of the study conjectured. “Stylistically, the structure could well date from 1860.”

County assessment rolls contain the answer to the mystery. On January 30, 1864, J. E. Wood, a prominent rancher in Eagle Valley, paid his property taxes on the north 1/2 of lot no. 1, Block 7, in the Sears, Thompson, & Sears Division. The total assessed value of the land and improvements came to $500.00. A week later the Woods sold the property to E. D. Sweeney. On January 10, 1865, Sweeney paid the yearly tax on the 1/2 lot in the downtown area. The assessed value was now $2,500, and $2,000 of the total was assessed on "Brick Store On Same" lot. Tax records clearly demonstrate that Sweeney erected the building sometime after he had purchased the property in February 1864. Unfortunately, there are only a few extant issues of Carson City newspapers in 1864 and none of them make mention of the building's construction.

What seemed a logical assumption that the first brick building in Carson City supposedly built by Sweeney was actually the Sweeney Building was not logical at all. In fact, the brick building that housed the U.S. Land Office in the early 1860s appears to have been constructed on Carson Street and not where the Sweeney Building is located one block west of the main street. By the time the Sweeney Building was completed and occupied in late 1864, Carson City had dozens of brick buildings, including the St. Charles/Muller hotels and the Upton/Olcovitch stores on South Carson Street which still stand today.

The Sweeney Building not being one of the first brick structures in town does not diminish its importance in Carson City history. Among its first occupants in 1865 was attorney Orion Clemens, brother of Samuel Clemens (AKA “Mark Twain”) and former Secretary of Nevada Territory, who went on to represent Carson City and Ormsby County in the State Assembly in 1866. From December 1865 through
September 1867, the state leased office space on the second floor at $50.00 a month for Nevada's first governor, Republican Henry Goode Blasdel (the State Capitol, built by E. D. Sweeney's father-in-law Peter Cavanaugh, was not completed until 1871). In 1870, Nevada's best known artist of the 19th-century, Cyrenius B. "Mac" McClellan, and portrait painter of former Territorial Governor and U.S. Senator James W. Nye, operated a studio in the structure. By the early 1870s, Patrick Henry Clayton, one of the leading Democratic politicians in Nevada, conducted his law practice in the Sweeney Building.

Ed Sweeney deeded the property to his wife Ellen on the day he died, February 17, 1913, at the age of 87. The building passed out of the family's hands with Ellen's death in 1919. Today, the Sweeney Building, built in 1864 and not in 1859-60 as generally believed, stands as mute testimony to the vision of a pioneer builder in Nevada's capital.

Photo: The Sweeney Building located at 102 South Curry St. in Carson City dates back to 1864. Photo Courtesy of the Nevada State Museum.

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, August 2001 edition)
Traditionally, divorcees coming to Reno to take advantage of the city's easy divorce laws threw their wedding rings into the river, According to the Reno Gazette-Journal's "Nevada Living" supplement (April 2001). "The trend may have started-or been fueled by-a scene in the 1961 film 'Misfits' in which Marilyn Monroe considered tossing her ring into the Truckee."

Some writers argue that ring tossing in what was once known as "The Divorce Capital of the World" is a myth. Others claim the legendary ritual began as a publicity stunt that was imitated by divorcees. People have been debating for years whether dropping wedding rings into the Truckee River is a long-standing tradition. Any trend started long before "The Misfits," the short story and screenplay written by playwright Arthur Miller following his Reno divorce in 1956 and subsequent marriage to Marilyn Monroe.

An early description of ring throwing can be traced to Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr.'s first novel, Reno (1929). A journalist, the great-great grandson of railroad baron Cornelius Vanderbilt wrote the book after a divorce from his first wife in Reno in 1927. Vanderbilt may have read the first known account of throwing wedding rings into the Truckee River in a pamphlet titled Reno! "It Won't Be Long Now" NINETY DAYS AND FREEDOM (1927) while awaiting his divorce.

On page 24 of Vanderbilt's novel, one of the principal characters, John Gilbert Berkeley (J.B.), standing on a concrete bridge compares the Ganges and Truckee rivers. India's Ganges washes away Hindu sins and the Truckee is supposed to cleanse one's marital past. According to J.B., "the moment a divorcee is granted her final decree of freedom, she hurries to the river with her friends-and often the man she is to marry on the morrow-and standing upon the bank, and with some sort of prayer beginning: 'Here goes nothing,' she throws the wedding ring into the enveloping waters.-They say there is more gold now in the river's bed than was taken out by all the placer miners of the early days." A feature film Reno, released in October 1930 and based on Vanderbilt's novel, first introduced movie-goers to Truckee River ring-flinging. Not long after Vanderbilt's novel appeared, newspapers throughout the nation first printed wire service stories and articles describing the "Reno custom."

"I want to tell you about wedding rings," wrote "Patsy" in a letter published in the Chicago Daily News (March 26, 1930). She identified herself as a "temporary sojourner" in Reno. "Every woman who gets a divorce has an unnecessary one and some of the men, too. Those who have a sentimental streak and want to put an artistic finish to their Reno adventure step over to the Truckee River, a stone's throw from the courthouse, and standing on the bridge over the place where the river is deepest, hurl the shining circlet into the tumbling torrent and beg it to roll down to the sea."

The entire letter smacks of hype, however "Patsy" probably visited "The Biggest Little City in the World" to compose the copyrighted account of her stay. She needed a geography lesson. The Truckee River flows northeast and terminates in Pyramid Lake and not the sea.

The Reno Divorce Racket (1931) includes a photograph of Mrs. Marjorie MacArthur and Mrs. Dorothy Foltz taking the "six-week cure" and "tossing their discarded rings into the river from Reno's 'Bridge of Sighs' . . . as they follow the custom of the liberated." Another photo on the same page depicts the Riverside Hotel, opened in 1927 after the state legislature reduced the length of residency from 6 months to 3 months. The photo caption reads in part: "Just a step to the judge for your 'Liberty bond' and then you kiss the pillar, and run for the 'Bridge of Sighs' to throw your wedding ring to the fishes!"

Life Magazine (June 21, 1937) ran a feature story on "Reno Divorce Seekers" and disputed any tradition of throwing wedding rings into the Truckee River. "A popular Reno myth has it that upon receiving a
decree a divorcée rushes out, embraces and kisses the Washoe County Courthouse pillar, dashes on 200 feet to the Truckee River, [and] throws in her wedding ring,” according to the Life reporter. “As every Reno citizen knows, she does no such thing. To depict the legend as a preliminary to blasting it, Life’s photographer had to stage the scene on the front cover.”

The Life expose did not squelch the myth. Another movie titled Reno was released in 1939 and a divorcée throws her wedding ring from the Virginia Street bridge into the river in an opening scene.

Journalist Max Miller, who authored the book Reno (1941), claimed that the Truckee River ring toss "originated a few years ago by some photographers for an eastern picture magazine. The story along with the pictures caught on somehow, so that today visitors believe it, even a few divorcées believe it. At no time have I seen a divorcée throw her wedding ring away in such a manner."

American Weekly (June 11, 1944) described author Inez Robb hanging around the Virginia Street bridge in hopes of glimpsing a wedding ring toss. "However, after the first fruitless weeks, I began to lose faith in the legend," bemoaned Robb. She was then told the last and maybe the first person to throw a ring into the river was British film actress Margot Grahame, in Reno for a divorce in 1936. The event was staged for a photographer using a ring purchased from a discount store. "The legend still persists," Robb noted, "but the rippling surface of the Truckee isn't constantly disturbed by showers of once-cherished bands of wedlock."

According to a United Press wire service story, datelined Reno, September 19, 1950, “A famous Reno legend that Nevada divorcees celebrate their new freedom by hurling their wedding rings into the Truckee River was demolished Sunday.” The story went on to note, that after cleaning the river in downtown Reno, fifty Junior Chamber of Commerce volunteers with high hopes "of turning up some worthwhile loot" found only one wedding ring with the stone missing amid all the debris.

Whether or not there was actually a homegrown tradition of throwing wedding rings into the Truckee River, many persons believed it to be true. The "tradition" may have been folklore originating in promotional literature, then reinforced many times by publicity gimmicks. While not common practice, real wedding rings found their way into the Truckee because some divorcees acted on what they believed to be a tradition.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, September 2001)
On Sunday, September 9, 2001, some 300 faithful packed Carson City's historic First Presbyterian Church, apparently worshiping there for the last time. Church officials, prompted by four unfavorable engineering reports over three decades, closed the building. One estimate of the cost to repair and stabilize the church completed in 1864 is $3.5 million. The congregation does not have that kind of money and as long as the church maintains title to the building government funds are unavailable.

"Legend has it that Mark Twain once performed [in the church at 110 N. Nevada St.] to raise money to replace the roof," observed newspaper accounts. "The fund-raiser was a favor to his brother, Orion Clemens, who was a church member and Nevada’s secretary of the state at the time."

According to Webster's Dictionary, a legend is "a story coming down from the past, especially one popularly regarded as historical although not verifiable." The Mark Twain story may have come down from the past, or maybe someone just assumed it to be true and told the reporter. However, it is verifiable. Relying on Mark Twain's Letters, Volume 1, 1853-1866, we know that while there was a church fund-raiser, it was not held in the church because it was unfinished and there was no roof to replace. At the same time, the formal request to speak came from two church trustees and not brother Orion, who was Secretary of Nevada Territory and not Secretary of State.

Construction on the First Presbyterian Church began in the summer of 1862. By January 1864, the building was still not complete and more money was needed. Church trustees Seymour Pixley and Gregory A. Sears wrote Mark Twain, whose brother Orion was a practicing Presbyterian, and asked the reporter for Virginia City's Territorial Enterprise if he would consider charging a fee to hear him deliver his Third Annual Message to the Third House. The Third House was a mock legislative body held in saloons, public buildings, and legislative chambers-legislators and others were frequently among those participating in burlesque deliberations and law making.

On January 23, Twain, writing from Carson City, responded to Pixley and Sears:

Gentleman:--Certainly. If the public can find anything in a grave state paper worth paying a dollar for, I am willing they should pay that amount or any other. And although I am not a very dusty Christian myself, I take an absorbing interest in religious affairs, and would willingly inflict my annual message upon the church itself if it might derive benefit thereby. You can charge what you please; I promise the public no amusement, but I do promise a reasonable amount of instruction. I am responsible to the Third House only, and I hope to be permitted to make it exceedingly warm for that body, without caring what the sympathies of the public and the Church be enlisted in their favor and against myself or not.

"Governor Twain" delivered his message to the Third House, January 27, 1864, on the second floor of the Ormsby County Courthouse "before the first paying audience of his speaking career," according to R. Kent Rasmussen in Mark Twain A to Z (1995). Clement T. Rice, reporter for the Virginia City Daily Union and a friend of Twain whom Twain playfully called "The Unreliable," commented on the fund-raiser on January 29:
Mark Two's message only helped to keep up the effervescing spirit of the good work in behalf of that same, ever-present, gaping skeleton of a church. The benefit on this occasion was large—perhaps $200—which will take the institution in out of the weather and hasten its completion very materially.

Thanks to Twain's generosity the Presbyterian Church was completed in May, about the time he was hightailing it out of Nevada Territory for greener pastures in San Francisco.

Today the vintage structure, a fixture in Carson City's historic district, is in need of another benefactor or else the wrecker's ball will again play havoc with a remnant of Nevada's frontier past.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, October 2001)
Thanks to the diligent efforts of Asa W. Phelps, the Silver City Home Guards was organized on October 4, 1862 as a unit in the Nevada Territorial Militia. Records of the Adjutant General housed in the State Archives in Carson City document the efforts of Phelps and his Silver City cohorts on the Comstock to form a volunteer, military unit. Tragedy struck less than two weeks later when Phelps, a twenty-eight-year-old native of West Andover, Massachusetts, and 2nd Lt. in the Silver City Guards, suddenly died on October 15. Buried in the Silver City Cemetery, his gravestone has survived the ravages of time and vandalism.

So why did Silver City residents, military buffs, and their organizations beginning in 1973 honor Asa W. Phelps on Veteran's Day as a hero of the Pyramid Lake War in 1860 ("Silver City Guard," by Bill Germino, Nevada Official Bicentennial Book, 1976)? The answer is quite simple. Asa W. Phelps, a miner with a claim in Gold Canyon and carpenter who purchased a lot in Silver City on May 9, 1861, has been confused with A. H. Phelps, a casualty of the second battle of the Pyramid Lake War on June 2, 1860.

A private under the command of Captain Edward F. Storey (the namesake for Storey County), A. H. Phelps and fellow private James Cameron were shot in the head, according to Myron Angel's History of Nevada (1881). Captain Storey took a shot through his lungs during the battle with the Pyramid Lake Paiutes and their tribal allies. All three men died later that evening. Phelps and Cameron were buried on June 3 near Camp Storey on the lower Truckee River. Their fallen comrade Captain Storey was buried in the Virginia City Cemetery. The Masons erected a monument in 1930 in tribute to Storey's military service and his membership in the secret order.

Dennis Myers, a reporter for Reno's KTVN Channel 2 TV, covered the Silver City Veteran's Day event in 1985—the community called it Armistice Day—honoring Asa W. Phelps. When it came to Myers' attention after the broadcast that Asa W. Phelps was not a war-hero, he invited Phil Earl, Curator at the Nevada Historical Society, and myself as State Archivist to explain the truth in this and other stories associated with Nevada's colorful past on his "Face the State" program.

Despite our efforts to clear up the confusion surrounding Asa W. Phelps, he is still considered a war-hero by some. Sadly, we do not know how Asa Phelps died because there are no extant newspapers containing his obituary.

The Silver City Home Guards was disbanded in November 1865 after interest waned following the end of the Civil War. The young pioneer surely deserves the honors accorded him for being the principal founder of the Silver City militia unit. However, whether intentional or inadvertent, it is an unfortunate case of playing tricks on the living and the dead to honor Asa W. Phelps for the supreme sacrifice of A. H. Phelps in the Pyramid Lake War.

Photo: Buried in the Silver City Cemetery, Asa Phelps, gravestone has survived the ravages of time and vandalism. Courtesy Sierra Sage

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, November 2001)
The masthead on Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg's inaugural version of the *Territorial Enterprise* on May 2, 1952 claimed the famous publication was "Nevada's First Newspaper." When they resurrected the newspaper, the two colorful bon vivants and raconteurs probably believed it to be true. After all, Myron Angel's *History of Nevada* (1881) claimed the newspaper was "the pioneer paper of the Territory." Everyone seemingly wants a first and so did Beebe and Clegg in their efforts to hype Virginia City and the Comstock in the 1950s. However it's not true. Let me tell you why.

The first edition of the *Territorial Enterprise* was printed in Genoa, Utah Territory, on December 18, 1858. The pioneer newspaper and its printing press then moved to Carson City where it first appeared on November 26, 1859. One year later the *Enterprise* found a permanent home in Virginia City, Utah Territory, where the paper resumed publication on November 3, 1860.

By late 1862, the fledgling newspaper, now published in Nevada Territory, included among its reporters William Wright and Samuel Clemens. The editor was Joseph Goodman who had hired both gifted writers. Wright had adopted the pen name "Dan DeQuille" in California prior to his coming to the Comstock in 1860. Clemens took the pen name "Mark Twain" in January 1863 while working for the *Enterprise*.

The key element in this story is that the *Territorial Enterprise* was the first newspaper to be PRINTED in the area that became Nevada. We now know there were two handwritten newspapers that preceded the *Enterprise*.

Nevada's first newspaper was actually the *Gold-Canon Switch* produced about 1854 in the fledgling mining camp of Johntown. Walter Cosser, who first arrived at Spofford Hall's Station at the mouth of Gold Canyon in 1852, is credited with founding the Johntown settlement in late 1853 when he opened a store a few miles up the canyon. Precious little is known of the *Gold-Canon Switch*. Dan DeQuille, in *The Big Bonanza* (1876), characterized the newspaper as a "spicy weekly" composed of "several sheets" of foolscap and "assiduously passed from hand to hand." The editor was Joseph Webb who was among the first to locate claims on the Comstock in 1859. No issues of the paper are known to exist.

The second hand-written newspaper, the *Scorpion*, dates to about February 1, 1857 when Stephen A. Kinsey issued the first number at Genoa. Kinsey was among the all-male party under John Reese's leadership that permanently established Mormon Station in June 1851. Bearing the motto, "Fear no man, and do justice to all," the paper was published monthly, according to Richard Lingenfelter and Karen Gash in *Newspapers of Nevada* (1984), "and contained twelve columns of interesting news items, written in a large bold hand and generously
illustrated with amusing caricatures.” Lingenfelter and Gash speculate that the hand-written paper probably didn't last a year. No known copies exist of the Scorpion; however there is a reference to the July 1, 1857 issue in the Territorial Enterprise of April 12, 1871. So the next time you read or hear that the Territorial Enterprise was Nevada's first newspaper you will know better.

Photo of Historic Marker: Courtesy of Karen Grillo


(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, December 2001)
Prior to 1970 few female attorneys practiced law in Nevada. In fact, so few that the handful of practicing women lawyers after World War II claimed they were among the very first. Not surprisingly, the legacy of their pioneer sisters has virtually been lost with the passage of time and it was presumed that the history of women practicing law in the Silver State essentially started after World War II.

Actually twenty-four women were admitted to practice law in Nevada prior to 1941. After the 1893 legislature changed the statute to allow females to practice, the first woman, Laura May Tilden, passed the bar exam on July 23, 1893 at the age of 22. She was the daughter of Virginia City attorney Marcellus C. Tilden, probably studied for the law in his office, and, according to the Carson Morning Appeal, was the person responsible for the passage of the bill allowing women to practice law in Nevada. Miss Tilden and her father opened a law firm in Sacramento in 1894. Following her father's death, Laura married Fred Ray in 1898. She moved to Colorado after Fred's death where she was admitted to practice law on September 4, 1901. Laura Tilden Ray was one of the few women attorneys in Denver. She married Walter Curtis Wilson, retired from her law practice sometime after 1914, and, by 1920, the Wilsons had moved to Montrose, Colorado. Laura died from injuries sustained in an auto accident near her home on May 31, 1928 and was buried in the family plot in Sacramento.

On April 4, 1898, Gertrude Grace Grey, was the second woman admitted by the Nevada Supreme Court to practice law. She was admitted to practice in the federal courts on January 8, 1900. Attorney Oscar H. Grey, a former state legislator and Secretary of State from 1891 to 1895 was her husband. It is not known if she actually practiced law in Nevada. She lived in Washington, D.C. and Salt Lake City before dying in Carson City on January 23, 1925. Mrs. Grey's obituary in the Daily Appeal erroneously claimed “she was the first woman attorney admitted to practice law in Nevada.”

The first woman known to practice law in Nevada was Georgia J. Johnson. Born in Inyo County, California, she moved to Carson City as a young woman and for six years worked for federal district court judge Thomas P. Hawley. Encouraged to study the law by Judge Hawley, Miss Johnson was admitted to practice in Nevada on July 30, 1898 and in the federal courts two days later. Prior to moving to Utah in 1902, marrying there, and opening a practice, she was counsel in a number of Nevada cases including the Paiute war claims. Georgia Johnson Dooley died in Pasadena, California, on September 14, 1953.

Anna Mudd Warren, admitted to the Nevada Bar on July 29, 1899, ranks fourth among female attorneys. Warren worked as a court reporter and served as the United States Commissioner for Nevada from 1913 until her death on July 31, 1944. A feature story in the Nevada State Journal headlined “Outstanding Woman Lawyer Dies In Reno” noted that Mrs. Warren had been a member of the Washoe County Bar, Nevada Bar, and the American Bar Association. The article wrongly claimed the she was “the second woman to be admitted” to the state bar.

The fifth woman admitted to the Nevada Bar was the first native-born woman admitted to practice law. Born in Carson City in 1878, Felice Cohn was the granddaughter of Rabbi Jacob Sheyer. Miss Cohn pursued course work at Nevada State University in Reno and Stanford University before graduating from Nevada Business College in 1899. She reportedly attended George Washington Law School in Washington, D.C. On June 17, 1902, shortly after her twenty-fourth birthday, she was admitted to practice law in Nevada. She worked as an assistant to the U.S. Attorney for Nevada from 1906 to 1914. Miss Cohn also held the positions of Ormsby County district court reporter, a referee in bankruptcy proceedings, and a U.S. hearings attorney for the General Land Office. By 1924 she had a private practice in Reno, where she died on May 24, 1961.

Bird May Wilson, admitted to the Nevada Bar on June 28, 1906, was a Goldfield attorney and stockbroker active in the women's suffrage movement before returning to California. Miss Wilson wrote a compelling
pamphlet, “Women Under Nevada Law,” directed at male voters that helped women win the right to vote in Nevada in 1914. She died on January 27, 1946 in Alameda County, California.

Edna Howard Covert, admitted to the State Bar on September 4, 1912, opened a practice in Eureka, married, and was appointed Eureka County District Attorney in 1918. Edna Plummer, the state's first female district attorney, ran for the office but was not elected. Mrs. Plummer moved to Los Angeles to practice law where she died on May 25, 1972.

Ruth Averill, a school teacher in Tonopah and daughter of District Judge Mark R. Averill, passed the bar exam on April 5, 1920. The Virginia City native was elected to the State Assembly in 1921 and appointed to the Committee on Education. Miss Averill, born in 1897, became the second woman and the first female attorney to serve in the state legislature. She married Jay Edwin Logan in 1922, moved to Oregon, and later California, where a daughter, Ruthella was born. Ruth suffered from a mental illness and was last known to be alive in 1941, apparently living in Nevada.

Prior to World War II, there were also a number of husbands and wives who worked as attorneys. Fannie McKay Waggoner, admitted to the bar on July 6, 1920, practiced law with her husband Robert in Yerington. Alfreda Moss Noland, who passed the bar exam on September 29, 1930, partnered with her husband in Las Vegas, and later in Los Angeles, where she died on September 17, 1946. Sallie Rupert Springmeyer, admitted to practice on October 2, 1936 after attending the University of Southern California Law School, occasionally assisted her husband George Springmeyer, the former U.S. Attorney for Nevada, in Reno. Much of the time she used her legal training to advance public service goals, mostly on children's issues. Mrs. Springmeyer died on December 23, 2007 at the age of 104.

Hester Mayotte, admitted to the bar on January 3, 1927, has the distinction of being the first female attorney to be a member of a law firm, Hawkins, Mayotte & Hawkins. Tragically, her career was cut short when she died in auto accident near Colfax, California on October 18, 1931. The front page, headline story in the Nevada State Journal, "Reno Woman Attorney Killed in Crash," referred to her as a prominent attorney who attended the University of Nevada. Miss Mayotte joined the law firm as a full partner in September 1929.

The last woman admitted to the Nevada Bar prior to World War II was Margaret E. Baily on October 29, 1938. She began her law practice in Los Angeles in 1923 and moved to Reno in 1934 where she was married. Mrs. Baily was admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme in 1963. She died in Reno on February 16, 1968.

Lest we forget those who came before us and deny their rightful place in history.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, January 2002)
Monday is the President’s Day holiday. We also celebrate February as Black History Month. Virtually everybody has heard the fantastic tale that Nevada's gold and silver saved the Union during the Civil War and inspired statehood. The reasons for statehood were political, not economic, and every mining territory and state in the American West helped support the Union cause with their gold and silver production. The real and more compelling story of Nevada's contribution to the nation is intimately linked to President Abraham Lincoln, his efforts to reunite the country, and his desire to end slavery and make African-Americans citizens.

By the time Congress approved an Enabling Act for Nevada Territory (also Colorado and Nebraska territories) on March 21, 1864, President Lincoln had already issued the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil War was winding down. The Union had won decisive victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, and the South was in shambles. Lincoln sought reelection in order to reconstruct the South after the war and promote amendments to the U.S. Constitution freeing the slaves and addressing civil rights and suffrage issues.

Lincoln, a moderate Republican, initially faced a three-way race against General John C. Fremont, a radical Republican (who had run for the presidency in 1856 and lost to James Buchanan), and General George B. McClellan, a Democrat. Earlier in the Civil War, Lincoln had unceremoniously relieved both generals of their commands. If the popular and electoral college vote were indecisive and the election went to the House of Representatives, as it had in 1824-25 in a four-way race, Lincoln supporters, including Representative James M. Ashley of Ohio, the author of the Nevada Enabling Act, believed that the new state's lone Congressman would support the incumbent president.

Lincoln and the moderate Republicans believed that the Confederate states were in need of a lengthy reconstruction. Many conditions related to the status of African-Americans would have to be addressed in new state constitutions and statutory law before a rebel state could rejoin the union.

Fremont and the radical Republicans, however, wanted to harshly punish the South, conducting war crime trials and executing convicted Confederate political and military leaders. Questions were raised if these former Union states had forfeited their sovereignty by withdrawing from the United States.

McClellan and the Democrats, on the other hand, wanted to readmit Confederate states back into the union with virtually no conditions.

Ironically, Fremont dropped out of the presidential race in September 1864. Nevada, shortly after its voters approved the state constitution on September 7, was no longer critical to a Lincoln win. President Lincoln proclaimed Nevada the 36th state on October 31, a week before the national election, and then went on to carry Nevada by a decisive margin over General McClellan. Only two electors voted for Lincoln. The third, A.S. Peck, found himself snowbound in Aurora and no law in the new state provided for a replacement.

While it is true that Nevadans gave the beleaguered president three Republican members of Congress to help rebuild the nation, contrary to popular belief, our two U.S. Senators, James W. Nye and William M. Stewart, did not vote on the 13th Amendment. The Senate had approved the amendment proposing to abolish slavery on April 8, 1864.

However, Congressman Henry G. Worthington arrived in time in Washington, D.C. to vote on the amendment in the House on January 31, 1865. According to the late Leslie B. Gray in his work The...
Source and The Vision (1989), Worthington "was one of the two key votes which gave it a constitutional majority." Congressman Worthington's heretofore-obscure gravesite in the Congressional Cemetery was marked with a sizeable monument in 2000 thanks to then-U.S. Senator Richard Bryan and Fallon newspaper editor and publisher David Henley.

Illinois, the home of President Lincoln, was the initial state to ratify the 13th Amendment on February 1, 1865. Nevada followed shortly thereafter. The first state legislature ratified the amendment on February 16 making it the sixteenth state to support the constitutional abolition of slavery, two months prior to Lincoln's assassination, and almost ten months before ratification was completed on December 6, 1865.

The Nevada legislature took the unusual step of authorizing Governor Henry G. Blasdel to telegraph the resolution of ratification to President Lincoln. According to UNR political science professor Elmer Rusco in Good Time Coming: Black Nevadans in the Nineteenth Century (1975), "A resolution commending President Lincoln and his administration stated that the amendment to abolish slavery marked 'the dawn of a new political era, and [we] pray that its principles may be ever enforced until regenerated America shall forget the name of slave'."

Nevada's Congressional delegation also voted for the 14th amendment, which provided persons in the United States, including African-Americans, civil rights protection. The amendment was proposed on June 13, 1866, ratified by the Nevada legislature on January 22, 1867, and it became law on July 9, 1868.

Perhaps Nevada's greatest contribution to Black Americans was associated with Senator William's Stewart's role in amending a resolution that proposed the 15th amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The 15th amendment in essence declared that a citizen couldn't be denied the ballot because of race. Congress passed the landmark legislation on February 26, 1869, and Stewart, as one of the principal sponsors, immediately telegraphed the news of congressional passage to the Nevada legislature so that it could act before adjournment. The telegram signed by Stewart, James W. Nye, Delos R. Ashley (the outgoing member of the House), and Thomas Fitch (the incoming member of the House), was received in Carson City at 8AM on February 27. On the following Monday, March 1, 1869, Nevada was the first state in the nation to ratify the 15th amendment. Ratification was completed on February 3, 1870 and the U.S. Secretary of State declared in a proclamation dated March 30 that the legislatures of 29 of 37 states had ratified the amendment.

Nevada had paid back in full its debt to President Abraham Lincoln and the moderate Republicans for statehood. Sadly, it took the nation some 100 years longer to guarantee the rights to Black Americans promised in the 14th and 15th amendments.

Photo from the Assembly Chamber at the Nevada State Legislature

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, February 2002)

Nevada's first and only “First Lady” of the White House was born in White Pine County. Many people assert Ely was Mrs. Nixon's birthplace. However others claim it all began in the nearby towns of Reipetown, Ruth, Lane City, Kimberly or East Ely. A few even suggest remote Cherry Creek. Why all the confusion?

The official on-line biographies produced by the White House and the Richard Nixon Library & Birthplace state Patricia Nixon was born in Ely, as does her published biography. According to the biography written by daughter Julie Nixon Eisenhower, Thelma Catharine Ryan was born near midnight on March 16, 1912 "in a miner's shack high in the mountains of eastern Nevada." Her father called her his "St. Patrick's babe in the morn." From then on her birthday was celebrated on St. Patrick's Day, March 17.

Her Irish father, William M. Ryan, worked as a gold miner in the Black Hills of South Dakota before moving to Nevada's White Pine County. The April 1910 U.S. Census enumerates the 42-year-old Ryan as living in the Reipetown precinct and working as a copper miner. Other census information noted he was born in Connecticut, had not worked for 16 weeks in the previous year--which is why he came to Nevada--and that he had been married one year.

His wife Catharine--a widow prior to their marriage in 1909--two stepchildren and son William are not enumerated in the census. The mystery begins here because William M. Ryan is living with other miners, not with his family. Social Security records for son William George Ryan indicate that he was born on January 31, 1910 in Nevada, however there is no birth certificate in White Pine County.

A second son, Thomas Sanford Ryan, was born on February 24, 1911. There is a birth notice in the February 26, 1911 issue of the White Pine News for a nine-pound male child born to Mr. and Mrs. William Ryan. A birth certificate, filed by Dr. A. F. Franklin on March 1, denotes he was born in Ely.

The Ryan family stayed only a short time in Nevada after Pat was born. The Ely area was in a period of violent labor unrest. Kate persuaded her husband to give up the dangers of mining for farming and the family moved to southern California when Pat Ryan was about a year old.

The Ryan children had virtually no memory of their childhood in White Pine County. In a conversation with William Ryan prior to his death on September 11, 1997 in Los Angeles, he told me he could not remember where they lived in the Ely area and had only a vague recollection of his sister's birth. After all, William was not quite three when the family relocated to Artesia. He explained that his father and mother did not talk much about their hardscrabble days in White Pine County.

Kate Halberstadt Ryan died in 1926. At the tender age of 13, Pat assumed the household duties for her father and brothers. Her father became seriously ill two years later and died in 1930.

Despite the loss of her parents as a young woman, Pat Ryan went on to receive an undergraduate degree in merchandising from the University of Southern California where she graduated cum laude in 1937. She met Richard Nixon while working as a high school teacher in Whittier. They were married on June 21, 1940.

A check of her application for Social Security, dated April 26, 1939, gives her name as (Thelma) Patricia Ryan, although she signed the form as Patricia Ryan. She worked at the Bullock's Wilshire department store in Los Angeles. While the information regarding her parents' name is correct, her birth date is listed as March 17, 1913, her age is noted as 24, and her place of birth was typed as Eli, Nevada.

What does this confusing information tell us? Did Patricia Ryan actually know when she was born, or did she misrepresent her birth date? Whether she was born in 1912 or 1913, she would not have been 24 in 1939. Was the spelling Eli, Nevada a typographical error, or did she think that was how the city's name was spelled? Did Miss Ryan even know for sure that she was born in Ely and not in a nearby town?

Some people who claim that she was born in Riepetown suggest she did not want to be associated with the wide-open community known for its saloons, gambling, and prostitution. Unfortunately, the social security application only adds to the mystery surrounding her birth in White Pine County.

Patricia Nixon's birth certificate reveals the truth in this story. On March 16, 1912, at 3:25 a.m., Dr. Albert Franklin Adams delivered Thelma Catharine at the Ryan residence on Campton Street, west of the county courthouse, and filed her birth certificate with the county recorder on April 7. An April 1912 Sanborn fire insurance map shows a concentration of modest houses on the south side of Campton Street between Fifth and Sixth streets. The confusion over Pat Nixon's birthplace may stem from the fact her father rented a number of dwellings during the four years the Ryan family resided in White Pine County.

The Nixons visited Nevada many times. Richard Nixon was a U.S. Representative for California during a visit in 1948 and a U.S. Senator in 1952. Ely feted Pat Nixon during her husband's U.S. vice-presidential campaign in 1952; her photo appeared on the front page of the local newspaper announcing that she was an Ely girl and a banner welcoming her home was strung across the main street. Mayor Nevin E. Broadbent presented the senator's wife with a foot-long copper key to the city.

Old-timers remembered little about the family and nobody could agree as to where the Ryans lived. The Ely Daily Times reported that a Mrs. Amy Stambaugh believed the house where Pat Nixon was born was located on High Street near the Ely grade school.

During the presidential election campaign in 1952, the vice chair of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) claimed that Richard Nixon had told "two unimportant lies but lies nonetheless" during his controversial and now famous "Checkers speech" on September 23. The so-called lies related to his wife's name and when she was born. The New York Times on November 4 reported Senator Nixon had referred to his wife as "Pat" or Patricia and stated that she had been born on St. Patrick's Day. The DNC vice-chair "commented that Mrs. Nixon's name on her birth certificate was Thelma Katherine and that she had been born on March 16, not St. Patrick's Day, which is March 17."

A spokesman responded to the charge stating "that Mrs. Nixon had used the name Patricia since infancy and 'to the best of her knowledge' was born on St. Patrick's Day." Mr. Nixon was quoted as saying: "How silly can the opposition get?"

One could assume from this "tempest in a teapot" that Patricia Nixon had never seen her birth certificate. She believed that she was born on March 17 because the family had always celebrated her birthday on St. Patrick's Day, although it is unclear why for so long she claimed 1913 as her year of birth. In the fall of 1931, the young Miss Ryan dropped her given name Thelma and enrolled at Fullerton Junior College as Patricia.

Vice-President Nixon and Patricia returned to Nevada in 1956 on the reelection campaign trail and during the 1960 U.S. presidential campaign. On February 18, 1960, the couple presided over the opening of the Squaw Valley Winter Olympic Games. They also visited Nevada in 1959, 1966, and 1968.

With the election of Richard Nixon in 1968 as the 37th President of the United States, Nevadans took pride that the First Lady of the nation was a native.

In 1970, Pat Nixon campaigned in Nevada for Bill Raggio in his race for the U.S. Senate against Howard Cannon.

Patricia Ryan Nixon died at home in Park Ridge, New Jersey, on June 22, 1993. She and the former president are buried at the Richard Nixon Library and Birth Place in Yorba Linda, California.

Photo: Vice-President Richard Nixon and his wife Pat stepping off plane in Reno in 1959 bound for Virginia City's Centennial Celebration. Photo from The Nevada State Museum
(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, March 2002)
The 2002 Winter Olympics Games in the Wasatch Mountains near Salt Lake City have come and gone. Stories assessing the economic impact on Utah and surrounding areas appeared in the media and pundits speculated that Nevada gambling did not significantly benefit from the event as had been hoped. One gambling expert claimed the same unmet expectations were true during the 1984 Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles. However, should we believe this expert's statement in an Associated Press (AP) story that in 1960 the Winter Olympics in Squaw Valley, California, outside Lake Tahoe, failed to attract an influx of gamblers to Nevada casinos? Could this be a careless mistake and the making of a modern myth?

Thanks to the efforts of lawyer/developer Alex Cushing, Squaw Valley (located some fifty miles west of Reno in the Sierra Nevada) was awarded the bid in 1955 for the Eighth Winter Olympics. Over the next five years preparations for the Olympics were made not only at Squaw Valley, the first winter games site in the western United States, but also throughout the surrounding area. In November 1957, the widening of U.S. Highway 50 and its realignment from Carson City to Lake Tahoe was completed in anticipation of increased automobile traffic. Construction on Interstate 80 between Sacramento and Reno had begun, although its completion came long after 1960. Also, a new Reno airport was opened in 1959 to accommodate the athletes and spectators from throughout the world. This is today's Reno/ Tahoe International Airport.

At the same time, major hotel and casinos such as the Riverside, Mapes, Holiday, Harolds, and Harrah's (including its operation at Stateline, Lake Tahoe) prepared to host and entertain the tens of thousands of visitors expected to converge on the area. Roy Powers, formerly with Harolds Club, and Harry Spencer, formerly with the Mapes, said the casinos were packed, the showrooms were full, and virtually every room in the greater Reno/Carson City area was occupied between February 18, when the winter games were opened by Vice-President Richard Nixon, and the final day of the Squaw Valley Olympics on February 28. On February 22, 1960, the Reno Evening Gazette wrote that the "coincidence of the long Washington's Birthday holiday and the VIII Olympic Winter Games has brought to Reno the largest crowd of tourists over a sustained period in history . . . . A survey of the Reno Chamber of Commerce, hotels, motels and other facilities showed the city was bursting at the seams as early as Friday . . . . Veteran observers said: 'It beats everything we ever saw, even in the middle of the summer tourist season.'" According to Carson City's Nevada Appeal on February 29, "Attendance for the games totaled 240,000-highest official attendance in the history of the winter events."

The Stateline casinos and South Lake Tahoe motels did not fare quite as well as their Reno counterparts in attracting Winter Olympic spectators. Yet, according to interviews in the oral history Every Light Was On: Bill Harrah and His Clubs Remembered (1999), the Squaw Valley event was considered a marketing coup. The Eighth Winter Olympics was the first to be televised, bringing Lake Tahoe to the attention of people nationwide. "We considered the Olympics a great opportunity to get Lake Tahoe's name out to the world and to get Harrah's name out at the same time," noted publicist Mark Curtis. "It did the job. It established Harrah's; it established Tahoe. Everybody knew where it was, and from then on business was great."

Efforts to attract the 2022 Winter Olympics games to the Reno/Lake Tahoe/Carson City area are underway. While it may be true that Nevada tourism and gambling was not measurably enhanced by Olympic events in the Salt Lake City or Los Angeles areas, to suggest that an Olympic event in any community's backyard does not bolster the area economy is dead wrong. Witness the frenetic activity surrounding the Eighth Winter Olympics in Squaw Valley in 1960-no myth here!

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, April 2002)
The name "Sparks" is familiar because of the city so-named on the Truckee River in northwestern Nevada. However the person for whom the town was named, Nevada Governor John Sparks, too many means little or nothing. The newly-created Southern Pacific railroad division point was named to honor the popular chief executive in April 1904, some four years before his death in office on May 22, 1908. The circumstances surrounding his demise have become so distorted with the passage of time that they can only be described as fanciful and maudlin.

John Sparks was born in Mississippi in 1843, raised in Texas, and made a fortune in the cattle business in Texas and Wyoming Territory, before moving to Elko County, Nevada, in 1881. With partner John Tinnin, Sparks acquired huge land holdings and established a cattle empire in northeastern Nevada and south-central Idaho Territory. In 1887, Sparks purchased Jason C. Smith's ranch and large Carpenter Gothic-style house--on the site of the former Anderson's Station south of Reno--moved his family there, and operated the palatial Alamo Stock Farm near the Virginia & Truckee Railroad (today the northwest corner of Peckham Lane and Virginia Street).

By the end of the 19th century, John Sparks was among the most wealthy and powerful men in the state. Running on the Democrat-Silver ticket, Nevadans elected him governor in 1902. In 1905, he unsuccessfully attempted to convince the predominately Republican state legislature to select him as a U.S. senator. At that time, state legislatures, not the electorate, chose U.S. senators. Sparks went on to be reelected governor by an even greater margin in 1906.

"Honest John" Sparks, as he was affectionately called by his admirers, had probably reached the height of his popularity beginning his second term in office. However, Sparks' response to 1907-08 events in the booming mining town of Goldfield in south-central Nevada cost him dearly in the court of public opinion; it may have also cost him his life.

Goldfield, Nevada's largest town at that time, with about 20,000 residents, was beset with labor strife. Governor Sparks enjoyed the support of organized labor, particularly among the railroad brotherhoods and craft unions in northern Nevada. Yet during a labor dispute, he sided with the Goldfield mine owners rather than the miners union associated with the militant Western Federation of Miners and the radical Industrial Workers of the World ("Wobblies"). Sparks found himself increasingly on the defensive.

Sparks' call to President Theodore Roosevelt in December 1907 for federal troops to police a strike action was precipitated by the mine owners, who in the midst of a national bank panic paid the miners in scrip instead of cash. Then in January 1908, the governor had to call for a special session of the state legislature to create a State Police to replace the federal troops, because Roosevelt believed he had been duped following the report of a federal investigative commission. The situation took a toll on Sparks' reputation and his health.

A great-great nephew of John Sparks, in a book entitled Cattle in the Cold Desert (1985) and in a newspaper interview ten years later, claimed that the 66 year-old governor, afflicted with a kidney ailment known as Bright's Disease and pneumonia, dragged himself out of his sickbed in December 1907 and rode on horseback to Goldfield "to see what he could do to help the situation." The distant relative's claim that the governor's death was directly linked to a 400-mile round-trip ride to Goldfield in December weather is preposterous. Governor Sparks arrived by train in Goldfield on December 10th.

While Sparks had been suffering with Bright's disease, the truth in the story surrounding the events leading to the governor's death was related in considerable detail to the press on April 29, 1908 by attending physician Dr. Raymond St. Clair of Reno. "Governor Sparks' illness dates from December 7, and was caused by exposure in an open auto on a trip [on December 6th] from Carson City to Reno and
return" noted Dr. St. Clair. "He was taken to bed about the first of the year and I was called about January 18, and have attended him ever since." Dr. St. Clair went on to state that "Governor Sparks is an old man and it is believed that worry incidental to the Goldfield strikes and the subsequent special session of the legislature are what broke him down."

Dr. St. Clair claimed that the ailing Sparks would "recover sufficiently to again take up his duties as Governor." Instead, Sparks died some three weeks later at the Alamo Ranch and Lt. Governor Denver Dickerson became the Acting Governor for the remainder of the term.

A story has circulated over the years that Governor John Sparks ultimately died of a broken heart. It may have some basis in fact. However, we can be sure that a round-trip from the state capital to Reno by car in the chill air of early December, and not a horseback ride to Goldfield of epic proportions, shattered his health.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, May 2002)
Myth #77: Eliza Cook: Not Nevada's First Female Doctor by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

Carson Valley's Eliza Cook, M.D., is erroneously credited with being Nevada's first female physician. In fact, in an interview published in Reno's Nevada State Journal on March 16, 1941, Dr. Cook claimed "that so far as I know I was the first woman physician to practice in Nevada."

Cook's obituary, entitled "Nevada's First Woman Doctor Dies Thursday" in the October 3, 1947 issue of The Record-Courier noted that she had been born in Salt Lake City in 1856, relocated to Carson Valley in 1870 with her family, graduated from the Stanford University Medical School, and studied at Women's Medical College in Philadelphia. Stories of Cook's life tell of her nursing the sickly wife of Dr. H. W. Smith of Genoa during the winter of 1879-80. Dr. Smith encouraged Cook in the study of medicine and she read all of Smith's medical books while living in his home. Dr. Cook completed the two-year medical program at San Francisco's Cooper School of Medicine (later incorporated into Stanford University) in 1884 and pursued her practice.

Thanks to the good work of Dr. Anton P. Sohn, Chairman of Pathology at the University of Nevada School of Medicine and founder of the history of medicine program and its Greasewood Press, we now know that as many as twelve women practiced medicine in Nevada before Eliza Cook. In his work, The Healers of 19th-Century Nevada (1997), he devotes chapter six and appendix II to "Women Doctors."

Dr. Sohn noted that among the few female physicians in the Silver State it was common for the women to limit their practice to females and children. Sohn's research uncovered a "Doctress Hoffman" practicing medicine on South C Street in Virginia City in 1865. Hoffman's ads in the Territorial Enterprise and the Virginia Daily Union (beginning January 1, 1865) were directed "TO THE LADIES!" and noted that "[s]he will cure all kinds of female complaints and diseases of children." Hoffman claimed to have practiced medicine for twenty-fours years and earned a diploma from "the highest school in Germany." While the first female graduate from an American medical school, Elizabeth Blackwell, dates back to 1849, "Doctress Hoffman"s claim to a German medical degree in about 1841 cannot be verified.

Other women practiced medicine in Nevada before Eliza Cook, such as "Doctress and Accoucheur" Helene Jones in Virginia City, Dayton, and Treasure City; "Doctress" A.C. Buchins in Elko; Helen Anderson in Reno and Carson City; Georgia Grey in Hamilton; and Brown DeForrest of Virginia City. However, Dr. Sohn was not able to determine if any of these women had medical degrees.

Sohn did find three women practicing medicine in Nevada before Eliza Cook that had medical degrees. Dr. Ruth E. Newland, who practiced in Virginia City in 1882, received a degree from the Medical Eclectic College in Cincinnati. Dr. Hattie F. Atwater, who practiced in Carson City in 1882, received her degree from Wooster Medical College in Cleveland. Of particular note, the first woman known to practice medicine in Nevada with a bona fide degree, Catherine Nicholas Post (Van Orden), graduated from the University of Pacific Medical Department (later the Cooper Medical School) in 1879, five years before Eliza Cook. Dr. Kate Post practiced in Virginia City in the early 1880s and her office was located at 87a South C Street.

Why were all these female physicians overlooked in making the claim that Eliza Cook was the first female doctor in Nevada? Many writers accepted the claim without pursuing the research necessary to verify its accuracy. Physicians were not licensed in Nevada until 1899, when the regulatory board was created. Determining who the female doctors were in Nevada prior to that date would have been a daunting challenge given that most of
them only spent a few years in the state. Essentially, people believed Eliza Cook to be Nevada's first female doctor because she was the first woman licensed to practice by the State Board of Medical Examiners in 1899. The confused and inaccurate claim for her being the first female doctor became an article of faith and community pride in Carson Valley.

Dr. Eliza Cook spent most of her life in Nevada and for a considerable portion of that time she practiced medicine. Besides delivering scores of babies, and attending to the medical needs of hundreds of patients in and around the Carson Valley, Dr. Cook was an ardent feminist--she never married--and supported the women's movement and its long-standing call for female suffrage. She would see Nevada grant women the right to vote in 1914; the United States following suit with the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920.

In the end, Dr. Eliza Cook did what the female doctors before her did not do. She lived and died in Nevada, expiring at the age of ninety-one at her house near Mottsville. Unlike her counterparts in 19th-century Nevada, she has not been forgotten.

Photos: Stanford University, Lane Medical Library, Special Collections.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, June 2002)
Literature describing Nevada's State Capitol generally claims that it is "the second oldest capitol building west of the Mississippi." Construction began in Carson City in 1870. Completed in 1871, seven years after statehood, it was expanded and modified in the early 20th-century. In 1957, plans to raze the structure were dropped. By the early 1980s, the capitol had been completely renovated in the course of a seismic retrofit.

The California State Capitol in Sacramento is considered the oldest capitol building still in use west of the Mississippi. While building construction began in 1856, due to numerous complications, it was not completed until 1874. However, the state legislature first met there in 1869. It has been commonly assumed that since Nevada's legislature met in its new statehouse in 1871 that it was the second oldest capitol west of the Mississippi.

A survey of the twenty-two state capitals west of the Mississippi (Baton Rouge, Louisiana and St. Paul, Minnesota are east of the river), identified one capitol where the state legislature had met in the building in 1870. While there are some former capitol buildings that predate both California and Nevada's existing capitols--Arkansas' first capitol dating back to 1833 is now the Museum of Arkansas for example--only the current Kansas State Capitol predates the construction of the Nevada State Capitol. Most states older than Nevada have replaced their first capitols with newer ones.

Work began on the capitol in Topeka in 1866, five years after statehood, and the east wing was completed in 1873. State officers had already moved into the building in 1869 and the legislature met there the next year. The west wing was completed in 1881, and the central portion and dome in 1906.

Although it can be argued that the Kansas State Capitol was not finished until 1906, thirty-five years after the completion of the Nevada State Capitol in 1871, the criteria for oldest appears to hinge on when did the respective legislatures first meet in their statehouses. The California State Capitol was not completed until 1874, yet it is considered the oldest capitol west of the Mississippi because the legislature met there in 1869. Following that logic, the Kansas State Capitol would be the second oldest because its legislature met in the building in 1870, and the Nevada State Capitol the third oldest because its legislature met in the statehouse in 1871.

To complicate matters further, the Nevada State Legislature has met in a building independent of the original capitol since 1971. Only two other states, North Carolina and Arizona, have separate legislative buildings. While five of Nevada's six constitutional officials maintain offices in the original capitol, dictionaries consider the official capitol a building in which a state legislature meets.

You make the call.

Photo: Nevada State Library and Archives.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, July 2002)
Myth #79: Nineteenth-Century Presidential Visits to Lake Tahoe and Nevada by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

Two men who served as the nation's chief executive visited Lake Tahoe and Nevada in the late 1800s, ex-president Ulysses S. Grant and President Rutherford B. Hayes. Both were transported across the breathtaking, alpine lake by the steamboat Meteor. There is no indication another sitting president saw Lake Tahoe until President Bill Clinton's official visit in July 1997. Contrary to popular belief, John F. Kennedy's visits to Lake Tahoe were before he was elected president in November 1960.

The first chief executive to visit Lake Tahoe and Nevada was Ulysses Simpson Grant. The former president and Civil War general had left office in 1877 after serving two terms and was on the last leg of a world tour with his wife and son. Arriving at Tahoe City on the northwest shore of Lake Tahoe on October 26, 1879, Grant's traveling party boarded the Meteor bound for Glenbrook. Following their arrival, passage was taken on the narrow gauge Lake Tahoe Railroad to Spooner Summit. The party then rode in carriages to Carson City via the Clear Creek route. At the reins of Grant's carriage was the colorful and famous stagecoach driver Hank Monk.

After spending the night at Governor John Kinkead's house, which served as the Governor's Mansion, Grant was honored at the State Capitol and made a short speech before some 3,000 onlookers. From there, a Virginia & Truckee Railroad train transported the Grant family to Virginia City, the state's largest city.

A tremendous crowd greeted the former chief executive in the "Queen of the Comstock" and a gala celebration and reception took up most of the remaining day. On hand to welcome the popular Civil War hero were Governor Kinkead, Nevada U.S. Senators John P. Jones and William Sharon, Comstock mining moguls John Mackay and James G. Fair, and the Virginia City mayor.

Grant spent two days on the Comstock attending functions at Piper's Opera House and the Savage Mansion, making speeches and being photographed, going down into the mines, and visiting the Sutro Mansion east of Dayton. He traveled the length of the recently-opened Sutro Tunnel to Virginia City. On October 29, 1879, Grant, his wife, and son boarded the V&T train bound for Reno. From there, they caught a Central Pacific train en route to their home in Galena, Illinois, with a brief stop in Wadsworth.

Less than a year after Grant's visit to Nevada, the first sitting president to visit Lake Tahoe and Nevada, Rutherford B. Hayes, arrived on the Comstock on September 7, 1880 after a brief stop and speech in Reno. The Hayes entourage was most impressive and included the First Lady, Civil War hero General William Tecumseh Sherman, Secretary of War Alexander Ramsey, and a number of lesser military and administration officials from Washington, D.C.

The day was filled with parades, speeches, tours through the mines, and, of course, much picture taking. President Hayes in one of his speeches to the huge crowds expressed his wonderment and praise for the engineering used to build the V&T Railroad from Carson City to Virginia City; to mine the mineral wealth at great depths; and to mill the massive amounts of gold and silver ore. Impressed with the prosperity of the Comstock despite the area's relative isolation, Hayes, speaking from the balcony of the new International Hotel, told the throng below that "Yours is a barren region but you have surrounded yourselves with all the comforts to be found in the most favored lands." In an offhand remark, President Hayes was heard to say that he would prefer to govern the country from Virginia City if he had the choice.

Following their one-day whirlwind visit to the Comstock, the presidential party on the following morning traveled to Carson City where they were escorted to the State Capitol for a reception hosted by Governor...
Kinkead. From there, Hank Monk drove Hayes to Spooner Summit where he and his entourage took the train to Glenbrook, then boarded the Meteor for a trip across Lake Tahoe. Disembarking at Tahoe City, California, late in the day, the party traveled to Truckee to catch a special Central Pacific train bound for San Francisco.

While many of the nation's presidents have traveled through or visited Nevada during the state’s history, almost 120 years would pass after President Hayes' visit in 1880 before another sitting president found his way to Lake Tahoe.

Photo of the Meteor courtesy of the Bliss Family Collection, Special Collections Department, University Library, University of Nevada, Reno. The steamship Meteor was launched Aug. 27, 1876 and for over twenty years was the fastest vessel on Lake Tahoe. Built and operated by the Bliss family, between 1876-1896 the Meteor was used to tow log booms from Bijou, Emerald Bay, Meeks Bay, and Sugar Pine Point to milling operations at Glenbrook. Presidents, generals, and members of the business elite accepted courtesy passes from owner Duane L. Bliss. In 1939 after years of non-use, the Meteor was deliberately sunk by owner William S. Bliss.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, August 2002 edition)
Myth #80: Bringing a Myth to a Grinding Halt

by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

You can't miss it if you are driving on State Highway 342 between Silver City and Virginia City. The site is Greiner's Bend, a challenging switchback in upper Gold Hill where you need to slow down to a crawl to navigate the narrow, two-lane road before you reach the Divide and the "Queen City of the Comstock".

So why do so many people call it Grinder's Bend? As the story goes the location was given that name because you could hear all the vehicles over the years grinding their gears while negotiating the severe, incline S-curve. While it is true that autos, buses, and trucks were heard to grind their gears while shifting, the bend is actually named for John (1868-1917) and William Greiner (1871-1949) who spent most of their lives in Gold Hill. The quaint Greiner house can still be found near the base of the bend.

Some writers erroneously state that the 19th century name of the switchback was Greiner's Bend. If the bend had a name then, it has been lost in time. The name Greiner's Bend on Main Street near Bullion Ravine was applied sometime after 1900. Alfred A. Wills and his wife, the former Annie Greiner, lived in the house at the bend in upper Gold Hill following their marriage on September 23, 1890. When the Wills family moved to San Francisco in about 1906, John and Will Greiner, who had been living with their sister's family, stayed on in the house. Comstock old-timers like Hugh Gallagher and Don McBride--both dying in 2006--remembered as children in the 1930s the S-curve referred to as Greiner's Bend.

Louise K. Greiner, and her three young children, John, Annie, and William found their way to Gold Hill from Brooklyn, New York in the mid-1870s. The family first shows up in the 1875 Nevada Census. Mrs. Greiner, a native of Wurtemberg in Germany, married John H. Witte, also from Brooklyn, in 1877 and started a second family. The blended family lived at 7 Bowers Grade in upper Gold Hill.

John Witte died in 1883 at the age of 37 leaving Louise to raise five children. She died in 1903 in Gold Hill. They are buried in the Virginia City cemetery next to their son Henry Witte who died at the age of 6, shortly after his father's death.

John Greiner was 49 when he died at his home on Greiner's Bend from typhoid fever on September 17, 1917. He had spent his adult life working in virtually every mill on the Comstock.

Will continued to reside in the house at Greiner's Bend after his older brother's death. Will Greiner worked as an engineer and carpenter for many of the Gold Hill area mines. He was also a long-time Mason and served as master of Silver Star Lodge No. 5, F.&A.M., in 1906 and 1907. He received his fifty year membership pin in September of 1948.

Will served faithfully in the Gold Hill Volunteer Fire Department, and Steven Frady, in his work Red Shirts and Leather Helmets: Volunteer Fire Fighting on the Comstock Lode (1984), mentions his long service. Frady recounts that Greiner's showcase residence barely survived the great conflagration of November 13, 1942 that ravaged most of the Divide, the fire burning to the rear of the Greiner house before it was extinguished. According to Will Greiner's obituary in the November 28, 1949 edition of the Nevada Appeal, "[h]is home at Greiner's Bend above Gold Hill was a show place of the area because of his beautiful front yard he maintained."

Lest we forget, John, Annie, and Will Greiner's house remains on the switchback known as Greiner's Bend as mute testimony to the Gold Hill pioneer family.

Note: a photo of Gold Hill in 1867 shot by Timothy O'Sullivan, photographer for the Clarence King Survey, depicts the switchback. See the George Eastman House webpage: http://geh.org/nes/mismi3/m198118860002_ful.html

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, September 2002)
“Nevada’s first state seal had a mistake on it,” wrote Gary BeDunnah in Discovering Nevada, a school text published in 1994. “The smoke from the train and the mill blew in opposite directions.”

There has been a long-standing belief in Nevada that the smoke from the passenger train locomotive and the quartz mill should have been blowing in the same direction on the original state seal. Some claim the smoke blowing in opposite directions was a hoax perpetrated by Territorial Enterprise reporter Mark Twain and some of his associates.

The claim has nothing to do with the design of the state seal as promulgated in the 1863 and 1864 state constitutional conventions in Carson City and officially adopted by the 1866 state legislature. Nothing in the description, officially or unofficially, identified which way the smoke should blow.

“Nevada’s 1860s seal was executed in the pictorial heraldic style that was popular in the 19th century,” according to vexillologist James Ferrigan, III. “This replaced the symbolic heraldry of the 18th century. In pictorial heraldry the focus is the center of the image, which generally contained the principal activities or aspirations of the state or territory. The smoke was incidental to the mill and would have been naturally drawn blowing out of the frame of reference. The train, a significant technology of the 19th century, was central, and assumed to be in motion, so the smoke was behind it. Hence smoke in two directions.”

The fanciful story suggests that if the wind is blowing the smoke from the quartz mill smokestack one way in the foreground of the state seal, then the smoke from the locomotive smokestack in the background logically must conform to the same wind direction. However, on the presumption the train is traveling across the viaduct at some speed, and not standing still, the smoke will inherently trail behind the train. Debate over the state seal in the 1863 state constitutional convention made it clear that the speed of the train would be left to the imagination of the people. The words "very slowly" were dropped from the draft description and an amendment to adopt "rapidly" failed. Depending on which way the wind is blowing, the smoke from the mill and a moving locomotive could blow in different directions.

That was clearly the case when John Church, the first Nevada State Printer, printed the state seal on publications beginning in August 1865—ironically, before the legislature officially adopted the seal design on February 24, 1866. The smoke from the locomotive is blowing to the left and the smoke from the quartz mill is blowing to the right.

There is no evidence that Samuel Clemens, alias Mark Twain, had anything to do with which way the smoke ended up blowing on the official state seal. It is true that he humorously commented on the spirited 1863 debate over what the motto would be on the state seal, either "volens et potens" (willing and able) which was on the territorial seal designed by his brother Orion, the Secretary of the Territory; or "The Union Must and Shall be Preserved." And, it is also true that he proposed, tongue-in-cheek, a state seal that included "a jackass-rabbit reposing in the shade of his native sagebrush, with the motto 'Volens enough but not so d….d Potens'."

However, despite conjecture in Nevada's Symbols: Reflections Of The Past (1978), a school text directed at seventh graders, Mark Twain could not have collaborated with his so-called "drinking partner" State Printer John Church and "good friend" Alanson W. Nightingill, a delegate to the first state constitutional convention who served on the state seal committee, to mastermind a hoax showing winds "coming from two directions at the same time." “There is no evidence that this is what happened,” wrote Angela Brooker, "but it only takes a little imagination to see Twain, Nightingill and Church sitting around a
barroom table plotting to play a mischievous trick on Nevada's lawmakers." In other words, if it didn't happen this way, it should have!

The statement made by Brooker that "Lance" Nightingill, a sign painter from Unionville, designed the state seal is true according to records in the Nevada State Archives. However, Nightingill was not a delegate to the second state constitutional convention in July 1864 and, therefore, did not participate in the debate over the state seal's final design which included adopting the motto “All For Our Country.”

Mark Twain, after offending some folks in Carson City and challenging an angry Virginia City newspaper editor to a duel, made a quick exit to California in May. Twain did not torment the second convention. The "Wild Humorist of the Pacific Slope" did not return to Nevada until October 1866 to lecture about his trip to the Hawaiian Islands.

Finally, the state legislature did not elect John Church the state printer until January 11, 1865, some six months after the second constitutional convention had adjourned. Twain was long gone and Nightingill had been elected Nevada's first State Controller.

While there was no hoax, there was some confusion in 1915 over which way the smoke should blow. Publications in that year had state seals with the smoke blowing in opposite directions and also in the same direction. From 1917--thanks to State Printer Joe Farnsworth--to the present, the smoke from the locomotive and the mill on the state seal blows to the left on all state publications. However, not until May 1929 did the official state seal kept by the Secretary of State for the Governor look the same as the State Printer's seal.

Only time will tell if blowing smoke in Nevada will again be an issue.

(Originally version published in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, October 2002)
Myth 82: Confusing Names: The Naming of Gardnerville by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist


A common mistake is to credit a person with the legacy of another who has the same last name, and sometimes first and last names. Witness all the confusion over the good work of Carson City horticulturalist George Washington Gale Ferris, Sr.; structural engineer and son George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr., inventor of the Ferris Wheel; and Reno architect George Ashmead Ferris.

Some have confused Major Marcus Reno with General Jesse Lee Reno as the namesake for northern Nevada's largest community. Reno was named for the Civil War general who died in battle at South Mountain, Maryland, and not the major associated with the disastrous Battle of Little Big Horn in what is now Montana. There are more examples of this type of confusion in Nevada history including the namesake of Gardnerville.

No doubt, Matthew C. Gardner was a prominent Nevadan. According to his obituary in the *Carson City News* (June 3, 1908), the Arkansas native found his way to Carson City via California in 1861. Gardner's ranch on the southern outskirts of the capital city was among the largest in Eagle Valley. "He was a central figure in the logging and lumber industry of the early days, and traces of his work can still be seen from Carson City over the mountains to Tallac," wrote the *News*. Gardner's pallbearers included two former governors and a supreme court justice.

However, Gardnerville is named for John and Mary Gardner, who sold a portion of their Carson Valley ranch to Leander S. Ezell on November 28, 1877 and to Lawrence Gilman on April 5, 1879, and not after M. C. Gardner. We know precious little of the Gardners except they were born in England--Mary's birth was in Manchester and John's in Preston--and they had been living in Douglas County since 1864 according to Mary's obituary in Genoa's *Weekly Courier* (July 14, 1899). "The death of Mrs. Gardner deserves more than passing notice, as she was the widow of John Gardner," the *Courier* proclaimed, "who gave the name to Gardnerville." Locals affectionately referred to the head of the household as "Uncle John" and he was elected the Douglas County Public Administrator in 1878 as a Republican. After selling the bulk of their ranch to Henry Vansickle on December 13, 1880 according to deed records, the Gardners bought a small property in Clear Creek Canyon. John died on December 5, 1887 and Mary on July 10, 1899. The couple is buried in the Jacks Valley cemetery.

Lawrence Gilman, after acquiring Vansickle's interest in the former Gardner property on April 26, 1881, began selling parcels. On January 19, 1882, the Valhalla Society purchased a lot adjacent to the County Road and built Valhalla Hall.

In the meantime, Gilman had moved the Kent House, situated between Genoa and Walley's Hot Springs, to his East Fork Township property. The structure was renamed the Gardnerville Hotel and the settlement included a blacksmith shop. On June 28, 1881, the Gardnerville post office opened with Gilman as the postmaster. Upon Gilman's death on July 2, 1905, the *Record Courier* in Gardnerville noted that "[h]e has long been considered among the founders of Gardnerville and justly so."

The moral to this story: Give credit where credit is due. Sometimes it's all in a name.

Photograph courtesy of Nevada State Museum.

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, November 2002.)
Everybody seems to know that actor/Academy Award nominee Elliott Gould and award-winning singer/actress Barbra Streisand once were married. Yet, virtually nobody knows--except Streisand's biographers--where the wedding was performed. Many claim the couple was married in New York City and others say Las Vegas. Neither location is correct. While both Gould and Streisand hailed from Brooklyn and their careers took them to Las Vegas, the nuptials actually occurred in Nevada's state capital, Carson City.

The two aspiring young entertainers first met while rehearsing for producer David Merrick's I Can Get It For You Wholesale, which opened on Broadway on March 22, 1962 and ran for some nine months. Gould, 23, born Elliott Goldstein, played the leading man. However, the 19-year old Streisand stole the show and the leading man in a minor role as a secretary. She won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for her comedy and singing performance.

"I must admit," Gould recalled in a Playboy interview in November 1970, "that the happiest memories I have of Barbra are when we were living together before we were married."

Streisand's career soared. She gained huge popularity in club and showroom appearances throughout the United States, and on various television programs including the Ed Sullivan Show and Tonight with Johnny Carson. Within two weeks of the release of her first album for Columbia Records in February 1963, Streisand was the top-selling female vocalist in the country.

On Monday, September 9, 1963, Barbra Streisand appeared as the opening act for piano virtuoso Liberace at Harrah's Lake Tahoe South Shore Room. She was touted as "the nation's newest singing sensation . . . who comes to Tahoe from a record-smashing engagement at Hollywood's Cocoanut Grove." In July, Streisand had first performed with Liberace at the Riviera Hotel in Las Vegas.

On Friday, September 13, 1963, Pete Supera, Carson City Justice of the Peace, presided over the secret wedding of Elliott Gould, 25, and the 21-year-old Barbra Joan Streisand in his office. Eleanor Supera had expected the wedding to be performed at her residence and was disappointed when the couple didn't show. The Certificate of Marriage was filed on Monday, September 16, at 9:58AM in the Recorder's office. The media failed to uncover the story. "There was no press, no spectacle," wrote biographer Randall Riese in Her Name is Barbra (1993). "Not even an announcement. After all, as far as almost everyone knew, Barbra and Elliott Gould had been married for at least six months."

Earlier in the year, Barbra had told a San Francisco Chronicle reporter that she and Gould had gotten married (Streisand, Her Life, by James Spada, 1995).

The two witnesses to the Carson City wedding were New York City residents Martin Erlichman--Streisand's personal manager who became a movie producer, producing one film, For Pete's Sake (1974), starring Streisand--and Martin Bregman, Streisand's business manager, who went on to produce films such as Serpico (1973), Scarface (1983), and The Adventures of Pluto Nash (2002), starring Eddie Murphy.

Barbra Streisand's name became a household word with her meteoric fame. Unfortunately, Gould's career did not keep pace and he understandably did not like being called "Mr. Streisand." A son, Jason, born to them in 1966 did not salvage the marriage. By 1969, their many issues, including his gambling and her extramarital affairs, led to a separation.

"I was very young, she was very young," Gould later reminisced, "and we went as far as we could together."

Gould starred in *California Split* (1974), shot in Reno; and appeared in the remake of *Ocean's Eleven* (2001), filmed in Las Vegas; *Ocean's Twelve* (2004); and *Ocean's Thirteen* (2007). He was also regularly featured on the TV show *Friends*.

Barbra Streisand's career has been phenomenal. Few entertainers can boast that they have received at least one Grammy, Oscar, Tony, Golden Globe, and Emmy. The superstar has also produced, directed, and co-written feature films. Her concerts are consistently sold out in Las Vegas and elsewhere. Streisand is arguably one of the most powerful and independent women in show business.

And to think that Barbra Streisand and Elliott Gould once found their way to Carson City to get married.

Certificate courtesy of Carson City Clerk-Recorder (note spelling of Streisand's first name).

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, December 2002 edition)
In comparing Iowa's state seal with Nevada's territorial seal, one is struck by the similarity. Is this just coincidence? Maybe. However, upon further investigation, circumstantial evidence suggests that Iowa's state seal was the model for Nevada's territorial seal.

The Iowa state seal, made official by Iowa's first state legislature in 1847, includes a soldier in the foreground, leaning on a rifle and standing in a field of wheat, holding an American flag. To the right of the soldier, in the background, smoke trails to the right from the chimney of a small cabin.

The Nevada territorial seal, made official by Nevada's first territorial legislature in 1861, includes a miner in the foreground, leaning on a pick and standing on a mining claim, holding an American flag. To the right of the miner, in the background, smoke trails to the right from the chimney of a five-stamp quartz mill.

Orion Clemens, President Abraham Lincoln's appointee as Secretary of Nevada Territory, presented a design for a territorial seal to the first legislature in Carson City on October 7, 1861. After some debate and much delay, the Council passed the House Territorial Seal Resolution on November 28, 1861. Councilman Ira Luther from Genoa noted that the Territorial Seal Committee's tardiness in reporting on the seal matter was related to an unsuccessful effort to generate an original idea other than what Clemens had proposed. Governor James Nye signed the bill the following day, the last day of the legislative session.

So what has Nevada's territorial seal to do with Iowa's state seal? Interestingly enough, Orion Clemens moved from Hannibal, Missouri, to Muscatine, Iowa, in September 1853 where he operated a small, commercial print shop and started the Muscatine Journal. On Dec. 19, 1854, Orion married "Molly" Stotts in her hometown of Keokuk, Iowa.

In June 1855, the couple moved to Keokuk where he bought the "Ben Franklin" Book and Job Office and employed his brother, Samuel (the future "Mark Twain"). Daughter Jennie was born on September 14.

Orion and his family left Iowa for Tennessee, Orion's birthplace, in the fall of 1857 only to return to live with his in-laws in Keokuk by 1859. In the meantime, Orion finished his law studies and became an attorney.

Despite having no documentary evidence that Clemens based the Nevada territorial seal design on Iowa's state seal, it is difficult to imagine that in all his time in Iowa as a newspaper publisher, printer, and attorney he was not familiar with the state seal. The similarity of the two seals suggests that Clemens consciously, or unconsciously, drew on the Iowa state seal as a model for Nevada's territorial seal.

Orion certainly took great pride in his creation. In a letter written by the Territorial Secretary on December 3, 1861, and kept in the Nevada State Archives, Clemens entrusted his seal design to an engraving firm. "I rely upon you to see that it is skillfully executed, both in design and engraving," wrote Orion. "It is a bantling [a very young child] of my own, and my pride will be to have the prettiest seal in the Union."

Orion and Mollie Clemens left Nevada in March 1866 (Jennie died in Carson City on February 1, 1864) and after a brief sojourn to California, returned to Iowa. Orion spent the greater part of his life there, dying in Keokuk on December 11, 1897.

In the end, maybe Orion Clemens' Iowa and Nevada connections have been forever sealed.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, February 2003 edition)
The Gold Hill Hotel is situated on Nevada Highway 342 between Virginia City and Silver City on a steep grade just below Greiner’s Bend. The rough-hewn, stone and brick hotel is the oldest extant hotel building in Nevada. However, the business’ letterhead and signage were inaccurate for many years. The hotel was not built in 1859, the year of the gold discoveries at the head of Gold Canyon in then-Utah Territory.

It stands to reason that 1859 was too early for a substantial building the likes of the Gold Hill Hotel. The first recorded Comstock Lode discovery of decomposed, gold-filled quartz at Gold Hill was in the early spring of that year. In the miners’ frenzy to dig out as much gold as possible before year-end freezing temperatures and snowfall froze the ground, they only erected tents, dugouts, shacks, and shanties for shelter.

The severe winter weather of 1859-60 started early in November and many miners returned to California. Activity picked up again in February 1860. However, the Pyramid Lake Indian War, erupting in May, brought mining on the Comstock to a virtual standstill until hostilities ceased just prior to that summer.

Then the “Rush to Washoe” was underway. Gold Hill’s population grew from 638 in August 1860 to 1,297 in July 1861, four months after the creation of Nevada Territory. A frenzy of construction meant a corresponding level of activity at the Carson County Recorder’s office as deeds, mortgages, agreements, and partnership records were filed by the hundreds. The result was a legal record that is not always clear today and transactions associated with the Gold Hill Hotel site that are not easy to decipher.

Hotels and boarding houses were in great demand. In July 1861, the Riesen House—today’s Gold Hill Hotel—was under construction. Beginning in July 1861 businesswoman and entrepreneur Miss Louise Forster (often misspelled as “Foster” in official records) entered into a complex series of legal transactions regarding the hotel site and building. On September 23, according to Carson County, Nevada territorial records, Louise Forster and Alfred Riesen formed a co-partnership to construct and operate a hotel on property they jointly held on the west side of Main Street. Although Forster sold the hotel, she and Riesen leased the building back. The Riesen House, “Riesen & Foster [sic], proprietors,” was first listed in J. Wells Kelly 1862 Directory for Nevada Territory. A Gold Hill Hotel, also identified in the directory, had no connection to today’s Gold Hill Hotel.

The Riesen House encountered problems. A wet winter inundated the Comstock in 1861-62.Torrential rains and melting snow in January 1862, shortly after the hotel’s completion, resulted in substantial structural damage. According to a story in San Francisco’s Alta California, first reported in the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise of January 13, 1862, “…the southwest and southeast corners of the Risen [sic] House, a fine structure, have fallen, but the main part of the building remained firm.” A photograph by Lawrence and Houseworth Co., dated 1862, depicts the two-story, stone Riesen House with its south wall shored up and under repair.

Perhaps the damage to the building and other business problems led Forster and Riesen to end their partnership. By late 1862, Horace M. Vesey leased and operated the hotel with his son Edward. The structure was renamed Vesey’s Exchange, then Vesey’s Hotel, and later the Vesey House. The popular hotel hosted many Comstock social events such as
"Vesey's Ball," an elaborate cotillion party, which was held in the new hall, a multi-story frame addition on the hotel's south side, on November 11, 1863.

While leasing the hotel, Horace Vesey was elected the Storey County Recorder in September 1864. Vesey ended his association with the hotel in 1867 and went on to manage hotels in Virginia City, Gold Hill, and Glenbrook. The Vesey House was still in business when Horace died on March 19, 1876 in Reno. By then, the Comstock had begun its long economic decline. The Vesey House was one of the many business casualties. According to the November 1890 Sanborn Fire Insurance map for Gold Hill, the business was now called the Capital Hotel and the frame addition was gone.

By 1907, the building served as a private residence. The purchase of the property by Dorothy and Fred Inmoor in 1958 breathed new life into the structure, then called the Gold Hill Bar and Hotel. Bill Fain is the current owner of the establishment. Fain renovated the building and added more rooms in 1986-87. A weekly history lecture series as well as plays and other entertainment are held in the charming venue. The construction date of 1859 was used by the Inmoors in their desire to promote the Gold Hill Hotel as Nevada's oldest. The date predates the Inmoors and was painted on the building when they bought it. Fain unknowingly perpetuated the fake lore. Ironically, claiming 1859 as the year of construction for the Gold Hill Hotel was unnecessary as the St. Charles Hotel in Carson City did not open until September 1862. It is still operating as the second oldest hotel in Nevada.

Photo of Gold Hill Hotel courtesy of Bill Fain. This photo shows one of the hotel's 20th century additions. 1864-1865 Nevada City Directory page courtesy of Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, April 2003.

To see early photos of the Gold Hill Hotel and read more about its history, logon to their Web site at http://www.goldhillhotel.net/history1.htm)
Fernley is Nevada’s newest municipality. When city hall officially opened for business on July 1, 2001, the State Demographer estimated 9,529 residents in the rapidly growing northern Lyon County community. However, the origin of Fernley’s name remains obscure and shrouded in mystery.

One hundred years earlier, there was no such place. It was not until the Southern Pacific Railroad realigned its route through northwestern Nevada that the Fernley siding was created. Fernley first shows up as a station stop, but with no other services, on Southern Pacific employee timetables beginning with the September, 18, 1904 edition (SP Salt Lake Division ETT No. 2). By September 3, 1905, Fernley is listed with a day and night telegraph office and wye facilities. The descendants of the telegrapher James A. Galbraith, who arrived with his family in 1906, still reside in the region.

In the meantime, a community emerged and took the name Fernley. The general area was part of the fledgling Truckee-Carson Reclamation Project created by Congress in 1902 and named the Canal Township because of the newly created Truckee Canal connecting the Truckee River to the Carson River and Fallon. Workers and settlers found their way to the western edge of the first federal reclamation project. On June 9, 1904 the Lyon County Commissioners created the Canal Township and appointed a constable, Robert A. Benson, and a justice of the peace, Edgar I. Parker, both men filing for homesteads in late 1903 according to records housed at the National Archives. In 1907 more settlers arrived and established homesteads.

On April 21, 1908, the Fernley post office opened. A public school also operated beginning in the 1908-1909 school year. According to the 1910 U.S. Census, 159 people lived in the Fernley area. Many of the town’s residents were active in the Socialist Party; some were appointed postmaster, and others elected to the school board, the office of the Justice of the Peace, and the State Assembly.

In addition, the Southern Pacific Railroad completed the Fernley & Lassen Railway in 1914 and a suitable depot was constructed in Fernley. Residents welcomed the completion of the Transcontinental Lincoln/Victory Highways through town in the 1920s.

The town grew slowly at first. In 1960, only 654 people were enumerated in the U.S. Census. However, the population more than doubled by 1970 with the construction of Interstate 80 and the Nevada Cement Company opening its operation in 1963. By 1980, the population more than doubled again. By 1990, the population reached 5,164 and in 2000, the census counted 8,543 residents. The State Demographer estimated the population as of July 1, 2006 to be 18,850.

Still, why the siding was named Fernley more than 100 years ago remains unknown. The answer probably is somewhere in the voluminous records of the Southern Pacific Railroad. Over the years, there has been much conjecture on for whom or for what Fernley was named.

A letter-to-the-editor published in the Sept/Oct 1990 issue of Nevada Magazine claimed that a physician of Welsh origin by the name of Fernley opened a coal mine in the area and supplied coal to the railroad. “The coal mining operation gave its name to the town of ‘Fernley’,” wrote Al Riggle on behalf of the 95-year-old Mrs. Nettie Fernley of Tombstone, Arizona. “In the early ’30s a nephew of the doctor, Tom Fernley, moved there and set up a casino in Fernley.”

Nothing can be found that verifies Mrs. Nettie Fernley’s claim. No coal mines were known to operate near Fernley; there is no record of a Dr. Fernley living or practicing anywhere in Nevada; and a Tom Fernley cannot be found operating a casino in Fernley in the 1930s.
On the other hand, the Fernley family name has its origin in Wales and England. The ancient English town of Hereford, near Wales, was once known as Fernley. St. Ethelbert (Aethelbarht), King of the East Angles, following his murder was finally buried at the church in the Heath of Fern circa 794. Today, there are no other communities in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, or the United Kingdom by the name of Fernley according to on-line place names databases. Fernley, Nevada County, California, no longer exists.

The source for Fernley, Nevada's, name may never be discovered. It's highly probably that the naming of the siding was random and concocted like nearby sidings labeled Bango, Benin, Ditho, Dodon, and Parran.

However, given Fernley's rarity as a place name, and the name's association with ancient Hereford, England, maybe Fernley should make an overture to Hereford for sister-city status. After all, in making another connection, Hereford beef cattle--the breed originated in the Herefordshire area--surely grazed the ranch and rangelands in and around Fernley over the last 100 years.

1909 Map of Truckee Carson Project Showing Farm Units Irrigable courtesy of Nevada Historical Society.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, June 2003 edition)
Myth #87: How Tall is Too Tall? A Capitol Tale by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

There is a tale in Carson City that no building in the community may be constructed taller than the State Capitol. Completed in 1871, Nevada's statehouse towered over all the buildings erected before it, including the first Ormsby House, the St. Charles Hotel, and the United States Mint. The Federal Building (now the Paul Laxalt State Building), opened in 1891, rivaled but did not exceed the capitol in height. The capitol with its silver-colored cupola stood alone as Carson City's landmark feature for 100 years.

The presumption that generated the legend was that city and state officials had agreed no building could be erected in Carson City that would exceed the height of the capitol. After all, Washington D.C. has a federal law dating back to 1899, and amended in 1910, that no private building can be taller than the U.S. Capitol at 288 feet.

From the top of the cupola to the base of the State Capitol, the building measures 112.2 feet. The flagpole, which technically is not part of the building, adds another 40 feet.

If there were a law or ordinance in place to the effect that no building could be higher than the capitol, then the current Ormsby House on the southwest corner of Carson and Fifth streets would be in violation. Opened July 2, 1972 by former Governor Paul Laxalt and members of his family, the new Ormsby House stood 117 feet tall. The Ormsby House is almost 5 feet taller than the State Capitol, minus the flagpole. Like the State Capitol, the Ormsby House dominates Carson City's modest skyline.

The truth is there was no law, ordinance, or policy in place until 1991 when the Carson City Downtown Master Plan was adopted. The Master Plan established a rule of "no building taller than the capitol within 500 feet," which effectively excluded the Ormsby House. The rule was codified in Carson City's Municipal Code (Title 18.06) in June 1995.

In effect, as Carson City continues to grow as an urban area and ground space for development approaches a premium, there may be commercial, governmental, and residential structures constructed in Eagle Valley that exceed the height of the State Capitol outside the 500’ radius around the building. Vertical growth may equal horizontal growth before the expected build-out of Carson City. Today, Carson City--which consolidated with Ormsby County in 1969--already has the highest population density of any county in Nevada.

At one time, as one approached Carson City from the west on King Street--then the Lincoln Highway to and from Lake Tahoe--you saw a beautiful, unobstructed view of the capitol. The Lincoln Highway (U.S. Highway 50) was relocated south to Clear Creek in 1928. At the same time, the Supreme Court and State Library had outgrown their small space in the capitol. Despite protests from many Carson City residents, a Supreme Court and Library building opened in 1937 that closed off King Street to Carson Street and blocked the magnificent postcard view of the State Capitol.

Growth and change, then and now, have altered the character of Carson City's landscape including the prominence of the statehouse in the heart of Nevada's capital. Well-conceived urban planning can minimize the impact of growth on Carson City's friendly sky in the future, preventing its "Manhattanization"--whereby the State Capitol will not be an island in a sea of high-rise buildings.

Photographs courtesy of Nevada State Library and Archives. Top: View from Capitol roof looking southwest to the Ormsby Hotel, 1979. Bottom: Photographer John J. Nulty aerial view of the Capitol showing Supreme Court building in upper left corner, blocking King Street, 1944.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, August 2003)
Many Nevadans believe that Henry Goode Blasdel was the Silver State's first governor after statehood was granted on October 31, 1864. However, Blasdel, elected on November 8, did not take office until December 5. Someone had to be running the 36th state. So, who was Nevada's first chief executive?

James Warren Nye of New York, commissioned by President Abraham Lincoln on March 22, 1861 as governor of Nevada Territory, continued as Acting Governor of Nevada under Article XVII of the newly adopted Nevada State Constitution. Any government takes time to be organized after its creation and Nevada's founding fathers described the duties of certain territorial officers until the swearing in of the elected state officers. Nye spent five weeks laying the groundwork for the new state.

On October 31, 1864, Nye's first action as the Acting Governor of Nevada was to certify President Lincoln's proclamation declaring Nevada's statehood. Lincoln's statehood proclamation and Nye's certification was published in Nevada's newspapers beginning the following day. The certification was signed James W. Nye, Governor, and attested to by Orion Clemens, Secretary of State.

Governor Nye's principal task was to oversee the first state elections on November 8, which included electing a governor and selecting presidential electors. There were no steam railroads in Nevada in 1864 and official election results delivered by stage and other means took time to arrive in Carson City. The official canvass of the vote was completed on November 26. Republican Henry G. Blasdel defeated Democrat David E. Buel for governor by a vote of 9,834 to 6,555. Abraham Lincoln won the presidential race and three electors were chosen to vote for him at the Electoral College. However, only two electors voted for Lincoln because one, A. S. Peck, of Aurora, found himself snowbound and could not make the trip to Carson City. The new state, not yet having a legislative session, had no law defining how a replacement would be chosen.

Nye continued to make appointments during the interim that included judgeships, county commissioner positions, and military commissions. He also issued his final Thanksgiving proclamation on November 14 for Thursday, November 24, this time as Governor of Nevada. President Lincoln, beginning in 1863, had designated the last Thursday of November as a national holiday of Thanksgiving.

Governor Nye concluded his tenure in office with a "Valedictory Address" on inauguration day, Monday, December 5, 1864 in Carson City. His speech was a lengthy one including an overview of his three and one-half-year tenure as territorial governor and the profound change he had observed in Nevada. "I take my leave of you, in official capacity, this day, but in that capacity alone," Nye concluded. "Among you I intend to live; here I expect to die," he vigorously proclaimed. "Governor, I now commit to you and your associates the interests of this new State, entertaining that no doubt that with your hands they will be ably defended, and by your vigilant eye carefully watched and guarded."

Nye then turned the reins of government over to Governor Blasdel. However, he was not out of office very long. The recently convened state legislature, among its first items of business, elected James W. Nye as one of Nevada's first two U. S. Senators on December 15, the other being attorney and former territorial legislator William M. Stewart. Nye drew the short term ending on April 4, 1867. The Senator was reelected by the legislature in 1867 and served until 1873.

In failing health, Nye's intention, which he had shared with Nevadans upon leaving office as governor in 1864, to die in the state was not realized. Nevada's only territorial governor and the state's first governor,
died on Christmas Day, 1876, in White Plains, New York. Nevadans had not forgotten the "Old Grey Eagle," as he was affectionately known. The last territorial legislature named a county in his honor: Nye County.

Photograph of Senator Nye by Brady's National Photographic Portrait Galleries, Washington, D.C., and signature of James W. Nye from paper photographic mat courtesy of Nevada State Library and Archives.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, October 2003)
Piper's Opera House in Virginia City was Nevada's premier entertainment venue in the late 19th-century. Practically all entertainers on tour in the far west found their way to Piper's, including the great American author Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens). The myth in this story is that many people believe that Twain lectured in the current Piper's Opera House, the third building with that name. Its location at the northwest intersection of B and Union Streets dates to 1885, having replaced the second Piper's which operated from January 29, 1878 until it burned in 1883.

Actually, Mark Twain's last visit to Virginia City found him entertaining audiences in the first Piper's Opera House on D Street between Union and Taylor. That structure, the former Maguire's Opera House, built in 1863, burned down in the great fire of October 26, 1875.

When Twain visited Nevada during his West Coast lecture tour of April/May 1868, he brought with him a reputation as a writer and humorist, and his arrival drew applause in the Virginia City newspapers. The Territorial Enterprise, where Twain made his mark as a reporter and adopted his now-famous penname a few years earlier, announced, "The celebrated humorist, after having visited the Holy Land and all the principal cities of the world, will again once more press his foot upon his native sagebrush this morning."

Strangely enough, Mark Twain's visit in 1868 is virtually forgotten today, long overshadowed by his first two Nevada sojourns in 1861-64 and 1866. Twain booked Piper's Opera House in Virginia City and the Carson Theater in Carson City. Upon his arrival on April 24, he witnessed a remarkable event, the hanging of John Millian, who had been convicted of the murder of Virginia City prostitute, Julia Bulette. In addition, when Twain took leave of Nevada ten days later—unlike his two previous departures in 1864 and 1866—he did not have to high tail it to California with a cloud over his head.

The crowds attending Twain's lectures on April 27 and April 28, 1868 at Piper's Opera House were much smaller than the horde, some 4,000 onlookers that witnessed John Millian's execution. The Odd Fellows balls siphoned off many would-be-attendees on Monday night. Before his Tuesday night lecture, Twain drank champagne with journalists Alf Doten, Phil Lynch, and Joe Goodman at the Gold Hill News office.

In his diary Doten described Twain's unusual opening at Piper's: "at 8-1/2 o'clock a piano was heard in behind the curtain--as it went up, Mark was discovered playing rudely on it, & singing 'There was an old 'hoss & his name was Jerusalem' etc--He came forward & apologized for so introducing things on the ground that if any of them had been waiting behind the curtain as long as he had, they would appreciate some relief of the kind." Doten, who attended both presentations, noted the one-hour talks were "humorous," "pleasing & instructive," and "Much applauded."

On the other hand, Doten observed on the first night, "Not very full house," and on the second, "about the same audience as last." Twain, ever obsessed with his financial condition, did not forget the perceived slight. In 1871, recalling his experience at Piper's—the building drafty and cold—Twain advised James Redpath of the Boston Lyceum Bureau to schedule temperance lecturer John Bartholomew Gough for only "1 night (or possibly 2,) in Virginia City, Nevada (provided you can get a church—for they won't go to that nasty theatre.)" He also referred to the disappointing receipts in a letter to Joe Goodman. As paraphrased in the Territorial Enterprise of March 26, 1869, Twain wrote, "I shall lecture in San Francisco in April or
May. Come down boys. I can't go to Virginia, having killed myself twice already in the lecture business.” However, Twain's plans fell through, and he never returned to Nevada or California after 1868.

Boarding the stage on May 3, 1868, Twain bid his friends good-bye. For most of his Comstock associates, it was the last time they ever saw Twain. A farewell send-off published in the Enterprise entitled "Going to Leave Us," probably written by lifelong friend Joe Goodman, captured the sentiments of many who knew Twain in his Nevada days:

"Mark Twain leaves this morning for San Francisco. Sorry to see you go, Mark, old boy— but we cannot expect to have you always with us. Go then, where duty calls you, and when the highest pinnacle of fame affords you a resting place remember that in the land of silver and sagebrush there are a host of old friends that rejoice in your success."

(For further reading see: Guy Louis Rocha, "Mark Twain's Forgotten Tour," Nevada Magazine, Sept/Oct 1999)

Photo credits: Advertisement for Twain's appearance at Piper's Opera House from the Territorial Enterprise, April 26, 1868. Courtesy of Nevada State Library and Archives.

Carte-de-visite photograph of Alf Doten in his volunteer fireman's uniform courtesy of the Alfred Doten Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Nevada, Reno.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, December 2003 edition. )
"For the past 50 years, there has been some speculation that White Mountain might be higher than Mt. Whitney," wrote award winning surveyor Robert Nielsen of Reno's Summit Engineering in Professional Surveyor. Nevadans and Californians near the state line continue to question why Mt. Whitney in the Sierra Nevada, and not White Mountain in the White-Inyo Range east of Bishop, has been identified as the highest point in the continental United States for more than 100 years.

Nielsen, using modern scientific techniques including a global positioning system (GPS), addressed the long-standing question of whether Mt. Whitney or White Mountain is the highest summit in the lower 48 states as part of his senior project at California State University, Fresno, in late May/early June 1996. As a student in the Surveying Engineering Program, Nielsen and his colleagues organized four summit crews to climb the four highest peaks in California: Mt. Whitney, Mt. Williamson, White Mountain, and North Palisade. "Our goal," wrote Nielsen, "was to take simultaneous GPS observations from the tops of four, 14,000'-plus mountains, my high elevation test base."

North Palisade was scaled first, beginning on May 31, followed by Mt. Williamson, and then White Mountain. The Mt. Whitney summit crew was forced to turn back after a storm the week before left the trail to the summit almost entirely covered with ice and snow. Fortunately, placing GPS equipment on Mt. Whitney was not essential in measuring its height. By the evening of Monday, June 3, the crewmembers had completed all work possible under the conditions.

"The intention of the experiment was not to determine accurate 'real world' positions for the newly set mountaintop stations," Nielsen noted in his article, "but rather to determine whether low-lying satellites could yield better precisions when added to the traditional satellite geometries." He selected Mt. Williamson and White Mountain as the two controls as they flanked North Palisade on either side and allowed the shortest baseline design.

The results of the study led to Robert Nielsen winning the National Society of Professional Surveyors' Student Project of the Year Award for 1998. In measuring California's highest mountains using high precision GPS technology beyond the project's original design, Nielsen discovered the mountains had long been improperly ranked in their relative elevations. Previously, only Mt. Whitney had been accurately surveyed for elevation. In Nielson's project, the heights of the four summits were measured to within inches of their absolute positions.

According to the scientific results, the four highest peaks in California, beginning with the highest, are Mt. Whitney, 14,500' and the highest mountain in the continental United States; Mt. Williamson, 14,382.3'; North Palisade, 14,255.9'; and White Mountain,
14,243.2', reversing the order of the third and fourth highest peaks.

In the end, science, and not hearsay and speculation, demonstrated that White Mountain, lower than Mt. Whitney by over 250 feet, is not even close to being the highest mountain in the lower 48 states. Currently, the peak near California’s boundary with Nevada is considered the 22nd highest mountain. With further GPS surveys of mountain summits in the Rocky Mountains, White Mountain's rank may change again.

All photographs courtesy of Scotty Strachan & Barry Beck.


Middle photo: White Mt Peak in background as seen from the southwest over the Sierra Crest. In the foreground is Norman Clyde Peak, 5/5/2003.


(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, February 2004)
Seemingly everyone has ridden a Ferris wheel at a carnival or an amusement park. Nevadans take great pride that the inventor of the Ferris wheel, George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr., spent much of his childhood in Carson Valley and Carson City. The irony in this story is most Nevadans are unaware of the location of the last existing 19th-century Ferris wheel. At the same time, the residents of the major European city where this Ferris wheel still carries millions of passengers have no idea that the inventor was a Nevadan.

Local lore credits George W. G. Ferris Jr.’s inspiration for the Ferris wheel as the undershot and overshot water wheels he saw as a child in the Carson Valley in the 1860s. On the other hand, P. Thomas Carroll, former associate professor of history at Rensselear Polytechnic Institute (RPI), claims that Ferris and his assistant, William Gronau, both RPI graduates in civil engineering in 1881 and 1887 respectively, took their inspiration from Henry Burden’s “Niagara of Water Wheels” in nearby South Troy, New York. According to Carroll, the 60-foot vertical water wheel was the most powerful in history, “and very probably—since Ferris and Gronau undoubtedly studied its structure while undergraduates—the model for Ferris’s wheel.”

We may never know where George Ferris, Jr. first got the idea to construct a 250-foot-diameter amusement wheel carrying 1,440 people in 36 cars above the midway of the Chicago's World Columbian Exposition of 1893. Ferris left no memoirs or other clues prior to his death in Pittsburgh on November 22, 1896. He died of typhoid fever at the age of 37, estranged from his wife and with his business affairs in shambles.

Today, the vintage giant Ferris wheels are gone except for one. The World's Columbian Exposition Ferris Wheel was dismantled and reconstructed in St. Louis in 1904 for the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. Renamed the Observation Wheel, it was favorably received by the public. Yet, efforts to sell the amusement ride after the Exposition closed were unsuccessful and it was dynamited and scrapped in May 1906. When London's Great Wheel ceased to be profitable, it was disassembled in 1906-07. The Paris Gigantic Wheel was torn down by the end of 1920 and its carriages used as homes for the homeless in post-World War I France. Blackpool's original Ferris Wheel was dismantled in November 1928.

Only Vienna's Riesenrad remains as a reminder of a bygone industrial era, a symbol of progress and engineering mastery much like Paris’ Eiffel Tower. Gracing the Austrian capital’s skyline and overlooking the Danube River and the Vienna Woods, the great Ferris wheel has survived two world wars, devastating fires, and business failures. With only 15 cars remaining after serious structural damage during World War II, it has been the setting for numerous movies and TV shows, none more compelling than the Oscar-winning motion picture The Third Man (1949). The scene depicting black marketer Harry Lime (Orson Welles) and his friend and western writer Holly Martins (Joseph Cotton) talking about the
value of human life in one of the gondolas, is unforgettable and ranks among the great movie moments in motion picture history. The Third Man is a cult classic in Vienna with its haunting zither music by Anton Karas.

Despite all the modern, gigantic Ferris wheels in the world today, in particular the 442-foot-high London Eye, the Viennese still take great pride in showing off their ancient Reisenrad. The late Inge Morath, renowned Austrian photographer and wife of American playwright Arthur Miller, featured the Vienna Ferris wheel among her outstanding photos.

But ask the Austrians whom George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr., was and you will get a blank stare. Ask a Nevadan for the location of the only remaining historic Ferris wheel in the world and it is unlikely you will get the right answer.

So this story has come full circle, linking in some small way, Vienna, Austria, the site of the last existing 19th-century Ferris wheel; and Carson Valley and Carson City, Nevada, boyhood home of its inventor George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr.

Top illustration: George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr.
Middle illustration: Bowser's schematic diagram of an overshot water wheel from An Elementary Treatise on Hydrodynamics, 1921.
Bottom drawing: Newspaper illustration of the Reisenrad giant Ferris wheel in Vienna. The young woman pictured in the top right corner rode her horse onto the top of one of the cars which then circled 200’ into the air.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, April 2004 edition)
The folklore is that the hillside letters found principally throughout the American west were created to help early 20th-century airplane pilots navigate and identify communities, presumably when the aviators could see the letters during daylight hours, with good weather, and no snow cover. The truth is the hillside letters are first and foremost symbols of school and community pride dating back to 1905. Early-day pilots found the hillside letters useful at times; however, any aeronautical value associated with the school and community letters came after the fact.


The University of California’s 70-foot high “Big C” in the Berkeley Hills started the college craze that spread throughout the trans-Rocky Mountain West. Built by the freshman and sophomore classes during the first spring days of 1905, just in time for official recognition at the annual Charter Day celebration, the hillside letter became the model for scores of letters to follow. Students at Brigham Young University built a 320 foot-high “Y” above its Provo, Utah campus in 1906. The University of Utah constructed a block “U” in 1907 just above Salt Lake City. Other schools soon followed the trend including Colorado State University, the Colorado School of Mines, and the University of Oregon in 1908; the University of Montana in 1909; and the Montana School of Mines (Montana Tech) and the New Mexico School of Mines in 1910. There are many more college hillside letters throughout the West and some of them are fairly recent in vintage.

University of Nevada students constructed a 150-foot high and 140-foot wide block “N” on April 13, 1913 composed of rocks covered with whitewash and located near the base of Peavine Peak overlooking the Truckee Meadows. The block “N” covers 13,000 square feet. Graham noted in her story that it was the largest hillside letter in the country until 1925.

The first documented Nevada high school letter was the Elko “E” reportedly built in late 1916. According to Howard Hickson, former Director of the Northeastern Nevada Museum, the “E” was constructed in honor of Raymond Thomas, a popular high school teacher who died on October 1, 1916 in an unexpected snowstorm while hiking in the nearby Ruby Mountains.

Apparently the next Nevada hillside letter was the “T” built in 1917 to honor Tonopah High School’s state championship girls’ basketball team. By the early 1920s, Carson City High School students had erected a “C” on a hill west of the city that came to be known as “C” Hill. The fad’s boom years witnessed the creation of the Sparks “S” and Battle Mountain “BM” in 1925, the Virginia City “V” in 1926, the Lincoln County “L” at Panaca in 1927, the Virgin Valley High School “V” in Mesquite in 1929, the Douglas County “D” in Carson Valley in 1932, and the Stewart Indian School “S” in Carson City in 1934.

Dozens of letters now mark hillsides throughout Nevada since the first one was completed north of Reno more than ninety-five years ago.
ago. In turn, tens of thousands of Nevadans have memories of their role in creating and/or keeping the letters readable. Despite the ravages of the harsh desert weather, vandalism, and school-related pranks and rivalries, the ritual of whitewashing or painting these distinctive vernacular landmarks in the western states endures as a tradition of school and community pride long after the flight of the last barn-storming pilot.


Credits:

Top photo: Block “N” on hillside north of the University of Nevada, Reno, campus, n.d. Notice the absence of development. Courtesy of University Archives, University of Nevada, Reno.


(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, June 2004)
Myth #93: So Who Was Actor Brad Dexter Anyway? by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

The cast of The Magnificent Seven was extraordinary. The seven were Yul Brynner, Steve McQueen, James Coburn, Charles Bronson, Robert Vaughn, Horst Buchholz, and Brad Dexter. Whenever they ask a contestant on a quiz show to name the seven, the most difficult one to remember is Brad Dexter. Actor Eli Wallach, The Good, the Bad, and Me (2005).

An Associated Press story, datelined Rancho Mirage, California, reported that “Actor Brad Dexter, who rode with Yul Brynner as one of The Magnificent Seven and became a confidant of both Marilyn Monroe and Frank Sinatra, has died at the age of 85.” Dexter died on December 12, 2002. “Born Boris Milanovich in Goldfield, Nev.,” the AP story continued, “Dexter made guest appearances on the 1950s televisions shows ‘Zane Gray Theater,’ ‘Death Valley Days,’ and ‘Wagon Train.’”

Despite all media accounts to the contrary—including the Los Angeles Times obituary which relied on David Ragan’s Who Was Who in Hollywood (1992) according to reporter Mary Rourke—tough guy character actor Brad Dexter was not born Boris Milanovich. The actor, who dropped the stage name Barry Mitchell for Brad Dexter at the request of director John Huston, was born Boris Michel Soso on April 9, 1917 in Goldfield, according to his birth certificate. Boris’ middle name was the last name of the female physician who delivered him, Dr. Marie Michel.

His Serbian family did not stay long in Goldfield. There are no enumerations in the 1920 U.S. census for Nevada for the father, Marko, a miner; his wife Violet; or children. The Soso clan had left their Goldfield residence at 827 Cedar Street and relocated to Los Angeles according to the census. “Dexter began working as early as age seven in order to help his family,” an on-line biography asserts. “After stints as a shoeshine boy, meatpacker and amateur boxer, he studied acting at the Pasadena Playhouse.”

The Belmont High School Alumni Association in Los Angeles reported that Boris Soso was the Boy’s Student Government President of his 1935 graduating class. By the time he enlisted in the military and then later when he appeared in Moss Hart’s highly acclaimed stage show “Winged Victory” on Broadway in 1943-44, he was Private Barry Mitchell. Following other stage, radio, and motion pictures roles, including the Las Vegas-based film Heldorado (1946) with Roy Rogers and Dale Evans; and Sinbad the Sailor (1947) with Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., the aspiring actor finally got his first break when John Huston cast him in The Asphalt Jungle (1950) with newcomer Marilyn Monroe.

February 12, 1952 found Brad Dexter, Jane Russell, and Vincent Price at the Las Vegas gala premiere of the Howard Hughes film, The Las Vegas Story. A photo of the 34-year-old Dexter, with a caption noting he was a native Nevadan, appeared in the Las Vegas Review-Journal. Co-starring in the lackluster drama, which included Victor Mature as Sheriff Dave Andrews, Dexter played a good-humored villain. By all accounts, the premiere was livelier than the movie.

On January 4, 1953, Dexter married the popular singer Peggy Lee. The extravagant wedding, Dexter’s first of three and Lee’s second, was widely covered by the Hollywood tabloids. However, the couple divorced ten months later. “As I said, I personally think the ‘Mister Lee’ business didn’t help his career,” Lee wrote in her 1989 autobiography, “I was to come to the conclusion that I loved him, but I was not in love with him . . . . I hope he found happiness. He deserves it.”

Although Dexter kept busy as a character actor, starring, for example, in 1958s Run Silent, Run Deep with Clark Gable and Burt Lancaster, he seemed on the brink of stardom when he co-starred in The Magnificent Seven (1960). The hit western film stars Yul Brynner, Steve McQueen, Charles Bronson, James Coburn, Robert Vaughn, Horst Buchholz, and Eli Wallach and is now a popular favorite. While most of the actors went on to become big-name stars, Dexter remained a lesser light.
He played gangster Benjamin “Bugsy” Siegel of Las Vegas fame in *The George Raft Story* (1961), then teamed up again with Yul Brynner in *Taras Bulba* (1962). A photo in the December 4, 1961 issue of the *Reno Evening Gazette* depicts Dexter, a “former Nevadan,” on location in Argentina for the shooting of *Taras Bulba* holding a sign which declared “only 6,250 miles to go to Reno.”

Dexter will probably be remembered more for his off screen associations than for his film career. A close friend of Marilyn Monroe, he was unsuccessful in convincing the blond beauty not to divorce her newly wed husband, baseball-great Joe DiMaggio, in 1954.

Dexter was once a buddy of singer-actor Frank Sinatra. In 1964, while shooting the film *None But the Brave* (1965) on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, he saved Sinatra from drowning. They appeared together again in Von Ryan's *Express* (1965). The two parted company when Dexter debuted as a movie producer in London, with *The Naked Runner* (1967). According to Dexter, he advised the 50-year-old Sinatra not to marry 21-year-old actress Mia Farrow. The film was completed without Sinatra, who quit the production in a fit of anger a few months after the wedding in Las Vegas. Returning to Los Angeles, Dexter was fired from Sinatra's company.


Sadly, Brad Dexter died in relative obscurity and now virtually every website associated with him lists his given name as Boris Milanovich. Most Nevadans don’t even know he was a native son. Goldfield, nearly a ghost town today, posthumously honored Dexter--Boris Soso--during its Goldfield Days celebration, August 22-24, 2003, with a film tribute.

Credits:
Top: Undated publicity photo of Brad Dexter courtesy of Harry Landon, Belmont High School Alumni Association
Bottom: 1935 Belmont High School yearbook *Campanile* photo of Boris Soso courtesy of the Belmont High School Alumni Association, Los Angeles

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, August 2004)
Lemuel Sanford “Sandy” Bowers was many things to many writers. Virtually all we know about Sandy Bowers, believed to be the first Comstock millionaire, was written after his death at Crown Point Ravine in Gold Hill on April 21, 1868.

Editor Myron Angel in his *History of Nevada* (1881) characterized Bowers as “an ignorant, easy-going frontiersman . . . .” An anecdote—probably apocryphal—in the pioneer history makes the Gold Canyon miner appear to be a lucky, good-hearted buffoon who just happened to strike it rich in 1859 and frittered away his fortune with his wife and business partner “Eilley.”

In editor Hubert Howe Bancroft’s *History of Nevada*, 1540-1888 (1890), we find that Bowers was an “illiterate Irishman” who married Scottish-born Allison Orrum Cowan in 1858. Actually, the couple was married on August 9, 1859, shortly after the major discoveries at Gold Hill where they had adjoining claims. “The Bowers became famous alike for their riches and their ignorance of their uses of wealth,” according to Bancroft’s work, and reference is made to a trip the couple took to Europe where “they remained three years abroad.”

The voyage to and from Europe, wrote Grant H. Smith in *The History of the Comstock Lode*, 1850-1920 (1943), lasted only eleven months. Smith, citing Eilley’s testimony in an 1865 court case, noted that the Bowers left San Francisco on the steamer *Golden Gate* on May 1, 1862, returning to Nevada Territory in April 1863. He referred to the couple as “. . . simple, unlettered folk . . . .”

Swift Paine, in his work *Eilley Orrum Queen of the Comstock* (1929), wrote of Sandy Bowers in 1859 that he “. . . had come from Missouri several years before as a teamster”, was “[s]pare, boyish, unlettered, [and] given to roistering . . . .” Paine later admitted to taking great liberties with the facts and inventing conversations and events for dramatic effect.

In a modest biography of Eilley Bowers entitled *The Mistress of the Mansion* (1950), author Alice B. Addenbrooke described “Sandy” as “enterprising . . . although uneducated.”

Perhaps the most sympathetic account of Lemuel Bowers is found in *An Editor on the Comstock Lode* (1936) by journalist Wells Drury. Drury interviewed Dr. Simeon Bishop, his own father-in-law and a close friend of the Bowers. “Two better people than Sandy Bowers and his wife never lived, exclaimed Dr. Bishop . . . . They were plain folks, both of them, though she was somewhat more pretentious than he . . . .” Dr. Bishop continued that “[h]e was a frontiersman; his ancestors had been pioneers of Kentucky. . . . He was a gentleman without trying, and without knowing why.”

Contrary to writers who exaggerated the cost of constructing the ostentatious Bowers Mansion in 1862-1863, Drury stated that the figure for the construction of the residence in Washoe Valley was actually $300,000. Grant Smith argued that the Bowers Mansion “. . . cost far less than $407,000 as claimed by several writers. Bower’s wealth has been a juicy morsel for sensational writers who knew little of the facts and cared less.”

Singling out Eilley and Sandy Bowers out as poor money managers in the midst of the Comstock’s first great depression in 1864-65 is not fair. Literally thousands of people on the Comstock, in San Francisco, and elsewhere suffered heavy losses in the stock market and in the resulting foreclosure and sale of mining properties. Barbara J. Jefferies in her study, “Sandy” Bowers’ Widow *The Biography of Allison “Eilley” Bowers* (1993), made no reference to Sandy being ignorant and unlettered when she noted how financially devastating the mining depression was to virtually everybody.
The meager primary documentation on Sandy Bowers and his life indicates that most writers relied more on folklore and fantasy than fact in writing his story. According to the 1860 U.S. Census for Gold Hill, Utah Territory, L. S. Bowers was 27 and a native of Illinois. His passport documents that he was born in Madison County, just northeast of St. Louis, Missouri, on February 24, 1833. A letter at the Nevada Historical Society in Reno dated October 11, [1862] and signed “Mr. L. S. Bowers” from Liverpool, England to John Oram, his brother-in-law, in Scotland was probably written by Eilley. However, Sandy’s last will and testament, subscribed by L. Sanford Bowers on April 15, 1867 and attested to by former California governor and Nevada Supreme Court Justice J. Neely Johnson, includes Bowers’ signature. It can be inferred that Sandy had some rudimentary education and, in all fairness, was not ignorant.

No more fitting epitaph for Sandy Bowers can be found than a line from the obituary published in Virginia City’s Territorial Enterprise: “By his death the State has lost a good and useful citizen, and the working men of the country a true and sympathetic friend.” Hundreds attended his Masonic funeral and the body was transported to Washoe Valley. Today he is buried on a hillside behind Bowers Mansion near the graves of his daughter, Margaret Persia, and his wife, Eilley.

Guy Rocha, October 2003

Portrait of Samuel “Sandy” Bowers, n.d. Courtesy of Bucket of Blood Saloon, Virginia City, NV

Photograph: Bowers Mansion, ca 1870. Courtesy of Bowers Mansion Park, Washoe County Parks and Recreation Department.

(Published in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, October 2004)
Have you heard that the west’s last stagecoach robbery occurred in Jarbidge Canyon in northern Elko County in 1916? It’s true except for one thing. The robbery actually involved a small, mail stage wagon pulled by two horses, and not a stagecoach drawn by a four or six-horse team.

According to Howard Hickson, former Director of Elko’s Northeastern Nevada Museum, in his on-line article “Case Number 606 Makes History,” the embellished robbery story converted “a buckboard-like wagon” into a stagecoach the likes of the Overland Stage. Western writer Nell Murbarger did much to popularize the Jarbidge “stagecoach” robbery in the 1950s, stimulating her readers to envision the Wild West stagecoach robberies produced for the movies and television. The Jarbidge stage robbery just didn’t happen that way.

On the snowy evening of December 5, 1916, Fred M. Searcy was the lone driver of the mail stage on its last leg between Three Creek, Idaho, and the remote town of Jarbidge, Nevada, when he was robbed and murdered. A search party found the wagon, horses, and Searcy’s body on the outskirts of the mining town of Jarbidge. An estimated $3,000 was missing from the stage that carried the U.S. mail and cash from Robertson, Idaho.

Evidence hidden near the scene of the crime implicated Ben E. Kuhl, a drifter who had been living in and around Jarbidge for a few months. Ben Kuhl was known as a troublemaker and was awaiting trial after being arrested on trespassing charges. Following Kuhl’s arrest for the stage robbery, a background check uncovered a criminal record. He had served four months in the Marysville, California, jail for petty larceny in 1903 and time in the Oregon State Prison for horse theft.

Kuhl’s associate, Ed Beck, was linked to the crime by a mutual acquaintance, William McGraw, who agreed to turn state’s evidence. The three men were transported to Elko and incarcerated.

Kuhl’s trial began on September 18, 1917 with Elko County District Attorney Edward P. “Ted” Carville prosecuting the case. The evidence linking Kuhl to the killing of Searcy, including his black overcoat with torn sleeves and the murder weapon, an ivory-gripped .44 caliber handgun, was circumstantial.

However, what made the Kuhl trial so distinctive in the annals of American criminal justice was the palm print evidence from the crime scene. Two California fingerprint experts testified that their forensic analysis linked the bloody palm print found on a torn letter near the mail stage to Ben Kuhl.

The jury found Kuhl guilty of first-degree murder after only two hours of deliberation. District Judge Errol J. L. Taber sentenced him to death and Kuhl entered the State Prison in Carson City on October 19, 1917. He was offered the choice of being hanged or shot. Kuhl chose to be shot, a form of execution used only once before in Nevada in 1913.

Ed Beck was found guilty of providing the murder weapon and sentenced to life in prison. He served slightly more than six years and was paroled on November 24, 1923.

Challenging the admissibility of the palm print as evidence, Ben Kuhl’s case was appealed to the Nevada Supreme Court, but to no avail. However, a week before the execution date the Board of Pardons met in executive session on December 13, 1918 and voted three to two to commute his sentence to life. Kuhl had admitted to the killing. However, he argued that it was the result of a quarrel between Fred Searcy and himself when they disagreed over splitting the booty, the stage robbery having been planned as an insider job.

Ironically, in 1945 Governor “Ted” Carville, the prosecutor in the Kuhl murder case, and Supreme Court Justice Errol Taber, the district judge in the case, as members of the Nevada Board of Parole, voted to release Ben Kuhl from prison. Kuhl, then 61, had served more than twenty-seven and one-half years and
was a model prisoner. At the time of his release on May 16, 1945 he had served time longer than anyone else in the State Prison. Kuhl reportedly died in San Francisco of tuberculosis.

Thus, Ben Kuhl made his place in history by engaging in the last horse drawn stage robbery in the nation (Yellowstone National Park historians lay claim to the last stagecoach robbery in 1915) and by being the defendant in a court case that for the first time used palm prints as evidence.

Guy Rocha, November 2003

Nevada State Prison "mug shot" of Ben Kuhl courtesy of Nevada State Library and Archives

(Published in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, December 2004)
Few people have heard of Vya and fewer yet have visited the remote location in northern Washoe County. There certainly hasn’t been much written about the place. In 2004, a guest ranch known as the Old Yellow Dog Ranch & Cattle Co. opened in what is known as Long Valley. Maybe it’s time to learn a little more about the founding of the settlement, Vya Wimer, and the claim that she was the “first white child born in that vicinity.”

This northwestern corner of Nevada was originally Northern Paiute country. Politically it was Roop County from Territorial times to 1883, when it was consolidated with Washoe County. The land was principally devoted to stock raising: the famous Miller & Lux outfit had interests in the region, and there was some prospecting and mining in the vicinity of Bald Mountain. The closest towns were Cedarville, Lake City, and Ft. Bidwell in Surprise Valley, Modoc County, California. As might be expected, a number of the first Vya-area farmers found their way there from nearby Modoc County when the federal government opened Long Valley for homesteading in the early 1900s.

The 1910 U.S. Census listed 15 households and 96 persons living in the newly created Bald Mountain Precinct. Among them were brothers Guy and Roy Wimer living on their adjoining farms. Both were born and raised in Lake City, and by 1909 moved to Long Valley to homestead. Another native of Lake City, their cousin Harry Wimer, also farmed in the valley.

At that time Reno’s Nevada State Journal talked of the possibility of railroads and irrigation projects for northern Washoe County. Schools opened in Long Valley in 1910, among them the Green Springs School where Roy Wimer was the school district clerk. Schools were the principal social centers in rural Nevada and a Long Valley correspondent sent the State Journal area news. At the same time, Bald Mountain Township was created which encompassed Vya, with a justice of the peace and constable to provide law and order.

The post office, named Vya after Roy and Artie Wimer’s only child, opened on September 29, 1910. Contrary to a report in the November 27, 1910 edition of the Nevada State Journal, five-year-old Vya was not “the first white child born in that vicinity.” This was a typical pioneer anecdote heard so many times in so many places but the story was not true. In fact, Vya was born in Lake City on December 22, 1904.

The settlement of Vya and the surrounding area grew and prospered in the early 1910s. The Wimers and other farmers produced a bountiful potato crop in 1913. Grain and other vegetables also did well that year and farmers continued the tradition of stock raising. In addition, many of the farmers trapped animals for their fur and sold the pelts.

The year 1914 saw a new Green Springs School erected and four school districts operating in Long Valley. Polk’s Nevada State Gazetteer for 1914-15 listed Vya’s population as 12, but there were hundreds of people living in the Bald Mountain Precinct and relying on Vya’s post office.

Tragedy struck the Wimer family in 1917. Artie died of heart disease on June 29th at Beulah in Mosquito Valley, north of the family homestead, according to her death certificate. She was buried in Lake City where she had married Roy in 1902. Twelve-year-old Vya was left without a mother. Life must have been difficult for Roy because by late 1916 his property was listed on the Washoe County Delinquent Tax List. In the meantime, he and daughter Vya moved back to Lake City.

Roy Alton Wimer married again. He died in Sacramento on January 19, 1959. Vya worked as a nurse, married, and lived to be 86 years old. She died on June 15, 1991 in Red Bluff, Tehama County, California. There are no direct descendants.
Both Roy and Vya lived to see the Vya school and post office close in 1941. Harry Wimer was still listed in the 1941 Washoe County Directory as one of the 30 people living in Vya. Despite its meager population, Vya’s own Don Crawford represented northern Washoe County in the Nevada State Assembly from 1942 until 1962. Following Crawford’s departure from the legislature, Washoe County Commissioners eliminated Bald Mountain Township and the offices of Justice of the Peace and Constable.

For a time in 1993 Vya received national attention. On January 6, a Washoe County Road Department supervisor found a dazed James Stolpa wandering near the maintenance station in Vya. Stolpa, his wife and infant son had become stranded in snowdrifts while driving on a back road from California to Idaho. After walking more than fifty miles in search of help, Stolpa lead his rescuers to a cave where his family had survived the bitter cold. Following the harrowing ordeal, the Stolpas and their rescuers were interviewed on the Phil Donahue TV show.

While some buildings remain today, the community of Vya is gone. Still, you can find Vya Wimer’s first name on the current Official Highway Map of Nevada.

Vya - gone but not forgotten.


(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, February 2005)
Myth #97: Hard Hats at Hoover Dam by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

No, the hard hat was not invented for construction workers on the Hoover Dam project in the early 1930s. It's another legend associated with the modern wonder of the world, much like the story of workers permanently buried in the dam. While workers wore safety helmets and hard hats to protect their heads, the hard hat had been available years before construction began at the Black Canyon dam site on the Colorado River in April 1931.

Actually its inventor, Edward W. Bullard, introduced the original "Hard-Boiled hat" in 1919. While working for the E.D. Bullard Company, established in San Francisco in 1898, the son of the founder began working on a helmet that could protect miners. Among the many hazards in the mines were injuries to the head. Bullard's experience with the doughboy helmet as a soldier during World War I inspired young Bullard to fabricate a hard hat similar in shape to the helmet. The original hard hat was manufactured out of steamed layers of glued canvas painted black. A suspension device was built into the hard hat for comfort and protection. According to the Bullard Company, now based in Cynthiana, Kentucky, the patented "Hard-Boiled Hat" was the first industrial head protection sold commercially in the world.

The Bullard Company asserts that the first official "Hard Hat Area" was the Golden Gate Bridge project in San Francisco. The project's chief engineer, Joseph B. Strauss, beginning on January 5, 1933, directed all the workers to wear hard hats to protect themselves from falling rivets and other materials.

However, the Six Companies constructing Hoover Dam first required all its workers to wear hard hats by November 1931. The Las Vegas Review Journal in its October 28, 1931 issue wrote, "Nobody will be allowed in the canyon bottom without one of the helmets, henceforth, according to Ed Brockman, supervisor of insurance and safety for the Big Six." The story continued, "And Six Companies is paying the bill. A helmet for every man! And more than fifty dozen already have been issued. Others are en route from the factory, enough to protect the craniums of the army in its entirety."

From all indications, the hard hats were purchased from San Francisco's E. D. Bullard Company. According to a Review-Journal article on April 20, 1932, a carpenter wearing a hard hat survived a blow to the head from a four by six timber. Although the hat was dented, the carpenter quickly returned to work. The newspaper story referred to the headgear as "one of the 'hard-boiled' hats for which Hoover dam workers in Black Canyon have become famous."

While the hard hat had been invented more then a decade before construction began on Hoover Dam, in all probability it was the first major public works project in the United States requiring use of a hard hat.

Photograph of "Hard Boiled Hat" courtesy of Bullard Company.

Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, April 2005 edition)
There is something about claiming to be the largest something, if not the first something. Every state in the nation claims to have the largest or first something and that makes the “something” very special. Marketing something as largest or first is rife with exaggerated and invented claims. Anyway, it’s free speech and there are no penalties for duping the public for fun and profit. In many cases, the promoters honestly believe the claim is true without doing the homework to determine its veracity. You never know what you might find. Truth in advertising seldom gets in the way of a good story.

In this case, is the Virginia City (Comstock) Historic District the largest historic district in the nation as widely advertised? With its colorful silver and gold mining history dating back to 1849, the greater Virginia City area was designated a National Historical Landmark on July 4, 1961. Five years later, the National Park Service listed Virginia City on the National Register of Historic Places as a national historical district. According to the National Register database, the Virginia City Historic District, which includes Gold Hill, Silver City, and downtown Dayton, in Storey and Lyon counties, has 382 contributing buildings and is 14,750 acres in size.

It’s unlikely the claimants for the Virginia City Historic District’s size as number one in the nation based their claim on the number of historic buildings. For example, the Lancaster Historic District in Pennsylvania’s Amish country has 13,411 contributing buildings making it the largest of its kind in the nation. That doesn’t stop some people from advertising on websites that the Charleston Historic District in South Carolina (1,465 contributing buildings) or the Savannah Historic District in Georgia (1,100 contributing buildings) is America’s largest historic district. When it comes to contributing buildings making up the size of an historic district, the Boulder City Historic District in Clark County is Nevada’s largest with 408 buildings.

The claim for the Virginia City Historic District as largest in the country is based on acreage. Responding to a query, the National Park Service’s National Register Database Manager noted that while the Virginia City Historic District is impressive in size it fell far short of the largest National Register historic district in the nation. He pointed out that the national historic district composed of the King Ranch in Texas is 1.2 million acres in size (it is also the largest national historical landmark in the U.S.). Closer to Nevada, for example, we find the Central Whidbey Island Historic District in Island County, Washington (174,000 acres); the Silver City Historic District in Owyhee County, Idaho (102,400 acres); the Chesterfield Historic District in Caribou County, Idaho (21,600 acres); and the Delamar Historic District in Owyhee County, Idaho (16,000 acres).

In the end, the Virginia City Historic District does not even come close to being the largest national historic district in size, nor is it the largest national landmark. However, for some, stealing someone else’s thunder or legacy is no big deal. It is sometimes heard, “It’s all for a good cause, and whom does it hurt, anyway?” Of course, if I didn’t do the research, who would know or care about the erroneous claim. You make the call.

Photographs of Virginia City courtesy of the Nevada State Library and Archives.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, June 2005 edition)
Myth #99: Caliente: Hot stuff on the Web, But is it True? by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

The Greater Lincoln County Chamber of Commerce once claimed on its website that “Caliente was one of the favorite writing spots for western novelist Zane Grey. . . . It was also where the famed ‘Robber’s Roost’, hideout for outlaws like Butch Cassidy, is located.”

Whoa, pardner! Some history homework was needed here. Just because these claims were posted on a website for the world to read doesn’t make them true.

I e-mailed one of Grey’s biographers, a colleague of mine, and asked if Grey had spent time in Caliente, drawing inspiration in the rustic railroad town located in southeastern Nevada for some of his writings. “He did not,” was the biographer’s response. “I believe that there was a story of him staying there for awhile and actually writing a novel there. However, I believe he had been confused with another western writer. Yes, I’ve seen the claim. There is nothing supporting that in his correspondence.”

Grey wrote a novel named Nevada, which first appeared in monthly installments beginning in the November 1926 issue of The American Magazine. A silent movie starring the up-and coming Gary Cooper as “Nevada,” Thelma Todd, and William Powell opened throughout the country the next year. The film was advertised as “a stirring tale of the days when rustlers roamed the cattle country and two gunmen fought the law, in a land where men ride fast, shoot straight; where thrills are everywhere.” On July 4, 1927 one could pay fifteen cents and watch the movie Nevada at the State Theatre in Reno. However, there is no evidence that Grey spent anytime in Caliente writing Nevada or any other book.

Grey, seven years prior to his death in Altadena, California, also wrote a novel entitled Robber’s Roost (1932). The following year a movie was released by the same name starring cowboy actor George O’Brien and Maureen O’Sullivan (who also starred with Johnny Weissmuller as Tarzan’s Jane).

So where was Robber’s Roost? Utahans take great pride that Robber’s Roost was located in Utah’s “Outback.” A haven for outlaws such as Butch Cassidy’s Wild Bunch, Jeffrey D. Nichols tells us in History Blazer (August 1995) that Robber’s Roost was “a wild stretch of land crisscrossed with steep-walled canyons and hidden draws . . . between the Colorado, Green, and Dirty Devil Rivers” in southeastern Utah. As the crow flies, Caliente is more than 200 miles to the west.

According to Nichols, “Robber’s Roost was one of several hideouts along what became known as the Outlaw Trail. The Roost was never successfully penetrated by the
authorities, despite some sporadic attempts and many boastful claims by various officials. The Roost was largely abandoned as an outlaw hangout after 1902 when Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid reportedly departed on their fateful South American trip."


When promoting tourism and history, something seems to happen where fancy and fiction overtake reality. The truth threshold for marketing a historical location is generally low and the entertainment value is deemed most important; after all, they’re only tourists. In the end, beware what passes for history, particularly on a website.

From first to worst, superlatives abound in describing historical and contemporary events. Journalists, public officials, town boosters, and others so many times feel compelled to claim something special about something. But what do they base their claim on and how do they, or we, know what’s true?

Take for instance the claim that a fire is the worst in the history of a community or state. Is there a handy-dandy list of all major fires in Nevada’s history? The answer is no. A comprehensive list has never been created and is long overdue.

The claim for “worst fire” generally stems from personal or collective experience, i.e. it’s the worst fire in memory. That claim on a statewide basis is contingent on the claimant being aware of all the other major fires in the course of his or her lifetime.

What makes a fire the worst? Is it because of acreage consumed, damage to property, cost to suppress it, loss of human life, or all of these elements in combination?

There have been many large conflagrations in Nevada history including the July 2004 Waterfall Fire in the Carson City area. Public officials have declared, “this is the worst fire Carson City has ever experienced” and emphasized no fire in the state’s history has been “so close to so many homes and people.” A newspaper editorial called the Waterfall Fire “the worst wildfire in Carson’s history.”

In researching fires in and around Carson City since the town’s founding in 1858, one could legitimately argue that the Waterfall Fire (8,799 acres) has cost more to control and the property loss is greater than any other fire in the past. Carson City never had great fires like Virginia City, Reno, and Goldfield, which burned most of those towns to the ground.

On the other hand, the Carson City fire of Sept. 28-29, 1926 burned west from the mouth of Clear Creek Canyon to Spooner Summit, some five miles, and east again back down Kings Canyon to the edge of city. Fire fighters fought valiantly to prevent the fire from engulfing the nation’s smallest state capital. The ranchers in the fire’s path lost virtually everything. Today most of those ranches have been replaced by residential subdivisions and custom homes. Five firefighters in 1926, including two prison inmates and a correctional officer, lost their lives to the fickle flames. A marker in the eastbound lane of U.S. Highway 50 below Spooner Summit pays homage to these fallen men. Based on the loss of life and amount of acreage involved, the 1926 fire may be considered the worst fire in Carson City’s history.

So where does the Waterfall Fire rank in the history of fires in Nevada? When it comes to the loss of human life, the MGM Hotel and Casino fire (November 21, 1980) in Las Vegas was Nevada’s worst. The death toll was 87 with three persons dying after the fire, and 679 people were injured. According to the Clark County Fire Department, the MGM fire “was the second largest life-loss hotel fire in U.S. history.” The Virginia City fire of October 26, 1875 probably resulted in the greatest property loss in Nevada history. Most of the downtown core in what was then Nevada’s largest city, perhaps 30,000 residents in the metro area, was destroyed in the blaze. Hundreds, if not thousands, of people were displaced. Insurance companies estimated the total losses at $10,000,000!

In 2003 dollars this is a loss of $105,151,060—a major calamity. Three fatalities were reported in the massive fire. The densely populated Comstock, including neighboring Gold Hill, with its many frame houses and other buildings, was fortunate to have avoided even greater loss of life and property.

According to newspaper reports, the great Reno fire of March 2, 1879 destroyed 50 acres of businesses and homes in the town’s north end. Six lives were lost.
Reno’s Mizpah Hotel fire of October 31, 2006 cost twelve lives, the deadliest in the town's history.

The Goldfield fire of July 6, 1923, which may have started with an explosion of an illegal liquor still, burned some thirty blocks in the declining mining town. One hundred and fifty families were left homeless. The estimated property loss was $500,000. In 2003 dollars, this is $5,257,553. Two persons died in the fire. Only 15 years earlier, Goldfield had been Nevada’s largest community.

Carson City’s Waterfall Fire devastated thousands of acres of forested areas but there have been much larger forest fires in Nevada history. Perhaps the Waterfall Fire’s distinction is that it will prove to be the costliest to suppress in the state’s history, more than $9,200,000 because of its mixed urban/wildland character.

Superlative claims are easy to make but not necessarily easy to prove or defend. There is nothing wrong in deferring a question if you don’t know the answer, or referring the question to someone who might.

Photograph of plane dropping fire retardant on “C” Hill in Carson City, ca 1964-1966, courtesy of the Nevada State Library and Archives. The view is toward the north/northeast. Neither the legislative building nor the Ormsby House had been constructed at the time of this photo.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, October 2005 edition)
Tourists by the tens of thousands flock to Virginia City every year in search of the Wild West and evidence of Mark Twain’s time on the Comstock. Anybody who knows anything about Samuel Clemens in Nevada knows he was a reporter for Virginia City’s *Territorial Enterprise* newspaper in the early 1860s and adopted the pen name Mark Twain. Many of the visitors want to see where the aspiring young writer worked and find their way to the Territorial Enterprise building and Mark Twain Museum on South C Street between Union and Taylor. But did Twain work there or ever set foot in the building?

The simple answer is no, much to the dismay of those who would like to believe otherwise. Even respected historians such as Richard Lingenfelter in his co-authored study, *The Newspapers of Nevada* (1984), and R. Kent Rasmussen in his encyclopedic work, *Mark Twain A to Z* (1995), claimed Twain worked in the building. The existing Territorial Enterprise structure was constructed after the disastrous fire of October 26, 1875 that burned much of central and northern Virginia City. The new building, located on the site of the previous office at 24 South C Street, saw the first issue of the newspaper published on February 1, 1876.

The large brick building on North C Street between Sutton and Union where Twain was first employed as a *Territorial Enterprise* reporter in September 1862, according to fellow Enterprise reporter Dan DeQuille, was destroyed in the 1875 conflagration. The multi-story, brick Territorial Enterprise building with its steam-powered press at 24 South C Street, where Twain worked beginning in the summer of 1863, suffered the same fate. While the desks, presses, and varied equipment in the current Territorial Enterprise building on South C Street are certainly vintage and fascinating, they would not likely be anything that Twain ever sat on, leaned against, wrote on, or had anything to do with in the earlier newspaper offices located on North C Street and South C Street.

At the same time, Mark Twain never set foot in the existing Territorial Enterprise building. In May 1864, in the midst of the region’s first mining depression and amid talk of a duel with an angry Virginia City newspaper editor, the Comstock’s bad-boy journalist left hurriedly for San Francisco where the *Golden Era* magazine welcomed him as “the Sagebrush Humorist from Silver-Land.”

Twain returned twice to his old haunts. Once in 1866 on a lucrative lecture tour the “Wild Humorist of the Pacific Slope” spoke about his recent excursion to the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands. His Hawaiian adventures and the Nevada tour are chronicled in *Roughing It* (1872).

During his second lecture tour in 1868, Twain talked about his trip to Europe and the Middle East, the subject of his next book *Innocents Abroad* (1869). On his first day back in Virginia City, April 24, he witnessed the execution by hanging of John Millian, the alleged murderer of prostitute Julia Bulette.

On May 3, 1868, Mark Twain left Nevada never to return. Twain stayed in contact with his Comstock cronies over the years. However, much of the Virginia City he knew was laid to waste with the great fire of 1875.

While Mark Twain is inextricably linked to the history of the “Queen City of the Comstock,” you won’t find his Virginia City days associated with the current Territorial Enterprise building on South C Street.
Nevada’s nickname, “Battle Born,” dates back to the Civil War. Thanks to the research of State Archives Manager Jeff Kintop, we know that constitutional delegate, and future Nevada Congressman, Thomas Fitch noted on July 6, 1864 that “Our state will be battle-born…”

People refer to Battle Born as the state’s motto, a common misnomer. In fact, the second state constitutional convention adopted the motto “All For Our Country” which can be found on the Nevada State Seal.

Another once common belief is that Nevada was not legally admitted as a state in the nation. The story goes that there were not enough people living in the Nevada Territory to justify statehood and a member in the House of Representatives.

However, the issue was not an obstacle to Nevada becoming a state. The constitutional question dates to the 1890s. The Battle Born state was in the midst of a major mining depression, people were leaving the area in droves, and sparsely populated Nevada had a new nickname, “the great rotten borough,” because the mining and railroad corporations so dominated political and economic life.

When the state legislature legalized boxing in 1897, and Carson City in March hosted the world’s heavyweight championship between contender Bob Fitzsimmons and champion “Gentleman Jim” Corbett, many in the press and the pulpit called the nation’s first legal prize fight an abomination. Combined with the fact that many of Nevada’s U.S. Senators only maintained token residences in the state and actually lived in California, Nevada’s reputation suffered. Eastern writers, using these and other unsavory themes, seized upon the population issue to try and strip Nevada of its statehood. William Ellsworth Smyth, in the April 1897 issue of Forum asked “Shall Nevada Be Deprived of Statehood?”

The argument seemingly focused on the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which stated that if a territory had 60,000 free inhabitants it could pursue statehood. The Nevada Territory may have had between 35,000 and 40,000 free inhabitants at the time of statehood in 1864. The general population of Nevada probably exceeded 60,000 for only a few years in the 1870s and early 1880s. The 1890 census recorded 47,355 inhabitants and by 1900 another 5,000 people had exited the state. The anti-Nevada crowd argued the Battle Born state should not have been Battle Born.

However, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, if it applied to state-making outside of the old Northwest, had a loophole that members of Congress and President Abraham Lincoln were probably familiar with when they supported Enabling Acts for Colorado, Nebraska, and Nevada in March 1864. The language in the ordinance read that a state could be admitted to the Union, “Provided, the constitution and government so to be formed, shall be republican, and in conformity to the principles contained in these articles; and, so far as it can be consistent with the general interest of the confederacy, such admission shall be allowed at an earlier period, and when there may be a less number of free inhabitants in the State than sixty thousand.”

It seems, the Battle Born state was admitted to the Union legally. President Lincoln and the moderate Republicans in Congress expected the 36th state to support the reelection of the president and his reconstruction policies for the South following the end of the Civil War. They were right on both counts. It’s unlikely Congress seriously considered changing Nevada back into a territory in the 1890s. Such an effort would have raised major constitutional questions about whether the founding fathers ever intended for it to be possible to remove statehood, once granted.

In the end, Nevada’s 20th-century mining boom, beginning with the Tonopah discovery in 1900, reinvigorated the nation’s least populated state. The cries to rescind Nevada’s statehood were silenced for the time being.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, February 2006 edition)
Boulder Dam. Hoover Dam. Boulder Dam. Hoover Dam. Take your pick. The name of the modern wonder of the world that dams the Colorado River between Arizona and Nevada near Las Vegas has gone by either name at different times. Today it is officially known as Hoover Dam. However, there are many Americans, mostly senior citizens who still refuse to call Hoover Dam anything but Boulder Dam.

Why all the confusion? The first viable site considered for a dam on the Colorado River was in Boulder Canyon. Full-scale geological testing began in January 1921 and was completed by the end of the year. A major report in 1922 had mentioned Boulder Canyon as the probable site. Congressional legislation introduced in 1923 was labeled the Boulder Canyon Project Act. The press had started to refer to the Boulder Canyon Dam, or Boulder Dam, as it tracked the progress of the bill. And by the time another report in 1928 designated Black Canyon as the best site for the proposed dam, the name Boulder had already become synonymous with the project. President Calvin Coolidge signed the Boulder Canyon Project Act on December 21, 1928.

So now the plan was to build the Boulder Canyon Project in Black Canyon, or so everybody thought. On September 17, 1930 at a ceremony south of Las Vegas to celebrate the project’s start-up, President Herbert Hoover’s Secretary of the Interior Ray Lyman Wilbur concluded his speech by stating “I have the honor to name this greatest project of all time—the Hoover Dam.” The announcement naming the dam after the sitting president, who had been involved in planning for the dam earlier in his career, drew only scattered applause with the nation sinking into its greatest economic depression. Some in attendance predicted that the proposed dam workers’ town would be named Wilbur City instead of Boulder City. The Washington Daily News, referring to the controversy in Congress over naming the dam, editorialized that “we care not even a tinker’s dam who calls it what, so long as it goes up pronto and does its job in the southwest.” A congressional appropriation act passed on February 14, 1931 made the name Hoover Dam official.

By April 1931, work was underway in Black Canyon to build Hoover Dam. The construction proceeded ahead of schedule. The diversion tunnels around the dam site were opened in November 1932, shortly after Franklin Delano Roosevelt defeated Herbert Hoover for the presidency of the United States. With a new president came a new Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, and a return to the name Boulder Dam. On May 8, 1933, in one of his first administrative acts, Secretary Ickes declared that henceforth the dam rising from the floor of Black Canyon would be called Boulder Dam and no longer Hoover Dam. Ickes claimed the name change would end the public confusion caused by his predecessor’s political decision to honor his boss, who Ickes argued had contributed virtually nothing to the project. Author Joseph Stevens, in his comprehensive work Hoover Dam An American Adventure (1988), states that Ickes’ claim that Hoover didn’t help in bringing the Boulder Canyon project to fruition was “blatantly false” and “it appeared that Ickes’ renaming of Hoover Dam was a political act, a mean-spirited attempt to shred the already tattered reputation of the former president, as well as an unsubtle snub to those who had supported him.” However, the name of the dam was never officially changed from “Hoover.”

President Roosevelt, in a nationwide radio broadcast from the dam site, dedicated Boulder Dam on September 30, 1935. Just the same, the name game was not over. On April 30, 1947, the name Hoover Dam was “officially” restored by a joint resolution of a Republican-dominated Congress and signed by President Harry S Truman, a Democrat. Former President Hoover in a private communication to one of the resolution’s sponsors expressed his gratitude that an insult had been rectified. Still, many Roosevelt partisans continued to call the great concrete edifice Boulder Dam and still do. Public reaction to the controversy was colorfully articulated by Frank Romano, Sr.
who proposed, in a May 10, 1947 letter to the Las Vegas Review-Journal, that the name be changed a third time to "Hoogivza Dam."*

*For more information on this topic, see the website of the Boulder City Museum and Historical Association at [http://www.bcmha.org/history.html](http://www.bcmha.org/history.html)

Photos courtesy of Weber State University, Stewart Library, Special Collections. Top photo: (center) stopped to visit the dam on November 12, 1932, shortly after his resounding defeat in the presidential election on November 8th. He was accompanied by officials of the construction consortium.

Bottom photo: Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States, at the dedication of Boulder Dam, September 30, 1935.

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It has long been believed that the popular American cowboy-humorist and actor Will Rogers attended Lincoln Highway Days in Ely. The gala four-day event, June 4-7, 1930 celebrated the completion of the last link of the transcontinental highway between Wendover and Ely, Nevada. While Rogers visited Nevada many times before his tragic death in an airplane crash in August 1935, including filming the movie "Lightnin'" at Lake Tahoe in August and September 1930 with cowboy actor and future Nevada Lt. Governor Rex Bell, he did not attend the Lincoln Highway Days.

Both Rogers and the colorful and controversial Walter “Death Valley Scotty” Scott were invited to Lincoln Highway Days as celebrity guests. In fact, Rogers responded to the invitation which was noted in the May 31, 1930 edition of the *Ely Daily Times*: “Say, if I can arrange things here I might take you birds up. I would fly to Scotty’s place [in Death Valley] and come up with him. Will wire you later. Will Rogers.” Reno's *Nevada State Journal*, datelined Ely, May 20, reported that “It is tentatively planned to have Death Valley Scotty, desert character, here in person to supervise the show.”

However, there is not a single mention of Rogers or Scott attending the highway completion celebration in the *Ely Record* or the *Ely Daily Times*. Something must have come up.

We may never know why Rogers and Scott did not attend the Lincoln Highway Days, an event that included Nevada Governor Fred Balzar, his counterparts from Utah, George M. Dern (film actor Bruce Dern’s grandfather) and Idaho's Clarence Baldridge; and the mayors of Ogden and Salt Lake City, Utah. We do know that Will Rogers was a nationally syndicated columnist in 1930 living in the Los Angeles area. At the time of the Lincoln Highway Days celebration in Ely, all the datelines of his daily columns in the New York Times were either in Beverly Hills -- where he had been the honorary mayor -- or Hollywood, California. Rogers wrote of recent local and national events. For example, on June 3 he satirically wrote that “Yesterday our municipal election ran true to political form. The sewer was defeated but the councilmen got in.” On June 7, with the United States sinking ever deeper into the Great Depression, he quipped that “About all that was in the papers this morning was about ‘debts.’ Every nation, and every individual, their principal worry is ‘debt.’”

The fact that Rogers was not mentioned in the Ely newspapers during Lincoln Highways Days, and his daily columns placed him in Los Angeles, clearly indicate that while Rogers was willing, he was not able to attend one of the largest events ever held in White Pine County.

Photograph: L-R: Death Valley Scotty, Nevada Governor Fred Balzar, and Will Rogers eating hot dogs at the Winnemucca Rodeo, Saturday, August 30, 1930. Courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society.

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, June 2006 edition)
Dorea Hall Pittman, representing the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), at a conference in Reno on June 6, 1964 charged that “if Arizona is the Alabama, Nevada is the Mississippi of the West, and Utah is the Georgia.”

By the 1950s, some journalists and critics had labeled Nevada the “Mississippi of the West.” The pejorative label was also applied to Las Vegas, Hawthorne, and Reno. An article in the March 1954 edition of Ebony Magazine entitled "Negroes can't win in Las Vegas" resulted in the town being called "the Mississippi of the West."

Was Nevada burning like Mississippi? Had Nevadans resorted to mob violence and lynched African-Americans; burned or bombed their homes, schools, businesses, and churches; killing hundreds of innocent men, women, and children? Were there incidents comparable to the murder of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till; NAACP leader Medgar Evers; civil rights workers Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman; and civil rights leader Vernon Dahmer?

The answer is clearly no. The late Elmer Rusco, University of Nevada, Reno, political science professor and long-time civil rights activist, noted in his oral history, Not Like A River (2004), that calling Nevada the Mississippi of the West “was a misnomer, it wasn’t fair, but Nevada was worse than most Western states, certainly worse than California in many respects.”

Nevada’s brand of racism was less embedded in law and not as violent as in southern states. For example, according to the Tuskegee Institute Archives, 539 blacks were lynched in Mississippi between 1882 and 1968, the highest number among all states and territories. In the same time period, no blacks were lynched in Nevada, one of only seven states that had no history of lynching African-Americans.

However, until 1959, it was illegal for blacks and whites to marry. Segregated communities were the norm. Discrimination in employment was rampant; generally the most menial jobs were available to blacks. African-Americans were denied service in most businesses, including hotels, restaurants, and casinos. Hawthorne’s El Capitan Hotel and Casino was notorious for refusing service to blacks and American Indians.

There were very few African-American teachers, lawyers, doctors, or politicians in Nevada until after the 1960s. Entertainers such as Sammy Davis, Jr.; Pearl Bailey; Lena Horne; Harry Belafonte; and Nat King Cole played to standing room only white audiences in Las Vegas after World War II, only to find themselves humiliated when escorted post-performance out a back door and transported to accommodations on the segregated Westside. Las Vegas’ high profile as the “Entertainment Capital of the World” was tarnished by such practices. On a smaller scale, Reno, “The Biggest Little City in the World,” had a miserable track record when it came to race relations. No doubt, Jim Crow was alive and well.

Perhaps this was why Nevada was labeled the Mississippi of the West, to shame the Silver State and compel its lawmakers and others to address the problem of institutional racism. Governor Grant Sawyer (1959-1967) met with stiff resistance to his proposed civil rights policies and legislation. His progressive administration generally prevailed, assisted by the passage of the federal Civil Rights Law of 1964. Integration in Las Vegas public schools in the 1960s, accomplished by bussing black children to schools in white neighborhoods, saw racial strife and riots in junior and senior high schools. Race relations significantly improved after Governor Mike O’Callaghan (1971-79) pushed a fair-housing law through the legislature in 1971.

Clearly, Nevada was not immune to the racism that permeated the United States following World War II. Its civil rights record, like other intermountain western states, was shameful. According to University of Nevada, Reno, professor of history James Hulse in The Silver State (1998), “Nevada was one of the last
states in the north and west to fashion a meaningful policy to discourage racial bigotry." Calling the Silver State the "Mississippi of the West" was a provocative rhetorical measure to elicit positive change in race relations, and it worked. Just the same, the moniker did not reflect the reality of Nevada vis-à-vis Mississippi.

Nevada has not been the only place compared to Mississippi when it came to characterizing race relations. At times, Indiana has been called the “Mississippi of the North.” An African-American civil rights leader picketing the Pomona, California, City Hall on February 3, 1970 over racial discrimination in city hiring called "Pomona and San Gabriel Valley 'the Mississippi of the West'." Hyperbole, no doubt, but by calling anyplace “Mississippi" you could get the media's and politicians' attention.

Photographs courtesy of the Nevada State Library and Archives.

Top: Pickets surround Storey County Senator James Slattery, protesting his status as "paid senator of the gaming industry in Reno," 1963.

Bottom: Governor Grant Sawyer meeting with leaders of the NAACP and other civil rights activists in the capitol.

Some people know that when Nevada became a state in 1864, the area today that includes greater Las Vegas (the town celebrated its 100th birthday in 2005) was in Arizona Territory. An act of Congress in May 1866 added a degree of latitude to southern Nevada including a new boundary with Arizona at the Colorado River.

What most people don’t know is that Governor Henry Blasdel recommended on January 10, 1867 that the state legislature pass a resolution accepting the cession, which the legislature did just a few days later. However, the legislature failed to heed the governor’s additional advice to pass the necessary resolution calling for a citizens’ election to ratify the action changing the state’s boundary in the constitution to include what is now southern Nevada. While the Arizona territorial legislature formally acceded to the congressional action in 1871 by dissolving its county government north of the Colorado River, the Nevada constitution did not reflect the newly-acquired domain.

Nobody apparently noticed. A large part of Lincoln County and a small part of Nye County extended to the south of 37 degrees latitude. When the state legislature carved Clark County out of Lincoln County in 1909, all the new county was made up of land once under the jurisdiction of Arizona and not described in Nevada’s constitution. Today more than 70% of the state’s population lives in Clark County.

Prison inmate Jerome Peter Kuk was the first person known to have raised the issue in court of whether Las Vegas was in Nevada or Arizona. Kuk was convicted of homicide in 1962, after spending time in the Nevada Mental Hospital subsequent to the brutal shooting of Steve Bowman in Boulder City on October 18, 1958.

Following unsuccessful appeals of his conviction in 1964 and 1967 to the Nevada Supreme Court, Kuk filed a writ of habeas corpus in the district court in Carson City in 1968 claiming the Clark County district court had no jurisdiction to try and convict him and that his sentence was illegal. District Judge Frank Gregory denied the writ stating that a favorable ruling would put Las Vegas and its casinos in “never-never land.” “The question of whether this territory is actually a part of Nevada has aroused a feeling of mirth and a good deal of laughter, particularly in the press,” Gregory noted, “I consider it a very serious problem.”

Kuk immediately filed a petition for rehearing to the State Supreme Court, but it was denied on November 19, 1968. An application for a writ of habeas corpus to the Federal District Court in Carson City was denied in 1969, the court arguing that Kuk’s claim was without merit. He was released on parole to his birthplace, Amsterdam, New York, in 1970 and died in Oneonta, Alabama, on December 15, 1995 at the age of 62.

Convicted murderer Antonio Surianello and the Clark County Public Defender’s office used the discrepancy in the state constitution in a 1976 case on appeal to the Nevada Supreme Court. Surianello had been convicted of the savage stabbing death of Paula Annas in a Las Vegas hotel room on March 31, 1974. A number of points of law were contested and an argument was made that Las Vegas, the Clark County seat of government, was not part of Nevada and “therefore the statutes of Nevada have no force and effect.”

“This jurisdiction issue,” opined the court, “which is presented periodically, is, of course, meritless and is summarily rejected.” The court reasoned that the legislature had formally accepted the cession by resolution and that the amending of the state constitution to reflect the new boundary was a
Such a housekeeping measure that had been neglected over the years. Surianello’s appeal was denied and he remains today incarcerated in the state prison system for life.

However, then-Nevada Legislative Counsel Frank Daykin figured it was time to do what hadn’t been done for over 100 years—change Nevada’s constitution to reflect the current boundaries. The 1979 session of the state legislature approved Joint Resolution No. 24 to conform the constitutional boundary of Nevada to its actual boundary. The resolution subsequently passed the 1981 legislature and was ratified by the voters on November 2, 1982.

Paradoxically, 115 years after Congress ceded, and the Nevada legislature accepted, the part of Arizona Territory that is now southern Nevada, 34 per cent of the total voters voted against making the change. While the constitutional amendment carried in every county, many of the voters opposed to the change were in Clark County which, according to the state constitution, was not even part of Nevada at the time of the general election in 1982. Go figure!

Myth #107: What Didn’t Happen in Carson City by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

Can a story be just too good to be true? A much-told tale of a Carson City area stagecoach robbery in the late 19th century fails to hold up under scrutiny. People still search for the loot somewhere in the vicinity of the old State Prison. The story, however, is pure invention, first appearing in a book called Pots O’ Gold in 1935.

Former prison warden Matt Penrose is credited as the author of the pot-boiler, although the work was written by confidence man and convict John K. “Jack” Meredith according to Nevada historian Phil Earl. Whatever the nature of the authorship, people were misled by the stage robbery story and treasure hunters have been on a wild goose chase ever since.

We are not told when the “Wells Fargo stage” robbery occurred. The “gold bullion” worth $60,000 was being shipped to the U.S. Mint in Carson City from the Comstock. The Mint first produced gold and silver coins in February 1870, although bullion deposits were accepted in 1869 as the mint had expected to issue its first coins in that year.

By January 1870, the Virginia & Truckee Railroad operated between Virginia City and Carson City. Shipping heavy bars of bullion using Wells Fargo Express was much easier and faster by train than a stagecoach and much safer when it came to the prospects of a hold-up. A stagecoach line would have been hard-pressed to compete with the V&T Railroad. Arguably then, 1869 was the only year in which a stagecoach could have transported bullion from the Comstock to the Mint. The story claimed the bullion was gold and weighed 300 pounds. Comstock bricks at that time were mostly silver with some gold and would have weighed 3000 pounds.

According to Penrose, the stage had passed through the milling town of Empire in eastern Ormsby County and was on the final leg of the trip, a few short miles to Carson City. The driver and the guard, believing they were no longer in danger with the state capital in sight, relaxed their vigil, only to find four armed robbers jumping out of the sagebrush and waylaying the stagecoach. At the point of a gun, the “treasure boxes” were dumped to the side and the stage proceeded to Carson City on a dead-run.

A posse was soon formed and rushed to the site of the robbery where it picked up the trail of the robbers. The highwaymen had not traveled far when three of the four men were killed in a pitched gun battle. The person who was captured was described as a Mexican, and later versions of the Penrose story by other authors claim that the man’s name was Manuel Gonzales. “In due time,” wrote Penrose, “the Mexican was tried and sentenced to twenty years in prison.”

Gonzales, we are told, would not divulge where the bandits had hidden the gold bullion and later claimed he could see the location from his prison cell window. After some eight years a governor pardoned Gonzales because the prisoner had contracted consumption and the authorities and Wells Fargo hoped that upon his release he would make an effort to retrieve the stolen bullion. While that did not happen, an “old Dutchman” who ran a butcher shop in Carson City befriended Gonzales and finally convinced the career stagecoach robber to take him to the hiding place. As fate would have it, just as the two men were about to travel to where the bullion was stashed, “the Mexican,” wrote Penrose, “was seized with a hemorrhage, and died in a few minutes.”

Why then have no newspaper accounts documenting a robbery of this magnitude ever been found? Dr. Robert J. Chandler, Wells Fargo historian in San Francisco, told me the story is preposterous. According to Dr. Chandler, “papers nationwide would have carried the story; historians would know the exact time the robbery occurred and all specifics.”

In addition, there is no record of a Manuel Gonzales, or any Hispanic male, being tried for a stagecoach robbery in Ormsby County and serving time in the State Prison. Editor Myron Angel’s groundbreaking
History of Nevada (1881) contains nothing on the crime. The biography of the famed Wells Fargo detective, James B. Hume and Howard Hickson's history of the Carson City mint are also mute on the subject.

The bogus tale will live on, of course; it is already gaining new life on internet web pages like www.LostTreasureUSA.com. Treasure hunters will continue to haunt archives, historical societies, museums, and special collections for leads to something that never happened. After all, a confidence man, convicted of forgery, wrote the story. Such is the gullibility of mankind and the power of the myth. For further information on John K. "Jack" Meredith, read "Confidence Man" by Phillip I. Earl, Nevada Magazine (Sept./Oct. 2005). See also, Nevada Lost Mines & Buried Treasures (1981), by Douglas McDonald, pp. 118-120.

Illustration from The First Directory of Nevada Territory, 1862, republished by the Talisman Press in 1962.

On a Reno TV weather broadcast recently, the weatherman referred to the Sierra Crest and then images of peaks in the Carson Range were displayed in the background. The Sierra Nevada crest line, nevertheless, is west of Lake Tahoe in California. In fact, virtually all of the Sierra Nevada is in California. What’s wrong with this picture?

Most geoscientists would tell you that the Carson Range is a spur of the northern Sierra Nevada and perhaps 80 million years old. The appendage begins in the south at Carson Pass in Alpine County, California, skirts Lake Tahoe—a much younger geologic feature—in a northward arc into Nevada, and ends just south of the border town of Verdi in Washoe County, some 52 miles in length (71% in Nevada and 29% in California). The Carson Range, including Job’s Peak, Job’s Sister, Genoa Peak, King’s Canyon, Slide Mountain, and Mount Rose (the highest point in the Nevada portion of the range at 10,776 feet), serves as a majestic backdrop for the Reno/Carson City/Carson Valley metropolitan area. The highest point in the Carson Range is Freel Peak at 10,881 feet on the border of Alpine and El Dorado counties in California and south of South Lake Tahoe.

Nineteenth-century immigrants to northern California, crossing the Great Basin by the Carson and Truckee routes, encountered this huge mountain range before them and called it the Sierra Nevada. Ferdinand Von Leicht and J.D. Hoffmann’s 1874 map of Lake Tahoe referred to the feature as “Sierra Nevada (eastern Summit).”

As early as 1855, surveyors like George H. Goddard knew the difference between the crest lines. In late August while pursuing a wagon road and boundary survey, Goddard’s party came to the summit of the “Great Carson Spur, which being the highest point on the wagon road, is generally called Carson Pass, although in reality it is not on the divide on the Sierra.” The “Great Carson Spur” was officially named the Carson Range in 1939 by the United States Board on Geographical Names.

The congressional acts creating Nevada Territory (1861) and the State of Nevada (1864) provided for a western boundary at the Sierra Nevada crest line if the California state legislature would agree to change its existing boundary from 120 degrees longitude. Of course, California was not about to relinquish any territory, particularly its portion of Lake Tahoe which is east of the Sierra crest line.

This story is really about long-standing confusion over area nomenclature that is perpetuated in the media. While one could argue that the Carson Range is part of the Sierra Nevada as a breathtaking eastern spur, it is misleading to depict or mention the Carson Range crest line and call it the Sierra Nevada crest line. The respective crests are two very different features, one bounding Lake Tahoe on the west and the other principally bounding Lake Tahoe on the east and south.

For the sake of accuracy, to eliminate long-standing confusion, and to inform the many new-comers to this area, perhaps we can get the geography right in the 21st-century.

Photo: Carson City and Lake Tahoe, showing both the Carson Range immediately west of Carson City and the Sierra Nevada crest, on the west side of the lake. Photographed at 13,500’ by Adrian Atwater, April 1969. Courtesy of Nevada State Archives.

“General U. S. Grant paid Walley’s a visit after inspecting the famous Comstock Lode,” the David Walley’s Resort website claimed until April 2007. Included was a portrait photo of Grant in military uniform claiming that “while on tour of the west” the famous Union General visited Walley’s Hot Springs (then known as Genoa Hot Springs) just south of Genoa in Carson Valley. Beware of website history. This “George Washington slept here” promotional claim was not true. The promotion apparently dated back to the late 1970s when the resort and spa were resurrected after being closed for some forty years. Grant only visited Nevada once and he didn’t get into hot water at Walley’s.

In instances like these, I sometimes encounter the retort, “how do you know?” and “well, if it wasn’t true, it should have been.” People are inclined to believe misleading stories that make a place famous, especially if a well-known person allegedly visited there, and, of course, it helps to attract interest. However, I characterize the perpetuating of myths as playing tricks on the living and the dead.

In this case, Ulysses Simpson Grant, accompanied by his wife and son on a world tour, visited Nevada in October 1879. Grant had long since left the military as a Union Civil War hero and recently completed two terms as president of the United States (1869-77). His itinerary in Nevada was tightly scripted. Virtually every step he took was covered by the area’s newspapers, readily available for research on microfilm at Nevada historical societies and libraries.

On Sunday afternoon, October 26, the Grant family detrained at Truckee, California. A carriage conveyed the party to Tahoe City where they were met at 2:30 PM by a delegation of prominent Nevadans, including lumber tycoon Duane L. Bliss. They boarded Bliss’ steamship the Meteor and crossed Lake Tahoe to Glenbrook. There, according to the Carson City Morning Appeal, passage was taken on Bliss’ narrow gauge Lake Tahoe Railroad to Spooner Summit. Renowned stagecoach driver Hank Monk held the reins of Grant’s carriage as it traveled down Clear Creek Canyon to Carson City where a throng of people jubilantly greeted the former president at 7:00 PM.

Grant and his family ate supper and spent the night at Governor John Kinkead’s house, which served as the Governor’s Mansion. At 9:30 AM, Monday, October 27, Grant spoke to some 3,000 well-wishers at the State Capitol, noting that until his arrival in the Silver State he had visited all the states except Nevada and Florida. A reception followed the brief speech. Leaving the capital about noon, a Virginia & Truckee Railroad train transported the Grant family to world-famous Virginia City in about an hour’s time.

Grant spent two days in the Comstock area, making speeches, being photographed, and attending functions at Piper’s Opera House and the Savage Mansion. Early Wednesday morning, October 29, he traveled through Gold Hill and Silver City to visit the Sutro Mansion. Contrary to a historical marker at the Odeon Hall he did not pause to speak in Dayton. He traveled the length of the Sutro Tunnel and returned to Virginia City.

At 2:05 PM, the Grant family boarded a V&T special train bound for Reno, pausing briefly in Carson City, and then again at Steamboat Springs to pick up the Reno reception committee (contrary to the claim of Nevada Historical Marker #198, President Grant made no pronouncement that the hot springs were “nationally acclaimed”).

Following speeches and a reception in Reno lasting an hour and a half, the party boarded a Central Pacific special train bound for Omaha, Nebraska, en route to the Grant home in Galena, Illinois. A five-minute stop in Wadsworth witnessed the town band serenade the former chief executive with “Hail to the Chief” as he shook hands from the rear of the platform.
At no time, did the Grant family deviate from their tight schedule and travel out of their way to Walley's Hot Springs (originally known as Walley Hot Springs). Genoa’s weekly newspaper, the Carson Valley News, noted on Friday, October 24 that Grant was scheduled to arrive in Carson City on Sunday, remaining until Monday morning. There is no mention of a proposed trip to Walley’s Hot Springs which would have taken the ex-president through nearby Genoa.

There is an editorial which cites a communication from “an enthusiastic Republican” who questioned the statesmanship of Grant, arguing no person should ever serve more than two terms as president. The editorial subtly endorsed the position that Grant, his administration marred by scandal and corruption, not be nominated by the Republicans in 1880 for the good of the party (and he was not).

The October 31 issue of the Carson Valley News noted Hank Monk was Grant’s driver to Carson City and curiously included the height and weight of Grant, and the weight of his wife, Julia, and Ulysses Jr. However, if the Civil War hero and former president had visited Walley’s Hot Springs, it would have made for banner headline news in the Genoa newspaper.

In the end, using myth as marketing hype is about not letting the facts get in the way of a good story.

Credits: top advertisement from the Genoa Carson Valley News, February 27, 1875; bottom advertisement from the Gardnerville Record-Courier, July 15, 1905.

Are the media in western Nevada geographically challenged when it comes to knowing the location of Pleasant Valley in Washoe County? The small valley was named in the 1850s and settled by Mormon pioneers when the western Great Basin was still part of Utah Territory. There was some mining in the nearby hills in the 1860s. Virginia & Truckee Railroad trains chugged through the valley between 1872 and 1950. Old-timers will fondly remember the Jubilee Club, owned by the Pagni brothers, with its bar, dinner house, and gambling. The club, dating back to 1953, closed on November 12, 1978. Today U.S. Highway 395 bisects the community with its one elementary school, celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2005, and no commercial development.

Pleasant Valley has remained a ranching and residential community for over 150 years. It is now on the brink of being consumed by Reno’s urban sprawl. Traffic on U.S. 395 has swelled with the metropolitan growth in Reno/Sparks, Carson City, and Carson Valley over the last twenty-five years. Highway accidents are frequent, sometimes fatal, and the Pleasant Valley community has posted signs along the road pleading with motorists to slow down. The road is a bottleneck in times of fires, floods, and vehicular accidents, forcing drivers to detour through Virginia City, Lake Tahoe, and occasionally even Fernley. Interstate 580, including the 1,719 feet long and 302 feet high Galena Creek Bridge, on the west side of Pleasant Valley, is scheduled to be completed in 2011.

Yes, Pleasant Valley is south of Reno before you enter Washoe Valley—but not IMMEDIATELY south. That’s Steamboat Valley, and it falls between Reno and Pleasant Valley. Steamboat Valley is immediately south of the Mount Rose/Virginia City junction. It was there that Mark Twain, in August 1863, visited the well-known hot springs for which the valley is named. Steamboat Creek, originating in Little Washoe Lake, cuts its way through the valley on its way to the Truckee River. The landmark residence of former Governor John Sparks (1903-08) was moved from Reno to the southwest corner of Steamboat Valley, close to the Andrew Lane intersection, in 1978.

In 2004, a wildfire that burned much of the southern end of Steamboat Valley was called the “Pleasant Valley Fire.” The fire, which started near the north end of Washoe Valley and rapidly progressed northeastward, never burned over the crest line of the Virginia Range hills that border eastern Pleasant Valley. Media coverage of the event was misleading and included warnings of a fire in Pleasant Valley, when the blaze was actually northeast of the little oasis. Imagine the fear and concern of Pleasant Valley residents working in Reno or Carson City and hearing the erroneous reports.

More recently, on September 29, 2005 a motorcycle fatality a few miles south of the Mt. Rose Junction backed up traffic for miles on Highway 395 in each direction. Those persons listening to the radio or watching television heard that the terrible accident was near Cheyenne Drive in Pleasant Valley. Newspaper headlines read “Pleasant Valley traffic claims another life” and “Man identified in Pleasant Valley wreck.”

Is this all about rapid growth, so many newcomers moving to the area, and unfamiliarity with the local geography? The United States Geological Survey and Nevada Department of Transportation Quadrangle maps clearly show that Cheyenne Drive is in Steamboat Valley. The tragic accident occurred near Steamboat Western Wear and Steamboat Trailers. Although the SBC telephone book lists the businesses in Pleasant Valley, they are found in Steamboat Valley.
 Perhaps this article will serve as a geography lesson. Then again, is anybody reading and does anyone care?

[Click here for a map showing the relationship of Steamboat and Pleasant Valleys]

Newspaper masthead and article from the Reno Evening Gazette, Monday, June 13, 1927.

Did one of the most famous rides in American history cost a presidential candidate the race for the nation’s highest office? As the story goes, New York Tribune editor Horace Greeley’s stagecoach ride with the colorful Hank Monk at the reins later played a major role in Greeley’s loss to incumbent Ulysses S. Grant in the 1872 presidential election.

More people today recognize the famous phrase, “Go West, young man, Go West,” credited to Greeley, than know of the much-maligned social reformer of the mid-19th century. In 1859, the forty-eight-year-old former New York congressman, outspoken abolitionist, and women’s rights advocate, was touring the West he had been touting to the nation. On July 30, he found himself at an inn south of Genoa running late for a lecture on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada. Turning to the stagecoach driver, Greeley asked the thirty-three-year-old Monk if it was possible to cross the massive mountain range in time to make his presentation in Placerville, California that evening. Monk assured the worried Greeley that he would get him there on time.

Leaving around dawn, the stagecoach followed the Carson River to Hope Valley, then turned north over Luther Pass to Lake Valley. From there, the stage climbed Meyers Grade to the top of Johnson Pass and shortly after noon pulled into Strawberry to change horses. According to Monk’s version of the story, Greeley, in some distress, asked the driver if he was certain that he could get him to Placerville by 5PM. Knowing Strawberry was the last telegraph station before his final destination, Greeley wanted to send a telegram notifying the reception committee if he was going to be late. Monk emphatically responded, “I’ll get you there.” The New York City editor experienced the ride of his life. He later wrote, “Yet at this breakneck rate we were driven for not less than four hours or forty miles changing horses every ten or fifteen, and raising a cloud of dust through which it was difficult at times to see anything.”

“Just before I got to Dick’s [Station] I looked into the coach and there was Greeley,” Monk told a writer for San Francisco’s Golden Era the following year, “his bare head bobbing, sometimes on the back and then on the front of the seat, sometimes in the coach and then out, and then on the top and then on the bottom, holding on to whatever he could grab.”

At one point, according to Monk, Greeley cried out, “Driver, I’m not particular for an hour or two!” Monk responded, “Horace keep your seat! I told you I would get there by five o’clock, and by God I’ll do it, if the axles hold!”

The shaken and disheveled Greeley arrived in time to meet the reception committee some twelve miles east of Placerville. Monk traveled on to the town, arriving there before Greeley. When the two men met up again upon Greeley’s arrival, the Eastern greenhorn bought the daredevil stagecoach driver the finest suit of clothes available in Placerville as a token of his appreciation.

Greeley wrote his version of the harrowing ride on August 1. It was published in the New York Tribune after his account reached New York City by mail. Hank Monk, with the Tribune story and other
Myth #111: Riding High: Hank Monk and Horace Greeley by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

accounts making him a national figure, regaled all who would listen to his role in the now famous ride. Mark Twain heard the story from Monk while he was living in Nevada Territory in the early 1860s, comically recounted it in his 1866 western lecture tour, and embellished the tale in *Roughing It* (1872).

Humorist Artemus Ward, after hearing the story during his visit to Nevada in December 1863, wrote an anecdotal account of Greeley’s stagecoach ride from hell in his work *Artemus Ward: His Travel and Complete Works* (1865). On March 29, 1866, Ward’s comical version was read in the House of Representatives by New York Congressman Calvin Hulburd as a jab at his nemesis Horace Greeley and entered into the *Congressional Record*.

While Greeley tried to disassociate himself from Monk and the unflattering story; it continued to dog him right up to the 1872 presidential election. Some writers have suggested that the story may have actually cost him the election. In truth, historians have noted that Greeley was a long-standing controversial figure and savagely satirized by cartoonist Thomas Nast, independent of the exaggerated stories surrounding his stagecoach ride in 1859. Essentially, his stand on the major issues of the day led to his resounding defeat in the presidential election.

Shortly before the election, Greeley suffered a major financial loss in a famous diamond mine swindle, and then his sickly wife died. Overwhelmed by the devastating turn of events, America’s premier social gadfly sank into a severe depression, dying before the electoral votes were cast.

Hank Monk, on the other hand, died in Carson City in 1883, eulogized as one of the greatest stagecoach drivers in American history and remains a folk hero.

For further information, see *Hank and Horace: An Enduring Episode In Western History* (1973) by Richard G. Lillard and Mary V. Hood; *Hank Monk: He’ll Get You There On Time* (1995) by Rich Pitter.

Photos: Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

The 2005 motion picture *Capote*, and the Academy Award winning performance of Philip Seymour Hoffman in the lead role, capture the hauntingly dark side of Truman Capote. The movie focuses on the making of *In Cold Blood* (1965), perhaps Capote’s finest book. The brutal slaying of the Clutter family in Holcomb, Kansas on November 15, 1959 has a Nevada connection but you wouldn’t know it because this movie that has exposed Capote’s pathological behavior has also perpetuated one of his lies and created one of its own.

The gifted writer was a damaged and disturbed man who lied to and manipulated virtually everyone around him, including the two killers and the readers of *In Cold Blood*. Gerald Clarke, whose excellent biography was the basis for the Capote screenplay, exposed some of Capote’s literary license in writing his so-called non-fiction novel. However, Clarke, like everybody else, believed Capote when he stated that murderer Perry Edward Smith, one of the subjects of *In Cold Blood* was a Cherokee Indian. The movie Capote depicts Smith in a prison cell interview telling Truman that his mother was Cherokee.

Readers familiar with *In Cold Blood* know that Smith and Richard Eugene Hickock were apprehended in Las Vegas and, after intensive interrogation by Kansas Bureau of Investigation (KBI) agents, confessed to the Clutter killings. While the Las Vegas arrest made national headlines, Smith’s birth in Elko County to a mixed-blood, Western Shoshone mother and a non-Indian father is not common knowledge.

In fact, Smith was born on October 27, 1928 to Florence Julia Buckskin and “Tex” John Smith in Huntington Valley, southwest of Elko. The daughter of Nookie and Maggie Cortez Buckskin, Florence had grown up with her sisters on a small ranch near Mineral Hill in Eureka County. Tex and Florence met on the rodeo circuit and married in 1922. The couple had four children, Perry being the youngest. The bareback riding and roping team adopted the name “Tex & Flo.” They lived hand-to-mouth until the couple retired from the rodeo business in 1933 and settled near Reno.

The hardscrabble rodeo family would break up in the mid-1930s. Flo fled to San Francisco area with the children after a violent clash with Tex during a visit to the Buckskin ranch in northeastern Nevada. A divorce ended a marriage long-plagued by alcoholism, adultery, and domestic violence. The children were placed in foster homes. Perry, first arrested at the age of eight, returned to live with his father after several confinements in institutions and children’s detention centers.

After Smith finished the third grade, father and son traveled all over the West eventually ending up in Alaska in search of gold. At 16, Perry joined the Merchant Marine, later enlisted in the Army, and received a Bronze Star in Korea before completing his military service in 1952.

Smith wrecked his motorcycle shortly after his release from the Army, breaking his leg in five places. He became addicted to aspirin to kill the pain. Aggressive and violent like his father, Perry became a loner, although he would periodically stay with Tex, who alternately lived in Alaska and the Reno area. KBI agents worked with the Washoe County Sheriff’s office and the Reno Police Department in tracking Smith down in December 1959.

Smith had been convicted in 1956 of grand larceny, jailbreak, and car theft in Kansas City, Kansas. He met Richard Hickock in the state penitentiary. Together they conspired to rob Herbert Clutter, Hickock having heard from another inmate who had worked for Clutter that the farmer kept a large quantity of money in his house in southwestern Kansas. Following his parole in early 1959, Smith visited his father in Reno in August and planned to go with Tex to Alaska before another angry falling out. On the road...
again, Smith spent four weeks in a Las Vegas rooming house until departing for Kansas City on November 11 to plan the robbery with the recently-released Hickock.

Truman Capote’s portrayal of Smith is a sympathetic one despite the fact that Perry’s dysfunctional family life and sexual abuse in the service had helped to create a monster. Some critics of *In Cold Blood* speculate that Capote, openly homosexual and a child abuse victim, identified with Smith’s shattered childhood and developed an attraction to him. Clearly, Capote grew too close to Smith in the five years he came to know him on Kansas’ death row.

Only sister Dorothy survived the family trauma and turmoil. Flo died a destitute, alcoholic whore. The oldest sister jumped from the window of a hotel and was crushed under the wheels of a taxi after a drinking spree. Perry’s brother committed suicide after he discovered his wife had taken her life following a domestic dispute. Tex “Buckaroo” Smith was found dead on May 20, 1986 north of Reno at his residence in Cold Springs. Tex did at the age of 92 of a self-inflicted gunshot.

In the controversial book, moments before being put to death, Smith, in a scene embellished by Capote for dramatic effect, turned to Warden Crouse and said, “It would be meaningless to apologize for what I did. Even inappropriate. But I do. I apologize.”

The movie Capote has Truman witnessing Smith’s hanging in a final scene. That too is a lie. According to KBI agent Harold Nye, after witnessing the hanging of Hickock, Capote could not bear to watch Smith killed, running from the building where the executions were staged.

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, September 2007.)
It sometimes seems like everybody claims that some notable person lived in an historic house. In Carson City’s historic district, a claim is made that Governor Jewett W. Adams once lived in the house at 312 N. Mountain Street. Well, he did, but many years after he was governor. The residence was never the Governor’s Mansion.

Adams served as Nevada’s lieutenant governor from 1875 to 1883 and governor from 1883 to 1887. Prior to the completion of the current Governor’s Mansion in 1909, wherever the governor lived was considered the Governor’s Mansion. Governor Adams lived on the south side of Carson City in a large residence near Thompson Street and between 4th and 5th streets.

Adams continued to live in the house while he served as superintendent of the Carson City branch of the U.S. Mint from 1894 to 1898. By 1906, he had sold his house to State Printer Andrew Maute, and he and wife Emma were renting a house at 312 N. Mountain from George McLoughlin. The couple lived there until relocating to San Francisco in 1915, where Jewett Adams died in 1920.

However, the story that a notable person lived in the house on the western edge of today’s historic district has an interesting twist, obscured by the passage of time. George McLoughlin, while living at 312 N. Mountain, worked for Superintendent Adams at the Carson City Mint until he was transferred to the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia in 1898. In 1903, McLoughlin transferred to the San Francisco U.S. Mint.

A child, Maurice Evans McLoughlin, was born to George and his wife Harriet (“Hattie”) on January 7, 1890 while they lived at 312 N. Mountain. The Carson City Morning Appeal noted the “little fellow . . . weighed about nine pounds and had good lungs.”

Maurice, while growing up in San Francisco, became an avid tennis player, winning the San Francisco and Pacific Coast championships in 1907. After graduating from Lowell High School in 1908, the Pacific Coast Tennis Association sent McLoughlin to the national championships at Newport, Rhode Island, the following year. When teammates Melville Long and McLoughlin were matched again each other, Eastern society witnessed a fast-paced, powerful game unlike anything played up to that time. Competitive tennis was generally a high society game reserved for the sons of the wealthy. “With his powerful serve and deadly overhand smashers,” according to one biographical account, “McLoughlin had introduced a new kind of tennis, and the game would never be the same. Modern tennis may be said to have been born that day at Newport.”

“Red” McLoughlin, known as the “California Comet,” was soon considered one of the best tennis players in the United States. By 1910, he ranked fourth among American players and in 1911 ranked second, playing on the Davis Cup Team that defeated Great Britain. He ranked first among American players in 1912 and 1913 and won the American championships in those years, the first American west of the Mississippi to win the title. In 1913, McLoughlin helped the United States to win the Davis Cup but lost in the finals at Wimbledon. He was also on the national doubles championship team in 1912, 1913, and 1914.

At Forest Hills, New York, a crowd estimated at more than 12,000 witnessed McLoughlin’s match against Australian Norman Brookes in the 1914 Davis Cup, which according to the New York Times, was “the most memorable set these international matches have ever produced.” Service in the first set was unbroken for thirty games before McLoughlin won 17-15. He took the next two sets, 6-3 and 6-3—a total of fifty games in two hours--although the United States lost the series and the cup.
McLoughlin was among the greatest tennis players in the world and again ranked number one in the United States in 1914 when he was upset in the U.S. national finals. Still ranked number one in 1915 despite the setback, he again lost in the finals of the U.S. nationals. He found time to write a book, *Tennis as I Play It*, published in 1915.

McLoughlin stopped playing competitive tennis and joined the Navy during World War I. He also married at that time. Upon his return to the game in 1919, he was badly defeated in the quarterfinals of the nationals and retired from tennis competition.

McLoughlin lived in southern California the rest of his life, an avid golfer, dying in Hermosa Beach on December 10, 1957. He lived to see his election to the Tennis Hall of Fame in March 1957. It was a meteoric, world class career, and it all started in 1890 with the birth of a nine pound baby boy at 312 N. Mountain Street in Carson City.

Photograph courtesy of Sue Ann Monteleone, Nevada State Museum.

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, November 2007.)
Carson City and the surrounding region celebrated the completion of the first leg of the US 395 freeway bypass on February 16, 2006 and the second leg on September 24, 2009. The third and final leg around the east side of Carson City has been postponed until at least 2014 due to a shortage of highway construction funds.

With the completion of the I-580 segment from the Mt. Rose Highway to Washoe Valley in 2012, Carson City will be linked for the first time to the nation's interstate system. Only four other state capitals--Juneau, Alaska; Dover, Delaware; Jefferson City, Missouri; and Pierre, South Dakota--will remain without a freeway.

Many recent newspaper articles and editorials focusing on the long history of the proposed Carson City bypass noted twenty years of planning and a few stories referred to thirty years of planning.

Doing the math following some homework, the planning for a Carson City downtown bypass actually dates back some fifty years.

A visionary general planning study for Carson City, published in April 1958, proposed a parkway around the east end of the city and a ring road. “Carson City has never had a planning survey,” according to the report. “Until recently it has not even had a planning board. The town's growth has been of the haphazard manner characteristic of most of the cities and towns throughout the country.” While the city had about 5,000 residents, the report noted that “NO TOWN IS TOO SMALL TO PLAN.”

A proposed Master Development Plan for the county in October 1964 included an “Eagle Valley freeway.” Despite the fact that the Carson City area’s population had doubled since the first planning survey, most Carson Street businesses (including the Nugget casino) and some residents vigorously protested.

“Maybe in the future some additional transportation problems may arise,” said William Crowell, Sr., the attorney representing the Carson Street business interests. “I can’t see how we can help this community by routing all traffic around town and giving business to Reno and Lake Tahoe.” The Nevada Appeal reported that Crowell urged the planning commission to “strike” the freeway from the development plan and his statement was greeted by applause at the meeting.

Planning consultant Raymond Smith pointed out “the freeway could not be built until 1972, and probably not until at least 1982. But we should plan so that when 1982 comes we are not facing an insufferable situation in obtaining rights-of-way.”

“One man said he has seen towns withered up by having a freeway go past them,” wrote the Appeal. “Another man said Salem, Oregon, has grown tremendously since its freeway was built.”

The plans for the freeway were dropped and a Carson City Beautification Plan in 1966 resulted in the elimination of parking on Carson Street and the addition of traffic lanes.

The Carson City Comprehensive Plan published in 1972 referred to previous master plans calling for a freeway bypass. While Carson City had consolidated with Ormsby County in 1969, and the city's population now exceeded 18,000 residents, the report noted “that traffic volumes needed to justify freeway construction are some years away.”

By 1980, Carson City’s population had reached over 32,000, and Washoe County to the north and Douglas County to the south were experiencing significant growth and development. Carson City officials and its city manager now called for a bypass.

Nevada Department of Transportation officials, on the other hand, argued that higher priority projects in Las Vegas and Reno would delay the construction of a freeway bypass in Carson City. City Supervisor John Hayes in a 1981 Appeal interview “said even 25 years might be too optimistic an estimate.”
While Hayes was right in his prediction, thanks to the efforts of Carson City Mayor Marv Teixeira and his championing of a local gas tax hike in 1997 to help build the freeway bypass, it appears what was first proposed in 1958 will become a reality more than fifty years later.

It didn’t take that long to plan and build the Hoover Dam.

Graphic symbol of the 395/580 Freeway courtesy of the Nevada Department of Transportation. For more information about the freeway, visit the NDOT 395/580 website at: http://www.ccfreeway.com.

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, January 2008.)
Myth #115: Plausible De-Nye-Ability: Just How Large is Nye County? by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

Nye County in central Nevada is commonly referred to as the second largest county in size in the continental United States after San Bernardino County, California. It’s not. That would be Coconino County in northern Arizona. Nye County ranks third.

The land area of Nye County today is 18,159 square miles. Coconino County, with Flagstaff as its county seat, is 18,861 square miles. San Bernardino County is 20,105 square miles.

When the territorial legislature created Nye County on February 16, 1864 and named it after Governor James W. Nye, it was about the same size, but looked very different. Carved out of one of Nevada’s first counties, Esmeralda County, Nye County was in the shape of a square. The Legislature in its infinite wisdom named Ione the county seat, although it was just outside the Nye County line in Esmeralda County. Nye County’s boundaries needed a survey.

In 1865, the state legislature slightly redefined the boundary at the expense of Churchill County. After Lincoln County was created in 1866, Nye County shrunk in size.

In 1866 and 1867, Congress authorized the extension of Nevada’s boundaries to the east and south respectively. As a result, Nye County grew to the largest size in its history.

The State Legislature moved the county seat from Ione south to the mining boomtown of Belmont in 1867. During Ione’s three-year tenure as the Nye County seat of government, it remained in Esmeralda County. Finally, two years later, the legislature adjusted Nye County’s northwest boundary to include Ione.

The year 1869 also saw Lander County reduced in size with the creation of Elko and White Pine Counties. Nye County has been Nevada’s largest county ever since.

Nye County’s boundaries have essentially been the same since 1877. The legislature in that year carved out portions of eastern Nye County and added them to Lincoln and White Pine counties. A boundary adjustment with Esmeralda County cost Nye County a long sliver of land on the west.

The Legislature designated Tonopah as the Nye County seat in 1905. Less than five years old, the silver boomtown had resurrected the sparsely populated state mired in a mining depression since the 1880s. Nevada’s second great mining boom created many new communities including the Nye County towns of Manhattan, Round Mountain, Pioneer and Rhyolite.

Rhyolite and southern Nye County grew so large in a few short years that a legislative bill was introduced to create a new county, Bullfrog County, in February 1909. The act failed to pass. Beginning in October 1907, a catastrophic national banking panic dried up investment capital. Rhyolite was already showing signs of decline in the midst of the banking panic and the 1910 census confirmed it. The town rapidly declined from an estimated peak population of 8,000 in 1907 to a meager 675 hangers-on in 1910. By 1920, Rhyolite was a virtual ghost town.

The state legislature created a Bullfrog County inside Nye County in 1987, but for much different reasons. The federal government had begun planning a high level nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain. The Legislature’s purpose in creating Bullfrog County was to punish Nye County for encouraging the federal government to build the repository, whereby if it were to be built the State of Nevada would financially benefit from it. Bullfrog County, a 144-square mile island in Nye County east of Rhyolite, was located on the Nellis Air Force Range and Nevada Test Site. Governor Richard Bryan appointed the county commissioners, since there were no residents to elect them, and the county seat was in Carson City, the state capital.
Creating a county in this manner was apparently a first in the history of the nation. In fact, it was so irregular that a senior judicial district judge on February 11, 1988 declared Nevada's 18th county unconstitutional. Nye County officials had filed the lawsuit charging that the legislation contained numerous violations of state and federal constitutions. “You are stretching every which way when you get to the real meat of the statute,” Judge David Zenoff opined. The 1989 legislature repealed the law creating Bullfrog County and Nye County reclaimed the Yucca Mountain area.

Today population in southern Nye County is mushrooming with the growth of the town of Pahrump. Over the last few years, there has been talk of creating a new county, or moving the county seat from Tonopah to Pahrump, as well as perhaps incorporating Pahrump as a city.

Pahrump will surely continue to boom with the spill-over from the explosive growth in nearby Las Vegas Valley. Time will tell if Nye County continues to be ranked as the nation's third largest county.

Photo credit: Nye County map courtesy of the Nevada Secretary of State's office.

April 2006. The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal and the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley.
Political scandal has rocked the U.S. Congress off and on since its inception, occasionally resulting in members of Congress spending time in prison. No member of Nevada’s congressional delegation has ever been sentenced to prison. Clarence Van Duzer, however, was fortunate to escape that fate despite being implicated in bogus mining ventures.

“The Constitution of the United States to-day came to the rescue of Clarence Dunn Van Duzer, Representative in Congress from Nevada,” wrote The New York Times in a front page story on March 4, 1907. Van Duzer, absent from his office for over a year, had returned to Washington, D.C. on his last day in office to sign a pay warrant for his mileage in the amount of $1,100. An attempt to forcibly arrest Van Duzer on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol was thwarted by a Capitol police officer who claimed that the U.S. Constitution prevented a member of Congress from being arrested. Van Duzer disappeared without collecting his money.

At one time Van Duzer was the fair-haired boy in Nevada Democratic politics. His Congressional biography and obituary claim he was a Nevada native son born near Mountain City in northern Elko County on May 4, 1866.

Van Duzer was living in Berkeley, California, by 1880. After attending the University of California, he graduated in the first class from Nevada State University in Reno, in 1889. His student record noted that he was born in Idaho City, Idaho, on May 4, 1864.

U.S. Representative Francis Newlands, a Democrat, recognized Van Duzer’s talent, hired him as his private secretary, and took him to Washington, D.C. Van Duzer graduated from Georgetown University Law School in 1893. Before returning to Nevada in 1897, he served as Nevada’s State Land Agent for over five years, a governor’s appointment.

Van Duzer’s political career skyrocketed after he was admitted to the State Bar in September 1898. Elected Humboldt County District Attorney the same year, he ran for the State Assembly in 1900 as a Democrat. Van Duzer easily won the race and was appointed Speaker. When his mentor Congressman Newlands ran for the U.S. Senate in 1902, the Silver-Democrats picked Van Duzer to run for Nevada’s lone house seat. Now calling himself a native Nevadan, Van Duzer scored his third political victory in six years and returned to Washington, D.C.

Like his father before him who established the Van Duzer mining district in Elko County in 1869, son Clarence was obsessed with mining and getting rich. He had pursued a number of mining ventures while living in Winnemucca and Golconda and also published three magazines-- The Nevada Magazine, Nevada Miner, and Mining and Industrial Review.

The Reno Evening Gazette and other Republican newspapers throughout the state began tracking Van Duzer’s corporate ventures in 1903. During his reelection campaign in 1904, he was dogged by stories characterizing his New England-Tonopah Mining Company as a wildcat operation that had fleeced its investors out of tens of thousands of dollars. Despite the negative headlines and accusations, Van Duzer squeaked out a victory and survived an election challenge to return to the House for a second term.

There was talk of Van Duzer running for Governor in early 1906. However, a law suit filed in Washington, D.C., by an elderly woman charging the congressman with fraud helped bring his political career to an abrupt end. Many of the Democratic newspapers in Nevada now turned against the once rising political star. In June, Van Duzer announced he would not seek reelection.

Writer, journalist, and Democratic war-horse Sam Davis savaged the errant politician in a Carson City Appeal editorial. “The exit of Clarence Van Duzer from public life was emphasized by having to resort to the protection afforded the dome of the capitol at Washington to congressmen who desire to escape the payment of their just debts,” Davis wrote. “He has been openly accused of selling these worthless stocks
and paying a few dividends out of the proceeds. He misrepresented his state and disgraced his party," Davis charged. "It will take Nevada a long time to recover from the black eye he has given our political reputation and our mining industry."

Stories of Van Duzer’s arrest in Pittsburgh in 1909 for failing to pay a bill; his arrest in Baltimore in 1917 for bilking farmers in a mining scam; his disappearance from York, Pennsylvania, after promoting get-rich-quick schemes and passing bad checks in 1921; and his arrest for passing bad checks in Wartburg, Tennessee, in 1922 found their way into Nevada newspapers.

At some point, Van Duzer stopped his scheming. He moved to Passaic, New Jersey, to practice law, work as an internal revenue department deputy, and, in 1931, even considered running for Congress again. The New York Times noted his death on September 28, 1947. Van Duzer’s cremated remains were scattered over the Humboldt River near Winnemucca.

In reading the Winter 2005 issue of *Central Nevada's Glorious Past*, I was struck by the statement that popular, long-time public educator Rita Agnes Cannan was “the first women principal in Nevada.” The short biography in the Central Nevada Historical Society publication noted that Cannan had moved from Goldfield to Reno in 1930 and taught at Mary S. Doten elementary school. The following year she was appointed the school’s principal and held the position for twenty-seven years.

While I didn’t know who the first female principal in a Nevada public school was, I did know that it wasn’t Rita Cannan. Education was one of the few occupations that allowed women to become administrators at the turn of the 20th century. For example, Maude Frazier, a long-time state legislator and Nevada’s first female lieutenant governor in 1962, was an elementary school principal in Goldfield in 1918, then became the Sparks High School principal, and in 1921 became the Nevada deputy superintendent of the fifth supervision district.

Rita Cannan, in fact, replaced a female principal, Miss Opal Martyn, at the Doten school in 1931. A check of school records found at least ten female principals in Washoe County in that year. Cannan surely would have known that she was not the first female public school principal in Nevada.

Trying to find the first female principal in Nevada would be a monumental task because of the paucity of public school records for early Nevada. We know that Hannah Keziah Clapp was the principal of the private Sierra Seminary in Carson City beginning in the 1860s. The *Educational Directory* for 1901 first lists public school principals in Nevada and there were at least seven female principals.

Among the first female public school principals in Washoe County was Libbie Conover Booth. After arriving in Reno from her native Hollister, California, in 1888 to teach school, she served as principal of the Southside School when it first opened in 1904. Libbie’s marrying George Booth in 1900 did not prevent her from being an educator, although her husband died in 1907. After construction of Orvis Ring School in 1910--one of the Spanish Quartet elementary schools that included Mary S. Doten in Reno--she became the principal. Booth held that position until retirement in 1935, not long after Rita Cannan was appointed principal at Mary S. Doten.

According to her obituary, Libbie C. Booth, age ninety-five, died in San Jose in 1948, where she had been living for the past four years. In 1955, the Washoe County school district opened the Libby Booth elementary school at 1450 Stewart Street. Mrs. Booth had been remembered by her community and colleagues in the school district, but the spelling of her first name had been forgotten. The confusion apparently started after her retirement and prior to her leaving Reno. A caricature in Lew Hymers’s *Seen about Town* (1944) even spelled Libbie’s name as Libby.

In the end, the claim that Rita Cannan was Nevada's first female principal and the misspelled Libby Booth elementary school is a reminder that memory betrays us all.

Photo credit: Caricature of Libbie Booth from the Lew Hymers’ book *Seen about Town: a Series of Cartoons and Caricatures That Have Appeared in the Reno Evening Gazette Over a Period of Five Years*, published in 1944. NSLA made every effort to contact the copyright holder of this image. If you feel that you hold the rights to this image please contact us.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the *Reno Gazette-Journal* and the *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley.
On July 4, 1910, Reno staged perhaps the most controversial boxing contest in American history. The outspoken, reigning heavyweight champion Jack Johnson, the first African-American to hold the prized crown, overwhelmed his opponent Jim Jeffries, an undefeated heavyweight champion who had been coaxed out of retirement and dubbed “The Great White Hope.” Ken Burns’ PBS production, Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson (2005) poignantly captured the drama and pathos associated with the epic pugilistic contest.

The bout, among the major events in Reno’s history, and one which attracted more than twenty thousand spectators and some thirty thousand visitors—more people than all the residents of Washoe County at the time—was promoted as the “Fight of the Century.” The racial overtones associated with the fifteen-round battle captivated the nation and the world. White rioting broke out around the country after the fight and following the distribution of the fight film. As a result of the bloody carnage and tragic loss of life, Congress prohibited the interstate transport and showing of boxing films for some twenty-five years.

On July 4, 1979, the Washoe County Historical Society and the Nevada Corral of the Westerners International dedicated a historical marker commemorating the Johnson-Jeffries fight on the southeast corner of Toano and East Fourth streets. However, the exact location of the arena site, obscured with the passage of time and the growth of Reno, had been difficult to find. Old-timers knew it was out East Fourth Street, somewhere between Spokane and Sage streets, yet nobody knew for sure just where. A dedicated group of historians and history buffs decided in January 1979 that it was high time to solve the mystery.

The history detectives included UNR history professor Michael Brodhead, Richard Datin, Phil Earl, Eric Moody, Walt Mulcahy, Bob Nylen, and myself. The first thing we discovered was that the newspapers of the day assumed everybody knew where the boxing arena was located. It was about a mile east of town, “at the turn of the road to Sparks where the trolley car leaves it,” and “just this side of Jack Vera’s, on the bend of the road to Sparks.” We determined that the site was on the block bounded by East Fourth, Toano, and Montello streets, and the railroad tracks. County tax records disclosed that this entire block belonged to prominent businessman Patrick Flanigan, and that it was the only parcel of land in the area large enough to accommodate the arena.

Photos of the boxing arena not only showed that the arena was south of the streetcar line on Fourth Street, and north of the Southern Pacific railroad tracks, but depicted, adjacent to the arena, structures whose identification helped substantially pinpoint the location of the fight. It was also discovered that Jack Vera’s Del Monte roadhouse stood near the old Sparks Road—also known as the Asylum Road—about a half block east of Montello Street.

We were very close to the exact location and probably would have settled for identifying the block in which the area was situated. However, we found the smoking gun while trying to determine when the arena was dismantled. The Reno Athletic Association which commissioned the arena’s construction had failed to pay the contractor, Charles Friedhoff. In turn, Friedhoff’s attorneys filed suit in the Washoe County district court and also filed a lien on the arena and Flanigan’s land.

On October 26, 1910, following a settlement, the suit was dropped and Friedhoff acquired the arena, but not Flanigan’s land. In the court documents was a legal description of the land in the Morrill-Smith Addition, identifying Block 7 and all the lots where the arena stood. Friedhoff began tearing down the arena, selling the lumber and anything else that could be salvaged to cover his costs. The Reno Evening Gazette of October 27 reported that “soon there will be nothing left to mark the site of this famous arena in which champion Johnson whipped the once famous J. J. Jeffries and demonstrated the fact that Jeffries couldn’t come back.”
Today, thanks to a cadre of history detectives, there is now a marker to designate the site where, for a time in 1910, much of the world’s attention was focused on two boxers, one black and one white, who represented much more than themselves in a perceived test of racial superiority.

Photo of the Johnson-Jeffries ticket stub courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal; and the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley.
Myth #119: Nevada's Oldest Family-Owned, Working Ranches and Farms by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

If you can’t claim a first then claim the oldest -- in this case the oldest continuously-operating family-owned ranch in Nevada. The Nevada Centennial Ranch & Farm Program honors working, long-time family-owned ranches or farms more than 100 years old. The ranch has to be at least 160 acres in size, or if less than 160 acres must have a gross yield of at least $1,000. The program, sponsored by the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office, Nevada Farm Bureau, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Nevada Cattleman’s Association, and the Nevada Department of Agriculture, is now in its third year.

There were many family-owned ranches and farms at the base of the Carson Range in the 1850s when the area was still known as western Utah Territory. A number continued to operate for more than 100 years. These pioneer properties, however, including the John Quincy and Rufus Adams Ranch (1853) and the Henry Fred Dangberg Ranch (1856) in Carson Valley, are gone now, the price of development in a booming urban corridor. Fortunately, the Dangberg Home Ranch in Minden is now Nevada’s 26th state park.

The oldest continuously-operating, family-owned ranch honored by the Nevada Centennial Ranch & Farm Program is the Cushman-Corkill Ranch in Churchill County. Josiah Cushman purchased the 1,700 acre ranch on the Carson Sink in 1861 where Fallon is today. “Cushman was known for his high-quality cattle and a ‘fine-bearing orchard’,” according to the 2004 award narrative, “and eventually served as County Clerk, 1872-1874.” Following the completion of the Newlands Reclamation Project in the first decade of the twentieth-century, the family raised alfalfa, corn, potatoes, Sudan grass, and small grains.

The Centennial award-winning ranches and farms dating back to the 1860s include the Snyder Livestock Company in Mason Valley (1862), the Laura Springs Ranch in Carson Valley (1863), Stewart’s Ninety-Six Ranch in Humboldt County’s Paradise Valley (1864), and the Stodieck Farm in Carson Valley (1868).

Recognized ranches and farms dating back to the 1870s include the Capurro Brothers in the Truckee Meadows (now Sparks), Hussman Family Ranch in Carson Valley, Overland Land and Livestock in Ruby Valley, the Pinson Ranch near Golconda, and the Henningsen Ranch in Carson Valley. There are many other award-winning ranches and farms dating back to the 1880s, ’90s, and the first decade of the 20th century.

Other long-time, continuously operating family ranches and farms dating back to the nineteenth-century have not yet applied for Centennial status. Among them is the Stone Cabin Ranch in Nye County. The ranch east of Tonopah dates back to the 1860s. It had many owners until Ed Clifford purchased the property from Mary E. Reveal in June 1883 according to the Nye County deed books. Based on the 1880 U.S. census enumerations and his obituary in 1916, Clifford—who had immigrated from Scotland in 1870-arrived to the silver mining town of Tybo in Nye County around 1876 with his wife, Ester, and two sons, Edward and James, after working in the coal mines of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Colorado, and Wyoming. The Clifford family has operated the Stone Cabin Ranch for over 120 years. With the recent sale of the Irwin Ranch near Duckwater dating back to 1867, the Clifford's Stone Cabin Ranch may be the oldest, continuously operating family-owned ranch in Nye County.

As Nevada grows increasingly more urban, and the demands for water in the sprawling metropolitan areas lead to the further decline of farms and ranches, the Centennial Ranch & Farm Program is a wonderful means to recognize the long-time family-owned businesses dedicated to agriculture in our nation’s most arid state.

Photo credit: Clarence Johnson Ranch, Mason Valley, 1956. Courtesy of the Nevada State Archives.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal, and the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley.
The BS associated with Lake Tahoe may be as deep as the lake. That’s if you believe the Sierra Nevada lake has a bottom. Some claim a fresh-water monster, equivalent to Scotland’s Loch Ness monster and affectionately named Tahoe Tessie, lives in the alpine lake. Others tell tales of dead bodies sinking to the lake bottom still intact today because of frigid water temperatures. They include Chinese woodcutters from the late 19th century and victims of 20th century mafia hits. Perhaps every sizeable lake in the world has its equivalent stories, but what do we actually know and why?

Stories of bottomless lakes seem to be very popular. However, Lake Tahoe has been sounded and scientifically mapped using the latest technologies. All the depths are known. We can thank Nevada journalist, writer, and politician Sam Davis for giving us the tall tale of The Mystery of the Savage Sump (1901) which claimed that Lake Tahoe had a hole in its bottom and was connected to the lower levels of the Comstock mines. The hole was plugged or unplugged as needed to manipulate the price of mining stock, or so Davis’s tale went. William Meeker, a San Francisco stock speculator involved in the elaborate stock market swindle was murdered in 1869 at Lake Tahoe by Colonel Clair, his partner in crime, according to Davis, and his mangled body found in the scalding waters of the Savage Mine sump. The short story is pure humbug and a hoax.

Then again, if there was a hole in the bottom of Lake Tahoe, maybe Tahoe Tessie commutes to Pyramid and Walker lakes in western Nevada. Both lakes have their tales of water monsters.

However, there is no hole and Lake Tahoe is not bottomless. That would help explain all those bodies floating at the lake bottom after so many years. The stories are myriad about a submersible under the direction of the famed Jacques Cousteau detecting perfectly preserved bodies including those of drowned Chinese woodcutters. The truth is that Philippe Cousteau, Jacques’ grandson, visited Lake Tahoe in April 2002, but there is no record of Jacques ever seeing the jewel of the Sierra, much less his being involved in an underwater expedition or using a motorized submersible camera to explore the icy depths.

One online story explains that Jacques Cousteau didn’t follow through on his plan because “a stop was quickly put on the mission by some powerful people.” Claiming that the Lake Tahoe area had a long history associated with organized crime figures, and recalling The Godfather II movie (1974), we are told in the website, “You see, it is so deep, so cold, -- so crystal clear, that there were a few people that were worried that a guy wearing concrete shoes, swimming with the fishes, if you will—might pop into the camera’s sights. Therefore, even though the technology is there, no one knows exactly how deep the lake is or what secrets it might hold.”

Speaking of fish stories, this website story is a whopper! Dr. Graham Kent of the University of California, San Diego’s Scripps Institute of Oceanography who has extensively studied Lake Tahoe’s depths finds these flights of fancy incredible. Kent is unaware of Jacques Cousteau ever visiting Tahoe, but more importantly he points out dead bodies would not last even at the bottom of the frigid lake. If the fish and the crawdads didn’t eat them, the indigenous bacteria eventually would.

The naïve will continue to swallow these imaginative Lake Tahoe stories hook, line, and sinker. Yet in the end discerning minds will see through the fish tales that pass as fact and have a good laugh at the never-ending gullibility of human beings.

Photo credit: Site of the future Sand Harbor State Park on Lake Tahoe's eastern shore, looking north, ca mid-1960s. Photo by Don Boone, Nevada State Library and Archives.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal and in the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley.
Every Nevada governor since 1909 has lived in the current Governor’s Mansion. An 1866 law requires that the governor reside in the seat of government. However, prior to the construction of the official residence at 600 N. Mountain Street, wherever the governor lived in Carson City was considered the governor’s mansion.

Territorial Governor James Nye’s house, located at 108 N. Minnesota Street, is a splendid sandstone building and today is a law office. Nye (1861-64) was also the acting governor of Nevada until Henry Blasdel was sworn into office.

Blasdel (1864-71), his successor Lewis Bradley (1871-79), and Bradley’s successor, John Kinkead (1879-83), all elected from places other than Carson City rented dwellings. The 1871 city directory shows Blasdel living at the corner of Division and Proctor streets. The structure on the northwest corner, for many years St. Peter’s Episcopal Church Rectory, dates back to the early 1860s. Blasdel purchased the residence in August 1870 from his secretary, attorney Thomas Wells, the deed noting that the governor had been using the house as his office prior to the acquisition.

The 1878-79 city directory identifies Governor Bradley as living at the northwest corner of Nevada and Second streets. The house on the corner today dates back only to the early 20th century. Assuming Bradley resided in just one location, it is a particular loss because the governor’s daughter, who served as hostess of the mansion for her widower father, was married in the structure in 1873.

The oversight associated with Kinkead’s governor’s mansion is that the house at 502 N. Division Street is identified solely as the former residence of Territorial Secretary and Acting Governor Orion Clemens. Orion’s brother Samuel, AKA Mark Twain, sometimes stayed at the house while reporting on Carson City events for the Territorial Enterprise. “Governor Kinkead is in the city taking his Christmas,” wrote the Morning Appeal of Dec. 25, 1878. “He and his family are settled for winter quarters in the Fox house—the dwelling erected by Mark Twain’s brother, Orion.” There the family remained and entertained during Kinkead’s governorship.

Jewett Adams, both lieutenant governor (1875-83) and governor (1883-87), lived in a stately house at 410 S. Minnesota Street. By 1906, he had sold the former governor’s mansion to State Printer Andrew Maute. The structure was torn down in the 1950s and the lot remained vacant for some 40 years.

“Hon. C. C. Stevenson has purchased the valuable property long owned by Misses Clapp and Babcock,” reported The Nevada Tribune of December 6, 1886. “No better site for a Gubernatorial Mansion could be found in Carson.” For many years, educators Hannah Clapp and Eliza Babcock lived at 512 N. Mountain Street before moving to Reno. However, the house to date has not been recognized as a governor’s mansion. Governor Charles Stevenson (1887-90) died in the house on September 21, 1890.

Lt. Governor Frank Bell (1890) briefly became the acting governor. He did not run for the governor’s office. It is doubtful that Bell, who lived in nearby Reno and likely commuted by train to Carson City, relocated to the state capital while serving as acting governor. Although the 1866 law required the lieutenant governor to also reside in the seat of government - the requirement was dropped in 1895 - it appears Bell may have only maintained a token residence in Carson City.

Following Roswell Colcord’s election, the governor-elect purchased the residence at 700 W. Telegraph Street on December 27, 1890. Colcord (1891-95) chose to serve only one term. Appointed superintendent of the U.S. Mint in Carson City in 1898, he lived in the former governor’s mansion until his death in 1939.
Silver Party candidate John E. Jones (1895-96) succeeded Colcord as governor. The former Nevada Surveyor-General lived at 603 W. Robinson Street. Governor Jones left for San Francisco in 1896 for medical treatment, leaving the powers of the governorship to Lt. Governor Reinhold Sadler. Jones died on April 10.

Lt. Governor Reinhold Sadler then became the permanent acting governor. Running for the governor's office in 1898, Sadler (1896-1903) was elected by a mere 22 votes. The former governor's mansion is located at 310 N. Mountain Street.

Governor John Sparks (1903-08) found a clever way to address the requirement he live in Carson City. He rented a room in the downtown Arlington House--razed in 1966--and would occasionally spend time there. When Sparks wanted to seriously entertain, or spend time with his family, he would board a V&T passenger train and travel to his elegant mansion on the Alamo Ranch south of Reno. Apparently nobody openly questioned the arrangement.

Sparks died at the Alamo Ranch on May 22, 1908. By then the current Governor’s Mansion location had been secured and construction bids solicited. While Sparks had initially vetoed the mansion legislation in 1905, he signed it in 1907. Lt. and Acting Governor Denver Dickerson first occupied the official residence in 1909.

Photo: Nevada State Governor's Mansion ca 1915-1922, during Governor Emmet Boyle's term of office. Photo from the collection of the Nevada State Archives.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal and in the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley.
Mark Twain didn’t say “Whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting over,” or any other version of the oft-quoted phrase. That’s what seemingly everybody wants to believe. It’s a great quote but there’s absolutely no reliable evidence linking it to Twain.

A representative from the Nevada Contractors Association in a September 2006 Associated Press story harkened back to Twain, or so he thought, when testifying on the Las Vegas plan to pump billions of gallons of water from White Pine County to the ever-growing entertainment capital of the world. People fighting water wars throughout the American West just love to use the quote. Hundreds of websites erroneously attribute this phrase to the great humorist and writer who lived in Nevada in the early 1860s and returned to lecture in 1866 and 1868. One site credits Twain in 1884 for the whiskey and water quote, but does not tell us where it came from.

The truth is somebody surely made it up and we don’t know who. The predictable response is that if Twain didn’t say it, he should have.

Staff members at the Nevada State Library and Archives have been asked to verify the quote many times over many years. Researchers at the Mark Twain Papers and Project at the University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library have found nothing to support the claim. Barbara Schmidt who maintains the website www.twainquotes.com makes no reference to the quote. Authoritative quote books do not include the phrase among Twain’s many quotes. The University of Virginia website entitled Mark Twain in His Time has a search capability and a check for the whiskey and water quote turned up nothing.

The general public is obsessed with attributing lively quips and quotes to prominent figures without really knowing if the attribution is true. In fact, the Florida League of Cities website credits Will Rogers with saying “Whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting.”

Some historical figures seem to be particular repositories for things they never said. Scholars have identified dozens of bogus anti-democratic quotes attributed to the revolutionary Marxist Lenin and many of the things we “know” Abraham Lincoln said did not come from him. Researcher Robert Newcomb determined that nearly all Benjamin Franklin’s “Poor Richard” sayings were cribbed from other writers. Franklin himself admitted as much: “Why should I give my Readers bad lines of my own when good ones of other People’s are so plenty?” In our time, South African leader Nelson Mandela has been quoted making a comment that actually came from self-help writer Marianne Williamson.

Who hasn’t been to a meeting where someone doesn’t regale the audience with a quote from Twain, Will Rogers, or Yogi Berra? Fortunately, no website has been found crediting the Yankee baseball great with the whiskey and water quote. At least not yet.

Photo credit: Lahontan Dam, courtesy of Nevada State Library and Archives.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal and in the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley.
On February 21, 2007, the crowd booed national TV personality George Stephanopoulos, Democratic presidential forum moderator, at the Carson City Community Center when he mispronounced the state’s name, “Nuh-VAW-duh.”

Late in 2003, President George W. Bush and 2004 Democratic presidential candidates Howard Dean of Vermont and Joe Lieberman of Connecticut made the same mistake while campaigning in Las Vegas. Interviewed by reporter Sean Whaley, I commented on the error in pronunciation in a Las Vegas Review Journal article. The Associated Press (AP) wire service circulated the story nationwide referring just to President Bush’s faux pas. Right-wing radio personality Matt Drudge made me the story, posting the AP story and my work email address on his website. For weeks, I received vile, mean-spirited emails attacking me for correcting the president. The pronunciation of our state’s name had been reduced to a partisan issue. Most of the persons who came to my support, many of them left-wing, arguably had more issues with the Republican president than just how he pronounced Nevada. I found myself caught in the middle of a vitriolic firestorm.

Vindication came when President Bush campaigned at the Reno-Sparks Convention Center on June 18, 2004. The president opened his talk by proclaiming that “It’s great to be here in ‘Nuh-VAD-uh,’” the crowd roaring its approval when he light-heartedly noted “You didn't think I'd get it right, did ya?” The president had made lemonade out of a lemon.

Those who preferred the state’s name to be pronounced correctly were not being partisan, which became clear later in the year when U.S. Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, the Democratic presidential candidate, came to Nevada and mispronounced the state’s name. I, and no doubt other Nevadans, made contact with his campaign and at his next rally in Henderson Kerry, too, had corrected his pronunciation. The flap spurred the Nevada Commission on Tourism to include a pronouncer on its logo to try and get the point across.

Folks east of the Rocky Mountains defend saying “Nuh-VAW-duh” by claiming it's the proper Spanish pronunciation. So why don't they pronounce Florida, Texas, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and California by their Spanish pronunciations? Anyway, I argue that Nevada would be pronounced “NA-VAW-duh” in most Spanish dialects where the “e” in Nevada is pronounced as a long “a.”

Americans rushing to the California Mother Lode mining camps in the late 1840s and 1850s probably anglicized the Spanish pronunciation of Nevada when they first encountered the massive Sierra Nevada range. Before there was a territory or state of Nevada, there was a Nevada City and Nevada County, California. These gold rush place names are pronounced the same way as the Silver State’s name.

However, the story doesn’t end there. Some gold rush sojourners returned to their homes in the midwest and south after chasing their golden dreams. Towns named Nevada in northeast Texas (named for Nevada Territory); central Iowa (founded in 1853 and named for the Sierra Nevada); and southwest Missouri (incorporated in 1855 and named for Nevada City) came into being. The Arkansas Legislature created Nevada County on March 20, 1871 in the southwestern part of the state, giving it that name because it resembled the State of Nevada upside down.

The additional twist in this story is that all these places are pronounced “Nuh-VAY-duh.” In the end, local usage should prevail. So when in Rome, or should it be Roma?

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal and in the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley.
A long-standing story goes that J. W. Rover, hanged in Reno in 1878 for murder, was, indeed, innocent. Rover was arrested and convicted for the murder of business partner Isaac Sharp following Sharp’s disappearance and the subsequent discovery of his dismembered body by the Humboldt County sheriff. Nevada newspaper accounts in 1899 wrote of a death bed confession exonerating Rover made by his other business partner and accuser, Frank McWorthy, in Arizona Territory.

Sharp, McWorthy and Rover were business associates in a sulphur mine near Rabbit Hole Springs just outside the Block Rock Desert in what was then Humboldt County. McWorthy and Rover accused each other of the April 1875 murder. However, it was McWorthy who rode to the county seat of Winnemucca and swore out a complaint against Rover.

Based essentially on McWorthy’s court testimony and circumstantial evidence, Rover was convicted of murder. Rover failed to convince the jury that McWorthy had actually killed Sharp and framed him for the brutal slaying.

The case was appealed to the Nevada Supreme Court in Carson City, overturned on the technicality that the jury did not explicitly state conviction for first-degree murder, and a retrial ordered. The trial outcome in 1876 was the same except that Rover was now found guilty of first-degree murder.

A second appeal to the Nevada Supreme Court also resulted in a retrial because of a district judge’s erroneous instruction defining reasonable doubt. However, due to a depleted jury pool in Humboldt County the venue was changed to Washoe County.

A third trial in Reno ended in a hung jury, but the fourth and final trial in 1877 sealed Rover’s fate. He was again found guilty of murder in the first degree and sentenced to die on February 19, 1878. This time the Supreme Court did not concur with the arguments made on appeal and directed the Washoe County sheriff to carry out the sentence. A petition for commutation from Humboldt County citizens to the State Board of Pardons was also not entertained.

Yet one more effort was made to save Rover’s life. Based on an obscure and rarely used law, the condemned man’s attorneys demanded that a “sheriff’s jury” be called to determine Rover’s sanity. Seven of the twelve jurymen deemed Rover sane; five weren’t sure. Hopelessly deadlocked on the morning of the execution, the jurors were dismissed.

While the state legislature had made public executions illegal in 1875, that didn’t stop Sheriff Albion Lamb from inviting some 200 guests to witness the hanging on the courthouse grounds behind an enclosure. Rover’s last words took 52 minutes to share with the gathering. Professing his innocence to the end, and still blaming McWorthy for Sharp’s murder, a black hood was pulled over his head and the gallows’ trapdoor sprung. Later the rope was cut and Rover’s body transported to the nearby Catholic cemetery for burial. Reno had experienced its only legal execution and Washoe County sent Humboldt County the bill for the trials and the hanging.

The story didn’t end there. Eilley Orrum Bowers, the well known eccentric “Washoe Seeress,” claimed that Rover’s spirit had come to her and declared his innocence. For awhile, it was popular to hold séances to contact Rover. Others who had visited the Rabbit Hole Springs mine swore that Rover haunted the area and refused to work there after dark. Even without Bowers’ psychic pronouncement of Rover’s innocence and the talk of his tormented ghost, newspapers for years noted the doubts among some that he was guilty of murder.

In fact, a story originating in the New York Engineering and Mining Journal was reprinted on July 22, 1899 in Winnemucca’s Silver State, Carson City News, and probably other newspapers claiming, “It afterward
developed that Rover was innocent of the crime for which he suffered. McWorthy died a few years ago in Arizona, and on his deathbed confessed that he was the murderer of Sharp.” A lengthy story on the Rover case in Winnemucca’s Humboldt Star in 1928 took it as fact that there had been a deathbed confession. So have others even today.

Actually, Frank McWorthy returned to his wife, Helen, and family in Oakland after the lengthy trials, dying in California sometime after 1900. A squib in the Reno Evening Gazette of July 24, 1899 has been somehow overlooked which noted, “The News is mistaken, for McWorthy is alive today and lives in Oakland. Rover killed Sharp and paid the penalty with his life.”

The Oakland Tribune of October 19, 1898 briefly mentioned a lawsuit over mining property in Plumas County, California, involving McWorthy. However, the definitive evidence is found in the 1900 U.S. Census. J. Franklin McWorthy, age 74, was enumerated as living with wife Helen in Eden, Alameda County, California.

Despite three juries finding Rover guilty of murder beyond a reasonable doubt, given Rover’s accusation that McWorthy killed Sharp, there will always be some doubt that Rover was the murderer. However a thorough examination of census records for California and other sources leaves no doubt that McWorthy’s so-called deathbed confession was an unfounded rumor embraced by some as fact.

Photograph: Washoe County Courthouse, Reno, built in 1873. This building still exists but was sheathed with a new façade and additions in 1910. Courtesy of Nevada Historical Society.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal and in the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley.
Nevadans know that Reno is “The Biggest Little City in the World.” While the Truckee River community dates back to the arrival of the Central Pacific Railroad on May 9, 1868, the downtown Virginia Street welcome arch first proclaimed that slogan in 1929, when the city’s population was less than 20,000. The 1926 arch frame adorned with the vintage slogan now spans Lake Street near the National Automobile Museum. Today “The Biggest Little City in the World,” growing in virtually every direction, has more than 220,000 residents.

Few Nevadans know that Fresno, California, calls itself “The Best Little City in the U.S.A.” There is a welcome arch spanning Van Ness Avenue, the current frame dating back to 1925, although the unofficial community slogan was not added until 1980. Fresno’s population approached 50,000 in 1925. Today it’s almost 475,000.

Gateway arches and city slogans were very popular for much of the twentieth-century. What better way to attract attention to your bustling burg in the midst of the nation’s burgeoning highway system and booming tourism industry? Seemingly every small town and city erected a gateway or welcome arch, and/or adopted a slogan, particularly those communities located next door in California. As early as 1910, some called Modesto “The Best Little City in the State.” Later references in the 1930s noted “The Best Little City in California.” However, the 1912 vintage welcome arch is adorned with “Water Wealth Contentment Health.”

The Oxnard Chamber of Commerce referred to the Ventura County city in 1922 as “The Best Little City on the Coast.” Another newspaper story later in the year changed one word in the slogan, labeling Oxnard “The Best Little City Along the Coast.”

In 1935, the Woodland Chamber of Commerce called the small community north of Sacramento “The Best Little City in the West.” Oakdale, to the south in the San Joaquin Valley, was not to be outdone. A story ran in 1968 referring to the Stanislaus County community as “The Best Little City in the West.” Perhaps there were just too many best little cities in the west. Today Oakdale’s nickname is “The Gateway to Yosemite” and its slogan is “Cowboy Capital of the World.”

Speaking of gateways, Las Vegas had a gateway arch between 1929 and 1931 spanning Fremont Street where it intersected with Main Street. It read “Welcome to Las Vegas—Gateway to Boulder Dam.” Clovis, California, adjacent to Fresno, still has a gateway arch. It reads “Gateway to the Sierras.”

Although Willits, California, on Highway 101 acquired Reno’s second arch frame (1964-87) and added the slogan “Heart of Mendocino County” in 1995, the heyday of welcome and gateway arches as a marketing tool was long over. On the other hand, town and city slogans are still widely used. Over time with development and change, these communities have adopted new slogans to presumably capture their transformation.

It’s unlikely Reno will change the slogan “The Biggest Little City in the World” despite its substantial growth and current rank as a mid-size American city. The 82-year-old slogan is a nostalgic symbol of the city’s small-town past in the midst of tremendous change, particularly in the downtown core. Practically all the late 19th-century buildings are gone, so too many of the earliest 20th-century structures when
Reno first laid claim to being the “The Biggest Little City in the World.” The welcome arch slogan not only represents a connection to this bygone time, but hopefully also the desire to sustain some essence of what made Reno so special for so long.

Photo credit: Reno’s second arch at night, courtesy of the Nevada State Library and Archives. This arch spanned Virginia Street in Reno from 1964-1987 and is now in Willits, California. See a photo of the redesigned sign on the city of Willits website.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal and Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley.
The biographers of long-time Nevada Congressman and U.S. Senator, Francis Griffith Newlands, tell us that he was born on August 28, 1848 in, or near, Natchez, Mississippi. Why shouldn’t we believe them? They are the authorities on the man whose principle claim to fame is the Truckee-Carson Reclamation Project (Newlands Project) in western Nevada. According to his obituaries and biographies, when Senator Newlands died of a heart attack at his home in Washington, D.C., on December 24, 1917 he was sixty-nine years old.

However, Ernie Schank of Fallon visited Newlands’ gravesite in 2005 in Washington, D.C.; found a discrepancy in his age; and brought it to our attention in an article in the Fallon Star. The marker in Georgetown’s Oak Hill Cemetery reads Newlands died in his 71st year. Is the headstone or are the biographers wrong?

The answer is found in the U.S. decennial censuses that the National Archives in Washington, D.C., has made available on microfilm since the 1960s. Today one can subscribe to a database service like Ancestry.com and, entering a person’s name, find census data readily at one’s fingertips. Let’s pursue a little forensic history using documentary sources.

A check of the 1850 U.S. Census finds Francis G. Newlands living in Palmyra, Marion County, Missouri, with his parents, James and Jessie, and four siblings: James, John, Annie and William. The occupation of his Scottish father was physician. The biographies of Newlands make no mention of this brief period in Francis’ life before the family moved across the Mississippi River to Quincy, Illinois, where his father died in 1851.

Interestingly enough, Francis was listed in the 1850 Census as four years old and born in Mississippi. The enumerator visited the Newlands household on August 27, 1850, the day before Francis’s birthday. Based on this information, young Newlands was born in 1846 and not 1848.

The 1860 U.S. Census found Frank G. Newlands living in Quincy with his mother and step-father, banker Eben Moore, and brothers and sister. The enumeration was made on July 18th and Frank was listed as thirteen. He would not turn fourteen for another six weeks if he had been born in 1846. Otherwise, if he was born in 1848, Frank would have been listed as eleven.

By 1870, Frank G. Newlands was living with his widowed mother--Eben died in 1866—and his three brothers and sister in Washington, D.C. His age was noted as twenty-four, born in Mississippi, and his occupation was listed as lawyer. After briefly attending Yale, Newlands studied law at Columbian University (today’s George Washington University) and was admitted to practice in the District of Columbia in 1869. The enumeration was dated July 12, seven weeks before his twenty-fourth birthday if he was born in 1846.

It’s reasonable to assume that one or both of Newlands’ parents were the informants in the 1850, 1860 and 1870 censuses as the heads of household. However, beginning in 1880, when Frank was the head of his own household we find enumerators being told erroneous information. In 1880, he was living in San Francisco with wife, Clara, and three daughters. We know from Newlands’ biographers that he moved to San Francisco in 1870 and married millionaire William Sharon’s daughter in 1874. Someone told the 1880 enumerator Newlands was a thirty-one-year-old lawyer, born in Kentucky.

Most of the 1890 U.S. Census was damaged in a fire in Washington, D.C. in 1921 and was not salvaged. However, in 1900 Nevada U.S. Representative Francis G. Newlands was listed in the census as living in Reno; married to a second wife, Edith; and three daughters from his first marriage resided with him. First wife Clara died in 1882 during childbirth. In 1900, the enumerator noted Newlands was fifty and born in Georgia. It gets better.
In the 1910 U.S. Census for Reno, U. S. Senator Newlands was sixty-five and born in California! What we do know is that someone, most likely a family member, knew better when it came to engraving the age of Francis Newlands on his gravestone. Doing the math clearly makes him born in 1846 if Newlands was 71 years old when he died in 1917. Ernie Schank’s visit to Newlands’ final resting place and a thorough analysis of the U.S. censuses have finally set the record straight.

Photo credits: Both photographs courtesy of Ernie Schank, Fallon.

-Top: Entrance to Oak Hill Cemetery, Washington, D.C.
-Bottom: Close-up of Newlands’ gravestone showing his age at death.

The Historic Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal and Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley.
Reno’s YMCA of the Sierra made the news over the future of the “Y” buildings on Foster Drive. In July 2007, the Reno City Council agreed to buy the structures for $3.4 million and make it a community center. The deal brought a sigh of relief to neighbors who opposed a plan by developers to raze the original “Y” building and construct 52 houses.

2006-2007 newspaper accounts confuse the year when the YMCA moved from downtown Reno—the first building was dedicated November 12, 1911—to Foster Drive. News stories have included dates from 1956 to 1960. Arguably, the construction of the YMCA building in 1956 is recent history. In fact, there are people still living in the area who were around when the “Y” was dedicated.

One of those persons is former Nevada Supreme Court Justice Cliff Young. At the time of the dedication on September 7, Young was Nevada’s lone member of the U.S. House of Representatives. A Lovelock native and graduate of the University of Nevada in Reno, the two-term Congressman served as the master of ceremonies at the “Y” dedication. The late U.S. Senator Alan Bible, another Lovelock native and graduate of the University of Nevada, was the speaker for the evening event.

A 1956 Reno Evening Gazette article noted that A.W. Plummer, the first president of the YMCA, had been asked to attend the dedication, but failing eyesight prevented him from participating in the event. The story included a photo of Plummer with Clark J. Guild, Jr, YMCA president; and Clarence Marshall, the outgoing executive secretary.

The American Legion post presented two flags at the dedication. James Rush, commander of the First Nevada District of the American Legion, was in charge of the presentation and dedication of the flags. Members of the municipal band entertained the audience. A YMCA board member, the Rev. Rafe C. Martin, gave the invocation. Well-known Reno vocalist Robert Herz sung “The Lord’s Prayer” and Rev. Blake Franklin of the First Baptist Church presented the benediction.

The dedication featured YMCA President Guild presenting the building to the citizens of Reno. The cornerstone ceremony included placing a time capsule behind the stone; however, the contents were not identified in the Gazette story. Following the ceremony, an open house was held at the YMCA and tours were conducted by members of the Boys Leaders’ Club.

Although many people attended the event, what happened that day appears to have been forgotten fifty years later. The date of the opening of the Foster Drive YMCA has not been accurately represented. While memories fade, people die, and newcomers have no personal connection to this bygone event, thanks to microfilmed newspapers there are ways to know what actually happened and when. The optical scanning of microfilmed newspapers into computer databases with keyword search is putting the information at our fingertips.

What we need to know now is what is in the time capsule behind the cornerstone!


The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal, Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley; the Humboldt Sun; and the Battle Mountain Bugle.
Myth #128: More Urban Nevada by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

Perception takes some time to catch up to reality, if it ever catches up at all. Media references to urban and rural Nevada are a case in point. We seldom read or hear a fact that would surprise many of us: Nevada, despite its rank as the seventh-largest state in size in the country, is one of the nation’s most urban states and growing more urban all the time.

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STATE DATA CENTER REPORT
A Newsletter for Nevada State Data Center Affiliates and Data Users
Volume 13, Issue 3 - November 2002
Carson City: Nevada's Third Urbanized Area

Nevada’s two long-standing urban areas are Clark and Washoe counties. Based on 2006 U.S. census estimates, Las Vegas and Henderson rank first and second in population among the state’s communities. Third is Reno, then North Las Vegas, with Sparks fifth.

Carson City, the sixth largest city in Nevada, consolidated with Ormsby County in 1969. The 2000 U.S. Census gave the state capital 52,457 residents. The Federal Register notice of May 1, 2002 officially designated Carson City and the contiguous areas of Mound House in Lyon County and northern Douglas County as an urbanized area (58,263). This is defined as an “area consisting of a central place(s) and adjacent territory with a general population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile of land area that together have a minimum residential population of at least 50,000 people.” With an urban designation comes federal dollars to help address infrastructure including mass transit issues. Carson City has enjoyed urban status for five years now, which includes federal money to support its Jump Around Carson (JAC) public transit system dating back to October 2005. The Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) intercity bus route also provides a transit link for commuters between the Reno and Carson City urban areas. In addition, Carson City is scheduled to be connected to the federal interstate highway system in 2011 with the completion of I-580 to Reno.

So why is that that we hear or read time and again that Carson City and its consolidated city/county government is one of Nevada’s 15 rural counties? It’s probable that many reporters and others aren’t up-to-date on Nevada census and demographic data. However, there also appears to be a general reluctance to accept the fact that Carson City has left the ranks of rural Nevada and is now part of a booming megalopolis at the eastern base of the Carson Range. Novelist Robert Laxalt once wrote that during his boyhood it was a point of pride that Nevada had the smallest capital. That hasn’t been true for many years, but we seem reluctant to surrender the impression.

More than forty years have passed since Carson City was the nation’s smallest state capital. With Carson City's population exceeding 55,000, adjacent areas to the east in Lyon County (Mound House and Dayton) and south in Douglas County (Indian Hills, Jacks Valley, and the Stephanie/Johnson Lane area) now include more than 25,000 additional residents.

Projected growth by the State Demographer suggests that Carson City may be augmented by larger parts of Douglas and Lyon counties as officially designated urban areas after the 2010 U.S. census. Storey County is already included in the Washoe County urbanized area because a large majority of Storey County residents commute to Washoe County to work. While western Nevada’s rural character outside the Reno-Sparks metro is rapidly disappearing, area residents are all over the board in their thinking about rapid change in the region. Some seemingly embrace sprawling growth as a sign of progress and prosperity, but apparently fail to recognize, or don’t care, that by the 2020 U.S. Census there could be over one million people living within a sixty-mile radius of downtown Reno (inclusive of Lake Tahoe and the Truckee, California area). Others are fighting non-contiguous development and annexation to Reno.

Old-timers generally feel helpless in the face of booming growth; some have moved to smaller rural communities. On the other hand, many newcomers point to the fact that western Nevada is a far better place to live than the major urban areas where they moved from.

One thing is for sure, the type of expansive growth experienced in southern California, the Bay Area, the greater Sacramento-Stockton area, and southern Nevada, is now being felt in western Nevada.

Between horizontal lines: masthead of the Nevada State Data Center newsletter of November 2002.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal; the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley; the Humboldt Sun; and the Battle Mountain Bugle.
The history of the word “gaming” in Nevada as applied to “gambling”—games of chance, mechanical and electronic betting devices—is a ball of confusion. Former mayor of Las Vegas, Jan Jones, now an executive for Harrah’s Entertainment, in a March 2006 Associated Press (AP) story “said ‘gambling’ became ‘gaming’ as that city’s famous Strip transformed into an entertainment mecca, complete with shopping and stage shows.” UNLV Professor Bill Thompson, who studies the gambling industry, said in the same story that “‘gaming’ went virtually unused until the late 1980s. The legislators say ‘Oh no, no, we don’t have gambling. We just have gaming. We’re just playing games’.” But the term “gaming” has been around for a lot longer than these folks believe.

In fact, Nevada created regulatory panels called the Gaming Control Board and the Gaming Commission in the 1950s. “I don’t use ‘gaming’,” long-time AP Carson City Bureau Chief Brendan Riley was recently quoted as saying. “No, only if it’s the title of the Gaming Control Board or the Gaming Commission. And I don’t use it because it’s a soft word.”

The casino industry has adopted the much broader term “gaming” over “gambling” some suggest because of the perceived stigma associated with the word “gambling.” The words are clearly not synonyms. However, is the use of the word “gaming” interchangeably with the word “gambling” something that just happened in the last fifty years?

The first Nevada Territorial Legislature passed “An Act to Prohibit Gambling” on November 25, 1861. Betting games were illegal in Nevada for eight years. Then, in 1869, the State Legislature overrode Governor Henry Blasdel’s veto and passed “An Act to restrict gaming”. Two years earlier in a legislative effort to legalize gambling, Governor Blasdel had told the legislators that “Gaming is an intolerable and inexcusable vice.”

“An Act to prevent gaming,” approved in the first state legislative session in 1865 was repealed four years later. Essentially licensed and regulated games of chance enumerated in the gaming law were legal.

The newspapers of the day refer to gaming tables, gaming licenses, and gaming revenue. Sometimes gaming and gambling were used interchangeably. For example, Reno’s Weekly Nevada State Journal for February 24, 1877 noted that a bill being considered in the State Legislature proposed “restricting gaming to the upper stories of all gambling houses in towns containing more than 1,500 inhabitants.”

Slot machines introduced in the 1890s were not originally taxed using the term gaming in Nevada but given their own tax category. State law referred to them as a mechanical device, machine for money or a gambling device, while Federal revenue acts in the twentieth-century would define slot machines as gaming devices.

Gambling/gaming, exclusive of lotteries, was legal in Nevada until October 1, 1910. A law passed by the 1909 Legislature was entitled “An Act prohibiting gambling.” Slot machines, games or devices are mentioned in the statute, but not gaming.

“An Act concerning slot machines, gambling games, and gambling devices” was passed on March 19, 1931, again legalizing the gambling business in Nevada. The term gaming was not used in the law.

Just the same, post cards and photos depicting casinos in Nevada from this era show signs advertising “Gaming.” Moreover, newspaper accounts used the term gaming frequently when referencing gambling. According to a United Press story in the January 18, 1950 edition of the Nevada State Journal, “The
[Nevada Supreme] court said that despite legalization of gambling in the state at various times in its history and despite the fact that the state taxes gaming, nothing in all the statutes would permit court action to collect gambling debts."

In spite of claims that gaming as applied to the casino gambling industry is a relatively new term, the historical record makes it clear that gambling and gaming have been used interchangeably in Nevada from its earliest days.

Photo credit: post card of a late 1940s view looking north on Virginia Street, sometimes called Casino Row, in Reno. Under the vertical Nevada Club sign the marquee reads "GAMING." Post card courtesy of Guy Rocha.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal, the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley; the Humboldt Sun; and the Battle Mountain Bugle.
A surprising change of venue for the Darren Mack murder trial from Reno to Las Vegas in October 2007 raised the question: Had this ever happened before in Nevada?

Seemingly no one could remember a change of venue involving a murder case in the recent past. Was this a first, or the first in a long time? Unfortunately, there is no comprehensive list that identifies every change of venue for murder trials in Nevada history.

When posed with the question, I knew that the murder trial of J. W. Rover had been moved from Winnemucca to Reno in 1876 following the Nevada Supreme Court overturning two murder convictions on technicalities. The Humboldt County jury pool was depleted and Rover was sent to Washoe County for trial. Ultimately, Rover was convicted, and hanged in Reno on February 19, 1878.

Another change of venue associated with a murder trial involved Robert H. Crozier. In 1877, Crozier was granted a change of venue from Elko to Winnemucca by the district judge. Crozier was found guilty in the murder of Charles Silverstein, alas "Montana Charley," and hanged in Winnemucca on October 30, 1877. Thanks to the book Killed at the Gap (2003), we know that after two trials held in Austin for Alfred Vaughan, killer of brothers John and William Litster on December 28, 1893, the District Attorney was granted a change of venue to Reno. The Lander County jury pool was exhausted for the third trial mandated by the State Supreme Court. The Washoe County jury convicted Vaughan on April 10, 1896; however, he cheated the gallows by taking an overdose of morphine.

Four men involved in the sensational murder of Jack Welch in Humboldt County were first tried in Winnemucca in 1903. Thomas F. Gorman, Al Linderman, Fred Reidt and John P. Sevener were found guilty. However, the Supreme Court ordered a retrial and the venue changed to Reno. Again, the men were found guilty. The largest multiple execution in Nevada history occurred on November 17, 1905 when the four men were executed at the State Prison using double gallows.

The Washoe County district judge in the Mack case relied on a precedent set in 1907. After the district judge denied a change of venue, Patrick "Patsy" Dwyer was convicted of murder in Austin in November 1906 and sentenced to death. Dwyer’s case was appealed to the Nevada Supreme Court while he awaited execution at the State Prison in Carson City. In July 1907, the Supreme Court reversed the judgment and ordered a new trial with a change of venue.

Patrick McCarran, one of the attorneys representing Dwyer in his appeal, also represented Dwyer in his Elko murder trial. The jury acquitted Dwyer of murder on January 29, 1908 and set him free.

Nevada law at the time permitted McCarran, the Nye County district attorney, to maintain a private practice. McCarran, one of Nevada’s most successful defense attorneys, later served as a Nevada Supreme Court Justice and a long-time U. S. Senator.

An anomalous situation, also in 1907 resulted in a change of venue for a murder trial in Esmeralda County. The murder trial of labor leaders Morrie Preston and Joseph W. Smith began in Hawthorne and concluded in Goldfield because a new law moved the Esmeralda County seat in the middle of the trial. In this case, the jury remained the same, but the courthouse was relocated. Preston was convicted of second-degree murder and Smith of voluntary manslaughter.

By all indications, changes of venue for murder trials are rare in Nevada and occurred years ago. The exception is a case in 1980 that virtually nobody remembered except one of the defense attorneys in the trial who is now a Nevada Supreme Court Justice.

In February 1980, the murder trial of Patrick Charles McKenna was moved from Las Vegas to Minden. The Clark County district judge who ordered the change of venue presided in the case in Douglas
County. McKenna stood accused of killing his jail mate in a fit of rage after his recent conviction in a high-profile Clark County trial. McKenna was found guilty and sentenced to death. The conviction and death penalty were later reversed by the Nevada Supreme Court. In a subsequent trial, McKenna was again found guilty and sentenced to death. He is now in the Ely State Prison awaiting execution and, after multiple failed jail and prison escapes, is considered one of the most dangerous prisoners in the state.

Although McKenna’s murder trial in Minden in 1980 was well-covered by the media in southern Nevada, the case did not get much attention in northern Nevada. People living in northern Nevada at the time of the trial don’t remember it today. Thanks to Justice Michael Cherry, who was in the Minden courtroom representing McKenna, we know there was a change of venue in a murder trial in recent memory.

Photo Credit: The Supreme Court of Nevada sits for a portrait, circa 1908. These were the same Justices who heard the Dwyer case and the same courtroom in the Nevada State Capitol in which the hearing took place. Today the room is preserved as a museum room. On the bench, left to right: Justices Frank Norcross, George Talbot, and James Sweeney. Center row, left to right: James Finch, court reporter; J.W. Legate, court clerk; and William Kinney, bailiff. The two men in the foreground are unidentified. Photo courtesy of the Nevada State Museum.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal; the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley; the Humboldt Sun; the Battle Mountain Bugle; Lovelock Review-Miner, and Nevada Observer (online version).
Carole Lombard is best remembered as a zany, comedic actress in the 1930s, fondly known as the “Screwball Queen of the Screen.” She married actor Clark Gable in 1939. Las Vegas is featured prominently in the story. There in the desert gambling mecca Gable’s second wife, Ria, divorced the popular leading man after Lombard went public about her affair and plans to marry.

Lombard died a tragic death on January 16, 1942 in a fiery plane crash southwest of Las Vegas, near Mt. Potosi, following a trip to her home state of Indiana for a war bond rally. Indiana U.S. Senator Raymond Willis paid tribute to Lombard in Congress. President Franklin Roosevelt sent Gable a telegram noting that he and First Lady Eleanor had lost a friend.

What most people don’t know is that Carole Lombard--born Jane Alice Peters--divorced her first husband, actor William Powell in Carson City.

Powell and Lombard met while making the movie Man of the World, and worked together again in Ladies’ Man. They soon became engaged, followed by a private wedding on June 26, 1931 at the house of Lombard’s mother in Beverly Hills. The couple sailed to Honolulu for their honeymoon. Wire service photos filled the pages of the mainstream and tabloid press.

However, the marriage did not last long. Perhaps the sixteen-year age difference affected their compatibility. She was twenty-two and he was thirty-eight when they married. In addition, she was outgoing and outspoken, he was intellectual and reserved. According to her mother, Elizabeth, “They just decided all of sudden they could not agree.”

Lombard flew to Reno in July 1933 where she retained prominent divorce attorney George B. Thatcher. She stayed at the Riverside Hotel for three days before taking up her six-week residency on July 6 at Lake Tahoe. The house, adjacent to the Cal-Neva Lodge, was the summer residence of thirteen-year-old Robert Stack. Stack, later to become a prominent actor in his own right, and Lombard became close friends. He co-starred with Lombard in her last movie, To Be or Not to Be (1942).

Among Lombard’s many visitors were her mother; brother, Stuart; and Hollywood gossip columnist Louella Parsons. On August 6, the screen actress held the ceremonial ribbon dedicating Nevada’s portion of the Tahoe Rim-of-the-Lake Highway, known today as State Highway 28.

Thatcher probably advised Lombard to seek her divorce in Carson City, the tiny state capital numbering less than 2,000 residents, to avoid the media scrutiny associated with a high-profile Reno divorce.
The hearing was held on August 18 in the courtroom of District Judge Clark J. Guild. It lasted only six minutes during the noon recess, sandwiched in between a lengthy hearing to try and reopen the many banks that had closed in Nevada on November 1, 1932 because of the Great Depression. The court house was inundated with lawyers, banking officials and accountants. Lombard was heard to say, “It’s like the first night of a stag party.”

“Dressed in a smart grey traveling suit and with a blue beret partially covering her wavy blond hair, Miss Lombard answered the questions put to her by Thatcher calmly and showed no signs of agitation,” wrote the Carson City Daily Appeal. She charged Powell with extreme cruelty calling him a “very emotional man” who often resorted to “coarse and abusive language,” causing her acute unhappiness and impairing her health.

Lombard, known throughout Hollywood for her prolific use of expletives, was well coached to use the boilerplate language typical of a migratory divorce proceeding in the day. The mild-mannered Powell did not contest the suit and was represented in Carson City by his two attorneys in the property settlement. “It wasn’t Hollywood’s fault,” she said smiling. “Just one of those things that happen.”

Despite making the obligatory claim that she planned to permanently reside in Nevada and build a house at Lake Tahoe, Lombard flew from Reno back to Los Angeles with daredevil aviator “Colonel” Roscoe Turner less than two hours after the granting of the divorce decree. Filming of White Woman had begun with Lombard playing the lead role across from Charles Laughton.

Lombard and Powell, who became famous as Nick Charles in the Thin Man movie series, remained friends until her untimely death in 1942. They even made another film together, My Man “Godfrey” (1936). Both received Academy Award nominations.

The Lombard-Powell divorce was arguably the highest profile celebrity divorce in Carson City history. The Appeal noted Judge Guild’s daughter, Marjorie, chatted with Carole Lombard in her father’s chambers before the hearing. Marjorie would later marry Charles Russell and become Nevada’s First Lady when her husband was elected governor in 1950. Yours truly spent many hours talking with Marjorie Russell prior to her death in 1997. If only I had known of the conversation with Carole Lombard I would have asked what the colorful actress shared with her as a teenager.

Photo credits:
Top: Advertisement for Powell & Lombard’s movie My Man “Godfrey” from the Reno Evening Gazette, September 25, 1936, 2:3-4

Bottom: Carole Lombard at dedication ceremony for a portion of the Tahoe Rim-of-the-Lake Highway (Nevada Highway 28) August 6, 1933. To Lombard’s left is six-year-old Hatherly Bliss, “Miss Nevada,” and to her right is eight-year-old Barbara M. Bates, “Miss California.” Photo courtesy of William W. Bliss, Carson City/Glenbrook, Nevada.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal; the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley; the Humboldt Sun; the Battle Mountain Bugle; Lovelock Review-Miner, and Nevada Observer (online version).
I would like audiences to remember I had game. Bruce Dern, Things I’ve Said, But Probably Shouldn’t Have (2007)

Actor Bruce Dern and I worked together in a PBS documentary on Lake Tahoe environmental issues, The Fate of the Jewel (2001). That’s when I learned he married his current wife in Carson City.

You may remember Dern as the bad guy who killed John Wayne in The Cowboys (1972), or, perhaps you recall his Oscar-nominated performance with Academy Award winners Jane Fonda and Jon Voight in Coming Home (1978). His acting career dates back to the late 1950s and includes hundreds of plays, movies and TV productions. His memoir, Things I’ve Said, But Probably Shouldn’t Have, was published in 2007.

Prior to videotaping the Lake Tahoe production at Stateline’s Edgewood Country Club, Dern shared that his grandfather, George H. Dern, had been a Utah governor and President Franklin Roosevelt’s first Secretary of War; that his godmother was Eleanor Roosevelt and his godfather was Adlai Stevenson; and that his uncle was the Pulitzer-prize winning poet/playwright and Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish.

Dern then asked me where I lived. I replied Carson City. Was I surprised when Dern told me that his buddy Elliott Gould and Barbra Streisand married in the state capital, and, so did he.

Dern married Andrea Beckett in 1969. He had recently divorced second wife actress Diane Ladd, the mother of Laura Dern (Laura is a successful actress in her own right and the apple of her father’s eye). The marriage license application noted that Bruce M. Dern, 33, of Santa Monica, California, was divorced on September 18, 1969. While Beckett, a fledging actress also from Santa Monica, used her maiden name as her stage name, the 28-year-old widow signed the application with her married name, Andrea R. Kermott. Justice of the Peace Pete Supera, who had presided over the Gould-Streisand wedding six years earlier, conducted the ceremony for Dern and Beckett on October 20.

“Andrea and I had been living together about four months, and we decided we wanted to get married,” Dern writes in his memoirs. He noted that the money he earned from acting in the B-horror--he called it a Z-horror--film The Incredible Two-Headed Transplant paid for the wedding. “Andrea won’t have a shot of any kind, so we wanted to get married in Nevada because they don’t require blood tests there. We were going to Tahoe in October after I’d run in the American Fifty Mile Championship at Rocklin outside of Sacramento.”

Dern was a world class runner and ran track for the University of Pennsylvania before quitting school to join the prestigious Actor’s Studio in New York City in 1958. He received training from Lee Strasberg and Elia Kazan who remained his friends throughout their lives.

Dern also enjoyed a good working relationship with director Alfred Hitchcock appearing in two of Alfred Hitchcock Hour TV episodes, the motion picture Marnie (1964), and starring in Family Plot (1976).

His lead role in Silent Running (1972) was a major boost to his career. He also appeared in such noteworthy movies as They Shoot Horses Don’t They? (1969), The King of Marvin Gardens (1972) with long-time friend Jack Nicholson, The Great Gatsby (1974), Black Sunday (1977), and, more recently, Monster (2003) with Oscar-winner Charlize Theron.
Andrea Beckett’s acting career was short lived. She had moved from North Dakota to New York City to become a model and an actress. After losing her husband and high-school sweetheart in an auto accident, Beckett, 24, relocated to Los Angeles. Dern was Beckett's teacher at the Strasberg Theatre Institute in the summer of 1969.

A photo of the buxom beauty in the April 24, 1969 edition of the Long Beach Press-Telegram was captioned: “Andrea Becket, one of [the] newest of film stars, is queen of first Long Beach World Invitational marathon. . . .” However, the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) does not have a biography or filmography for her.

Beckett has gone on to make a name for herself as an artist and painter. According to Dern, Barbra Streisand bought one of his wife’s first paintings and he mentions Heather Locklear and Pierce Brosnan as purchasing her artwork. Besides her own houses, Beckett has also decorated a number of the homes of Hollywood’s rich and famous.

“I respect Andrea enormously,” Dern writes. “She’s as close to the perfect lady as anyone I’ve ever known. . . . Andrea and I have a magical existence.”

Now that’s one celebrity marriage that has withstood the test of time and it all started with a quickie wedding in Carson City.
One of Nevada’s long-standing myths is that President Theodore Roosevelt (1901-09) stopped and visited Governor John Sparks’ impressive Alamo Stock Farm. Some stories actually claim the president stayed the night at the governor’s house during a trip to Nevada. The claims are generally made for the year 1904; Roosevelt only visited Nevada once as president in 1903. Of course, people want to believe the stories and still do.

Stockman John Sparks bought the property he would name the Alamo Stock Farm from prominent farmer Jason C. Smith in 1887. The ranch location was mostly northwest of what is now the intersection of Virginia Street and Peckham Road. Before Sparks was elected Nevada governor in 1902, he expanded the already large house built by Smith in 1875 and made it an imposing mansion surrounded by Hereford cattle, bison, Persian sheep, elk and deer. The mansion was moved to the southwest corner of Steamboat Valley in 1978.

Governor Sparks met the presidential train in Truckee, California, on May 19, 1903. The train arrived in Reno at 7:30 a.m. President Roosevelt’s whirlwind speaking tour in western Nevada marked only the second time a sitting president had visited Reno and Carson City. The Reno Evening Gazette in a banner headline claimed it was the first visit by a sitting president, failing to note that President Rutherford B. Hayes briefly spoke in Reno on September 7, 1880 before traveling to Carson City and the Comstock.

Roosevelt’s presidential train stopped long enough to switch engines and proceeded to Carson City. The Virginia & Truckee Railroad tracks were located immediately east of Governor Sparks’ palatial, carpenter Gothic mansion. The reporter for the Carson City News, who apparently boarded the train in Truckee with the Nevada party, noted President Roosevelt’s comment when he saw the Alamo Stock Farm from the railroad car window:

“As he [President Roosevelt] passed Governor Sparks’ magnificent ranch this side of Reno, he remarked: ‘I wish I could return here and stay a week or more at your place, Governor. We would have some splendid times, eh?’”

According to journalist Alfred Doten, the presidential train arrived at the Carson City passenger depot at 8:45 a.m. and the party was transported by carriage to the front of the State Capitol. Carson City had gone all out to greet President Roosevelt; a banner was strung in front of the statehouse reading “Nevada Honors the Hero of San Juan.” People traveled from as far away as Tonopah to hear the nation’s chief executive. Doten claimed the audience was “fully 15,000 people.” However the Carson City News estimated the crowd size to be seven thousand. Even with the lower figure, it exceeded the attendance at the Corbett-Fitzsimmons world heavyweight championship fight in 1897 and was the largest crowd for any single event in Carson City history excluding the Nevada Day parades.

After being introduced by Governor Sparks, President Roosevelt spoke for nearly half an hour. He talked of many things, but most importantly for Nevadans he extolled the value of reclamation in the American west. The Truckee-Carson Project legislation had been passed by Congress and signed by President Roosevelt in 1902 at the behest of U.S. Rep. Francis G. Newlands of Nevada. The Secretary of the Interior had recently approved five such projects, including Nevada’s and construction of the Truckee Canal was about to begin. Nevadans seemingly had much to celebrate following years of depression in the mining industry.

Roosevelt spent about an hour in Carson City before boarding the presidential train and returning to Reno. His scheduled arrival time there was 11:10 a.m. Again, Roosevelt passed the Alamo Stock Farm prior to his arrival at the Southern Pacific Railroad depot in Reno. The president was on a very tight schedule and the reporters for the two Reno and the two Carson City newspapers surely would have highlighted the presidential train stopping at the Governor’s ranch, if it happened.
President Roosevelt regaled the crowd in front of the Washoe County Courthouse for about fifteen minutes. Running late, the presidential entourage made a hasty excursion to the University of Nevada campus where Roosevelt spoke to the student body for some three minutes. This was the last time a sitting president visited the university until President Ronald Reagan spoke there on October 7, 1982.

By 12:30 p.m., Teddy Roosevelt had boarded the presidential train and was on his way to Oregon via Sacramento. He would return to Reno as a private citizen in 1911 and again in 1912, running as the “Bull Moose” presidential candidate on the Progressive Party ticket.

Meanwhile, Governor John Sparks died in his mansion on May 22, 1908 and the Sparks family sold the Alamo Stock Farm shortly thereafter.

Some folks wedded to the myth can perhaps take solace knowing that, while there is no evidence Roosevelt visited or stayed at the Alamo Stock Farm, the president did see it twice looking out his railroad car window and expressed a desire to spend time there.

Photograph of President Roosevelt on the steps of the Nevada State Capitol courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal; the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley; the Humboldt Sun; the Battle Mountain Bugle; Lovelock Review-Miner, and Nevada Observer (online version).
Felice Cohn, Nevada's first native-born female lawyer, was a woman of many accomplishments, but she was neither a child prodigy nor a graduate of Stanford University. The mythology begins with an article in the June 9, 1905, Goldfield News, correctly acknowledging her having passed the bar in 1902 and incorrectly stating that she was a graduate of Stanford University.

Stanford University Archives confirm that while Cohn attended the university during the years 1895-96 and 1896-97, she never graduated with her class of 1899.

The 1880 Federal Census reported Felice Cohn born in Carson City in 1878, as did the 1900 census. In 1910, however, her age was given as 28, making her birth year 1882.

A Ladies' Home Journal article (September 1928) emphasized her youthful successes, including having passed the bar in 1902 at the age of 18. Had this been true, it would have placed her birth date in 1884, six years after the fact.

The 1930 U.S. Federal Census indicated Felice's age as 45. Depending on the date the census was taken, she could have had a supposed birth year of 1884 or 1885. Cohn was living alone in Reno at the time and likely was the person who provided the census enumerator with her age.

The incorrect birth date appeared in a Nevada State Journal feature story on March 2, 1930, then found its way into her obituary in 1961, and into numerous subsequent biographical sketches.

As recently as March 26, 2008, the Reno-Gazette Journal carried an article repeating the saga of Cohn's alleged exploits as a teacher at the age of 11, a Stanford graduate at 15 and as Nevada's youngest lawyer at the age of 18.

The same piece reiterated the widely believed report that she was appointed Assistant U.S. Attorney for Nevada in 1906. The facts are that after passing the bar in 1902, she worked as a court reporter and shared a Carson City office with Samuel Platt.

He was appointed U.S. Attorney for Nevada in 1906 by President Theodore Roosevelt. Felice Cohn might have served as an assistant to him in his capacity as U.S. Attorney, but there is, as yet, no evidence that she had a federal appointment to this office.

By then, rather, she actively was involved with land and mining legal matters in Goldfield.

Cohn gained a western regional reputation as an expert in land law policy and for several years had an office in Denver.

Cohn is correctly remembered as a Nevada women's suffrage proponent. She disaffiliated herself from Ann Martin's Nevada Equal Franchise Society in 1913 and became a leader in the non-militant suffrage movement. Her understanding of the law and Nevada politics allowed her to craft the women's suffrage resolution first passed in 1911, which became the language of the 1914 amendment to the Nevada Constitution granting women the right to vote and hold office.

In 1916, she was admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court. Cohn ran unsuccessfully on the Democratic ticket for State Assembly in 1924 and in the same year was appointed U.S. Referee for Bankruptcy for the State of Nevada.

She worked for child labor law amendments and opposed any legislation adversely affecting women and children. She served as trustee and lawyer for the Reno YWCA, vice-president of the American Bar
Association for Nevada (1930-31) and for ten years she headed the Nevada branch of the National Association of Women Lawyers. Although she was unaffiliated with Temple Emanu-El, the B'nai B'rith Women's Grand Lodge certified Cohn as president of the B'nai B'rith Nevada Auxiliary #9 on March 2, 1941.

Cohn ran unsuccessfully for Washoe County District Judge in 1942, 1950 and 1952 but her resume encompassed an extraordinary list of distinguished public services. The facts of her remarkable career do not need the oft-repeated exaggerated claims of her youth, education or subsequent positions.

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Photo of Felice Cohn courtesy of the Nevada State Museum.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal; the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley; the Humboldt Sun; the Battle Mountain Bugle; Lovelock Review-Miner, and Nevada Observer (online version).
Director Clint Eastwood's recently-released movie, *J. Edgar*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio as longtime FBI head J. Edgar Hoover, features anarchist Emma Goldman early in the film.

Labeled by Hoover in 1919 as "one of the most dangerous women in America," Goldman had lectured in Reno in 1910. She arrived with her manager and companion, Dr. Ben Reitman, by train from Salt Lake City on April 15. Reitman, characterized by his biographer as Chicago's "celebrated social reformer, hobo king, and whorehouse physician," scheduled two presentations at the downtown Eagle Hall conspicuously on Sunday--the Christian Sabbath--April 17.

Goldman, who immigrated to the United States from Russia in 1885 at the age of sixteen, and was inspired by the Haymarket Square Riot in Chicago the following year to embrace anarchism, first met the colorful and controversial Dr. Reitman in the "Windy City" in 1908. They fell in love, he joined the anarchist ranks, and they began touring the country together. It was during their 1910 tour that the couple decided Reno needed to hear her messages on "Anarchism" and "Marriage and Love." The *Nevada State Journal* quoted Reitman as saying that normally Goldman did not speak in cities of less than 50,000, "and therefore Reno should be very proud of her presence in its midst." The principal reason for the brief stop in Reno on the way to speaking engagements in San Francisco appears to have been Goldman's interest in the newly-acclaimed divorce capital of the nation.

"Reno is proof of my contention that marriage is a failure," the firebrand feminist told a local reporter. "At my lecture, I will invite any divorcees present to get up and tell me why they are here, and to state whether they believe my ideas are right or wrong. Nevada is in an advanced state. Its divorce laws stamp it as a modern, free thinking community."

As the so-called high priestess of anarchy, Goldman had no use for women’s suffrage. Nevada women were diligently pursuing the right to vote when Goldman arrived on the scene. However, she had visited the states of Wyoming and Colorado where women had been voting for many years and saw no evidence that their subordinate position in society had changed. "Why waste time with suffrage," Goldman proclaimed, "when the same can be gained so much easier in a sociological way?"

The *Nevada State Journal* countered in an April 16 editorial that "The people of Nevada are not inclined to the principles of anarchism. They will listen out of curiosity to Emma Goldman's talk, but they will not forsake their adherence to the principles of democracy."

The 8 p.m. talk on "Marriage and Love" drew a large crowd. "Goldman Talks on Free Love" read the front page *Journal* headline. The accompanying story noted that the diminutive "Miss Goldman’s radical views were very radical. . . . She quite took the breath away from many, who gasped continually . . . ." Goldman argued that women who came to Reno for divorces, only to marry again, were not free. Marriage was an economic agreement. "A husband isn’t a woman’s friend or comrade," she declared, "he is her keeper." Goldman referenced Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen’s *Doll House* and *Ghosts* numerous times in her scathing criticism of the institution of marriage and patriarchal family dynamics.

Goldman concluded her talk by condemning all the female prostitution in Reno, calling it "white slavery," and claiming 75% of the men patronizing prostitutes were married.

"All in all the lecture was convincing, and those who listened seemed to enjoy the experience," the *Journal* reporter wrote. "No policemen were present, which is somewhat strange for a Goldman lecture, nevertheless it was successful."
As a result of Hoover’s efforts, the federal government deported Goldman to Russia in 1919, invoking the wartime Anarchist Exclusion Act. While Goldman had initially supported the Bolshevik Revolution two years earlier as the coming of the new world order, she quickly became disillusioned with Vladimir Lenin’s Soviet dictatorship of the proletariat. Goldman died on May 14, 1940 in Toronto. Her body was transported to Chicago and buried in nearby Forest Park’s Waldheim (now Home Park) Cemetery, close to the 1893 Haymarket Martyrs’ Monument. Ben Reitman, who died in 1942, is buried nearby.

In an August 11, 2008 visit to the cemetery, I was surprised to find that Goldman’s gravestone has her death in 1939. She probably wouldn’t have cared about the erroneous date and approved the circle-A anarchist symbol more recently painted on the marker.

Credit: Photograph of Emma Goldman lecture card courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal; the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley; Humboldt Sun; Battle Mountain Bugle; Lovelock Review-Miner, and Nevada Observer (online version).
Molly Magee Knudtsen (1915-2001) had a long and distinguished tenure on the Nevada Board of Regents. A recent biographical sketch proclaimed that "Knudtsen became the first women elected to the Nevada Board of Regents, serving for twenty years (1960-80) and helping to establish community colleges, the University of Nevada Press, and the Department of Anthropology at UNR."

All of that is true of her legacy and more, except for two things. Knudtsen was not the first women elected to the Board of Regents, she was the fourth. While numerous secondary sources make the erroneous claim, three women were elected, and two appointed, to the board before Knudtsen won her race in 1960. In addition, Knudtsen served as a Regent for eighteen years, not twenty, between 1960 and 1980 with a break in service.

The first woman to win a state-wide race after Nevada's male electorate gave women the right to vote and hold office in 1914 was Mrs. Edna Catlin Baker, a Republican, elected in November 1916 to a two-year term on the Board of Regents. A native of Carson City, Baker graduated from the University of Nevada in 1895. Earlier in 1916 she had been elected to the Sparks Board of School Trustees and made its president, thus holding local and state offices at the same time.

Regent Baker voted in the majority for the removal of University of Nevada President Archer W. Hendrick shortly after her taking office in 1917 and she supported the appointment of Walter E. Clark--father of renowned author Walter Van Tilburg Clark--as President later that year. Baker also served as chair of the board's finance committee. However she chose not to run for reelection. An excellent biographical article written by Dana Bennett and entitled "Leading the Charge: Edna Baker Helped Set Nevada's Course," was published in the March/April 1997 issue of UNR's Silver and Blue.

Mrs. Eunice Esther Hood of Reno was elected to an eight-year term of the Board of Regents in 1918. The previous year the state legislature had made the regent post non-partisan. When Regent Miles North resigned in 1923, Governor James Scrugham appointed Mrs. Sophie E. Williams of remote Hot Creek in Nye County to the board. Now two women served on the five-member body until 1926. Mrs. Hood did not run for reelection when her term expired and Mrs. Williams died in 1927.

When Molly Flagg Gibb came to Sparks from New York City to train race horses in 1940, Anne Wardin was sitting on the Board of Regents. Mrs. Anne Wardin of Reno, like Edna Baker an 1895 graduate of the University of Nevada, was elected a regent in 1938; she was the third woman elected to the board. Wardin died in 1944 and Governor "Ted" Carville appointed Mary Henningsen to the remainder of the ten-year term.

Surely Molly Magee, who had divorced Robert Pinkerton Gibb in Reno in 1941 and married Grass Valley rancher Richard "Dick" Magee the following year, knew that Mrs. Wardin and her successor Mary Henningsen of Gardnerville were Nevada regents.

An article in the June 22, 1960 issue of Reno's Nevada State Journal entitled "Housewife Files For Regent Post," accompanied by a photograph of Molly Magee captioned "Lander County housewife," noted the five female regents who had served before her run for office. The story also pointed out the 1957 legislature had expanded the size of the Board of Regents to nine and provided for election by district.

Magee handily beat her male incumbent opponent for the District No. 3 seat representing Nevada's fifteen rural counties. The margin of victory was larger than all the other races for board district seats in 1960. She went on to serve eighteen years as a regent, 1960-72 and 1974-80, serving two terms as vice-chair.
UNR History Professor Emeritus Jim Hulse paid Molly Magee Knudtsen—who divorced Dick Magee in 1968 and married William C. Knudtsen—high praise when he described her in his university history published in 1974 as “one of the most articulate and best informed persons to function as a regent in recent years.”

Photograph of Molly Magee Knudtsen (UNRA-P1791-1) courtesy of University Archives, University of Nevada, Reno.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal; the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley; Humboldt Sun; Battle Mountain Bugle; Lovelock Review-Miner, and Nevada Observer (online version).
The story of the Reese River Navigation Company in central Nevada is an oft repeated tall tale very short on depth.

Of nationwide scope was the stock promotion bubble of the Reese River Navigation Company... when thousands of credulous souls bought shares in a company 'to freight rich ore from mines to mill on barges floating down the Reese River.' Little could they tell that the impressive river on the maps was (like most Nevada rivers) only a few inches deep!

So says *Pioneer Nevada* (1951), a creation of Reno's Thomas C. Wilson Advertising Agency, in its story "Incredible Austin!"

The claim for the little river-just a stream really-in Lander and Nye counties is pure invention, a real anecdotal whooper, getting bigger and better with every telling. A host of articles and books have further exaggerated the tale since it first appeared in Nevada newspapers in 1946 as part of a Reno Harolds Club promotion. Any mention of the Reese River Navigation Company is conspicuously absent in Fred Hart's *Sazerac Lying Club* (1878), Oscar Lewis's *The Town That Died Laughing* (1955), and Donald R. Abbe's scholarly study, *Austin and the Reese River Mining District* (1985).

It's not known if John L. "Jock" Taylor, editor of Virginia City's *Territorial Enterprise* (1946) and Austin's *Reese River Reveille* (1949-62), created the story or just embellished it. A July 8, 1955 *Oakland Tribune* story quoted Taylor as saying:

> Thousands of gullible easterners dragged the old socks out from wherever they were hidden and peeled off greenbacks to a total never revealed. What became of the greenbacks and the promoters who garnered them nobody appears to have learned. Despite all the furor created by the navigation company, the Reese remains a virgin stream, down which no barge has ever floated or ever will.

Taylor also pointed out "that during the greater portion of the time it is necessary to grease the sides of the trout to enable them to navigate between the banks of the noble Reese."

Nevada native and history buff Myrtle T. Myles, writing in the *Reno Evening Gazette* on February 17, 1962, placed the alleged swindle during the Austin mining boom in the 1860s. Reporting one hundred years later on recent flooding in central Nevada, Myles called the river, named by Captain James H. Simpson for early Nevada pioneer and scout John Reese, the "muddy trickle." "Old posters printed by a fake concern, The Reese River Navigation Company, to which stock was sold to gullible Easterners," Myles recalled, "showing steamers plying up and down the stream, along whose banks factories and mills were pouring out smoke and steam, would not at present seem so ridiculous."

A contemporary version of the fable claims "Shares of the Reese River Navigation Company formed to freight ore in barges to the railroad, sold briskly to investors who recalled the strategic importance of the Sacramento River traffic to the Mother Lode mines of California fifteen years earlier." The fallacy in this rendition is that by the time the Central Pacific Railroad reached Battle Mountain in late 1868 the Reese River mining district was no longer booming and only some 2,000 people remained in Austin.

To date no Reese River Navigation Company posters have been found. Nor is there any record of a company by that name in the Secretary of State domestic and foreign incorporation filings housed in the Nevada State Archives. A review of digital and analog newspaper indexes for newspapers throughout Nevada and the United States using keyword "Reese River Navigation Company" has turned up nothing prior to 1946.
Myth #137: Navigating a Tall Tale by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

From all indications, Mark Twain, Dan DeQuille, Sam Davis, Fred Hart and a host of Nevada's nineteenth-century "humbug" journalists would be suitably impressed with the latter-day hoax called the Reese River Navigation Company.

Photo credit: Photo of Reese River flood near Austin, Nevada, 1910, courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal; the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley; the Humboldt Sun; the Battle Mountain Bugle; Lovelock Review-Miner, and Nevada Observer (online version).
With much fanfare Carson City dedicated the Hermon Lee Ensign National Humane Alliance fountain on Labor Day, 1909. The polished granite fountain, then-located at the intersection of Carson and King streets in front of the State Capitol, was manufactured in Derby, Maine, and donated by the New York City animal rights organization. It was moved to its current location—some fifty feet to the west—by 1936 when the portion of King Street between Carson and Curry streets was condemned for the construction of a new Supreme Court and Library building.

The five-ton, six-foot plus high fountain, which includes a light fixture at the top, is composed of a six-foot diameter bowl with three lion head spouts where “men, horses and dogs” could drink. There are small cups at the bottom for cats, dogs and other animals. A plaque notes that the fountain was donated by the Humane Alliance in 1909. The story goes that each state received one fountain, making a total of forty-eight in 1912. People occasionally contact the Nevada State Library & Archives believing that the fountain in their city and the one in Carson City are the only two left in the country. Wrong on all counts!

While no definitive list of fountains is known to exist, there appear to have been as many as one hundred and twenty-five distributed throughout the nation. Some still exist. Nevada's only fountain is found in the state capital. Unfortunately, it has operated just sporadically over the years. The fountain last worked in the early 1990s thanks to a grant from Nevada's 125th Anniversary Commission and the efforts of Terry Sullivan, then director of the Nevada Department of General Services. Notably, benefactor Hermon Lee Ensign died in New York City in 1899 before any fountains were manufactured. The self-made man who had acquired his fortune in journalism and advertising was devoted to the welfare of animals in a time when animal welfare was a growing concern in the country. “To him, animals were not merely inferiors or slaves, they were companions and friends, devoting themselves to man and dependent on him for their lives and happiness,” according to National Humane Alliance promotional literature.

The Humane Alliance under the direction of President Harrison Grey Fiske, a New York City journalist and theatrical manager, made Ensign's dream of addressing animal welfare a reality. Minnie Maddern Fiske, Harrison's wife, was not only one of the leading actresses in the day, but also a prominent humanitarian and animal welfare advocate in her own right. She took up the cause for abused dray horses, called for the humane confinement of cattle being transported by rail to market, lectured against fur-trapping, and opposed bullfighting. The animal rights organization, spurred by the Fiskes, began donating fountains in 1906—the first dedicated in Derby, Maine—through at least 1911. The Fiske Collection in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress contains several boxes of Mrs. Fiske's materials which relate to her work advocating the humane treatment of animals world-wide.
The Fiske collection came to my attention through the pet project of Norman and Virginia "Bird" White of Minden, Nevada. Norm contacted me in 1998 and wanted to know more about Carson City's fountain, noting that while attending high school in Clinton, Missouri, the town also had a fountain donated by the National Humane Alliance.

Norm and Bird spent the next ten years periodically travelling around the country in their classic 1955 Pontiac sedan and 1955 Pontiac Safari station wagon trying to find every National Humane Alliance fountain. Many were found in such places as Ottumwa, Iowa; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Auburn, New York; and Clarksville, Tennessee. Most had been moved at least once from their original locations, some were used as planters, and only a handful still operated. Tragically, the Whites died in an automobile accident south of Minden on May 23, 2008. I paid tribute to Norm and Bird at the memorial ceremony at Douglas High School, and, now again, in dedicating this column in memory of all their good work for man and beast.

Photo credit: Top: The Carson City Herman Lee Ensign National Humane Alliance fountain in the intersection of Carson and King Streets, ca 1909. Photo courtesy of the Nevada State Archives.

Bottom: A photo, ca 1982, of the National Humane Alliance fountain on the grounds of the Nevada Supreme Court and Library building with the Nevada State Capitol in the background. Note the light fixture attached to the top of the fountain. Photo courtesy of the Nevada State Archives.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal; the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley; the Humboldt Sun; the Battle Mountain Bugle; Lovelock Review-Miner, and Nevada Observer (online version).
Well meaning claims of a “first” for people are made all the time in the name of legacy. The claimants in all likelihood believe the claims to be true. However, more times than not, the claims have not been researched, are not true, and overshadow the legacy of the people who really were first.

Take, for example, the claim of who was Nevada’s first female school administrator. A paid newspaper obituary in the Reno Gazette Journal, written by a private party, noted that “Rose M. Bullis, Nevada’s first female school administrator, passed away on January 19, 2009, in Reno.” In chronicling Mrs. Bullis’ distinguished career in Nevada education, the obituary said her career in school administration began in the 1950s and continued until her retirement in 1979. The obituary, for its purposes, defined school administrators as positions above principals but not including principals.

It is true Rose Bullis was among the first female public school administrators when the occupation was dominated by men. The obituary states that Bullis was the first Curriculum and Instruction Coordinator. Yet, Maude Frazier became a female public school administrator in 1921 when she was appointed a deputy superintendent in the State Department of Education.

Born and raised in Wisconsin, Frazier arrived in Nevada in 1906 to take a job as teacher/principal in Genoa. Before she became a public school administrator, she also taught in Lovelock, Seven Troughs, Beatty, Goldfield and Sparks. The job as a deputy superintendent headquartered in Las Vegas involved her supervising all public schools in Clark, Lincoln, Esmeralda, and Nye counties. "Four men had given up on that particular territory," Frazier wrote, "saying nobody on earth could get over that desert country."

In 1927, Frazier took the job of superintendent of the Las Vegas Union School District and principal of the high school. She persuaded the voters to support a bond issue for a new high school. Las Vegas High School (now Las Vegas Academy) was built in 1931 and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Frazier retired from the school district in 1946. She ran unsuccessfully for the State Assembly in 1948, but won a seat in 1950 that she held for twelve years. In 1955, Frazier convinced her fellow legislators to support a university campus in southern Nevada. The first building on the Nevada Southern University (UNLV) campus in 1957 was named Maude Frazier Hall (it was razed the weekend of January 24-25, 2009).

In 1962, when Lt. Governor Rex Bell--a former cowboy film star--died while campaigning for governor, Governor Grant Sawyer appointed the 81-year-old Frazier as Bell's replacement. She was the first woman in Nevada to hold a constitutional office and served six months. In poor health, Frazier had no interest in being elected lieutenant governor for a full term and died in her sleep in 1963.

Like Rose Bullis, Maude Frazier was an extraordinary woman in a male-dominated society.

Frazier's contribution to education in Nevada can be summed up in her own words:

"Our schools tend too much to conformity. We turn out people who know the same things, do the same things, think the same way. Yes, it has been the nonconformists, the people who dared to be different . . . who have contributed most to the world—the Edisons, the Wrights, the Marconis. Instead of trying to make people fit into a certain mold, we should encourage them to furnish their own mold."


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“No son-of-a-bitch ever knocked me off my feet,” boasted “Jake” LaMotta, the middleweight boxing champion between 1949 and 1951.

The feature film Raging Bull (1980), directed by Martin Scorsese and starring Robert De Niro as LaMotta, took for granted LaMotta's claim in his autobiography that no boxer ever knocked him down.

But Danny Nardico, who died in Sacramento on Nov. 22, 2010 at age 85, knocked him down. He did it with a right in the seventh round of a light heavyweight fight in Coral Gables, Florida, on New Year's Eve, 1952. The bout can be viewed on YouTube. LaMotta's corner stopped the bout before the eighth round of the scheduled ten-round contest.

Nardico was a battle-scarred ex-Marine who received the Silver Star during World War II. It was LaMotta who helped Nardico get started in the fight game in 1949. The one-time light heavyweight contender who fought out of Tampa, Florida, had a ring record of 50 wins (35 by knockout), 13 losses, and 4 draws. Nardico was particularly proud of being the only boxer to deck LaMotta, even if it was near the end of the Raging Bull's ring career. So, not surprisingly, he was furious that the movie failed to credit him with the knockdown.

Nardico coached boxing and ran the recreation program at the Northern Nevada Correctional Center (NNCC) in Carson City for over fifteen years. I remember seeing the yellowed newspaper clippings of the LaMotta fight and other Nardico memorabilia outside his office at the weigh-ins prior to my three-round boxing match at NNCC in 1977 (I won the contest by technical knockout over my inmate opponent).

The first time I met Nardico was after LaMotta's autobiography was published in 1970 but before the release of Raging Bull in 1980. The movie was a box-office hit and De Niro received the Academy Award for best actor. However, Nardico's legacy in the boxing world was ignored in the film. I met Nardico again while playing a softball game at NNCC after Raging Bull's release. He clearly felt robbed of his glory.

Hopefully, this column sets the record straight in paying tribute, and bidding farewell, to a one-time Nevadan and the only boxer to knock down the colorful and controversial Jake LaMotta.

Photo credit: Danny Nardico, left, and Frank Sinatra, Jr. at the Northern Nevada Correctional Center Gym in Carson City. Photo courtesy of Nardico's grandson, Richard C. Galindo, Jr.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal; the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley; Humboldt Sun; Battle Mountain Bugle; Lovelock Review-Miner, and Nevada Observer (online version).
Myth #141: Dead on Arrival by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

The few presidents of the United States who came to Nevada in its first 100 years included Warren G. Harding. However, Harding was dead when he arrived by train in 1923.

The 29th president left Union Station in Washington. D.C. alive on June 20 with the First Lady and his entourage on a two-month cross-country trip dubbed the “Voyage of Understanding.” The first-term, Republican president’s administration had been plagued by scandal. The tour, in part, was intended to shore up his popularity prior to a reelection bid in 1924. In addition, Harding planned to promote the country’s membership in the World Court in hopes the body would help preserve international peace following World War I.

After being the first president to visit Alaska, and the first to deliver a speech in Canada while in Vancouver, British Columbia, Harding returned to the states where he took ill in Seattle. A scheduled speech in Portland was cancelled and the presidential train traveled directly to San Francisco. Arriving on July 29, 1923, the president stayed at the famed Palace Hotel and was examined by a physician from Stanford University. Running a fever, Harding still insisted he would deliver his scheduled August 1 speech. His advisors overruled him and plans were made to return to Washington, D.C. The 57-year-old president died suddenly on August 2. There was no autopsy and it was later assumed that he had died of a heart attack or a stroke. Vice-President Calvin Coolidge was sworn in as President by his father, a notary public, on August 3 in Vermont where he was visiting.

The Harding Special train carrying the former president’s body that was bound for Washington, D.C. passed through Reno early on August 4. The flag-draped casket elevated on a bier and surrounded by flowers was in the rail car Superb. An overhead light illuminated the casket and made the honor guard visible through the windows of the last car on the train. The many onlookers bowed their heads and men removed their hats in paying their respects. The funeral train stopped for ten minutes in the Sparks railroad yard where some three thousand people waited “just as the sun rose broke over the horizon,” according to biographer Francis Russell. Among them were Governor James Scrugham, former Governor Emmett Boyle, former U.S. Representative Samuel Arentz, Reno Mayor Edwin E. Roberts, and Sparks Mayor August Krehmke. Those in the crowd close enough to the Superb filed up and down the steps of the rear platform to get a glimpse of the casket.

The Harding Special spent the rest of the day crossing the state. Nevadans along the way turned out to bid the former president good-bye. The train stopped briefly in Battle Mountain. A scheduled stop in Elko was cancelled because of a mix-up in trying to connect former First Lady Florence Harding with President Coolidge by telephone.

At 5:15 PM, the train made its final stop in Nevada at Montello, near the Utah border where US Attorney General Harry Daugherty, Secretary of Agriculture Henry C. Wallace, and House Speaker Frederick Gillett stretched their legs on the station platform. The Harding Special arrived in Washington, D.C. on August 7.

On August 10, 1923, the nation by presidential proclamation observed a “Day of National Mourning and Prayer” for Warren G. Harding, the only president to visit Nevada after he died.

For a more in-depth treatment of President Harding’s post-mortem visit to Nevada, see John Gilbertson, American History Made in Nevada (Sparks: Pah Rah Press, 2008).

Photo credit: Harding funeral train stopped in Battle Mountain, Nevada, August 4, 1923. Courtesy of the Special Collections Department and University Archives, Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center, University of Nevada, Reno.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal; the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley; the Humboldt Sun; the Battle Mountain Bugle; the Lovelock Review-Miner, and the Nevada Observer (online version).
Virtually everyone has heard of Denver, Colorado. Nevada had a Denver too. Not a town, but Frank Denver, the younger brother of attorney James William Denver. It was James who was serving as governor of Kansas Territory in 1858 when the fledgling community located at the base of the Rocky Mountains was named. Before Congress created Colorado Territory in 1861, the town of Denver was in western Kansas.

Frank Denver was a controversial Nevada lieutenant governor from 1871 to 1875. While Frank was ex-officio warden of the state prison in Carson City, there was a major prison break involving twenty-seven inmates on September 17, 1871. Denver was seriously wounded in the confused melee.

Nevadans were unhappy with the circumstances surrounding the escape and demanded something be done about the prison operation. At the recommendation of Governor Lewis Bradley, the 1873 state legislature passed a law creating the position of warden, which required professional law enforcement qualifications, and a Board of Prison Commissioners. While the new law went into effect on April 1, the Prison Commissioners, which included the Governor, and the new warden decided to take over the prison operation on March 13. Initially Denver resisted the takeover, but had second thoughts when state militia units arrived to take the prison by force if necessary. Denver formally surrendered the prison and kept a low profile as lieutenant governor for the rest of his term.

Until the James Denver papers were examined recently at the University of California’s Bancroft Library in Berkeley, it was generally assumed that James and Frank were brothers. U.S. census records in 1860 and 1870 noted that James and Frank were born in Virginia. Still, no family connection could be made from the entries. In 1860, James, a former U.S. Representative for California identified in the census as a "gentleman" living with his wife, and Frank, a jeweler, were living in Sacramento, but not in the same domicile.

Frank, 48, died in San Francisco on August 8, 1875. Obituaries and death notices in Nevada newspapers make no mention of a brother. James, 75, died on August 9, 1892. He was buried in Wilmington, Ohio, where his family had moved in 1830 from Virginia. The national wire-service story noting James’ death in Washington, D.C. did not identify a brother.

The evidence that links James and Frank as brothers is more than a dozen letters from Frank to James between 1850 and 1871. The first letter is conspicuous because Frank sent it from Wilmington, Ohio, on March 25, 1850 to James who was preparing to leave Platte City, Missouri, to move to California. A letter dated June 8, 1868 from Virginia City, Nevada, to James confirms that the Frank Denver identified in the city directory as a "Commissioner, Pacific Railroad," is the same Frank Denver who wrote his brother that he was the newly appointed railroad commissioner. The last letter in the collection is dated February 26, 1871 from Lt. Governor Frank Denver in Carson City to his brother James.


Photo credit: Frank Denver, lieutenant governor and warden of the Nevada State Prison. Photo courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society, Reno.
The Great Depression in Nevada was not as great as it was in the rest of the nation. Wall Street crashed in late October 1929, but remote Nevada, with the smallest population in the country, barely felt the impact. Federal highway dollars and public work projects coupled with a thriving migratory divorce industry initially insulated the state from the economic disaster. Although the depression caught up to Nevada, a combination of federal and state legislative actions and a marketing effort labeled "One Sound State" extricated the Silver State from the Great Depression long before the onset of World War II.

On January 20, 1931, Governor Fred Balzar’s message to the legislature sounded a positive note. “The expenditures proposed in connection with the Boulder Canyon Project [Hoover Dam] in Clark County, running into many millions of dollars during the ensuing decade, as well as those made at the Naval Ammunition Depot in Mineral County, are factors tending to lessen financial distress among our people, and these disbursements added to those authorized by Congress for additional highway construction give promise that Nevadans can face the future in a most optimistic frame of mind.”

Looking to enhance Nevada’s tourist appeal, the 1931 legislature legalized casino gambling after it had been outlawed twenty-one years earlier; then lowered the residency period for migratory divorces to six weeks to out-maneuver states that had reduced their residency periods to three months. Due to improved highways linking Nevada to California and surrounding states, the quickie wedding business, with no waiting period, also grew significantly.

However, the Great Depression caught up with Nevada later in 1931. With the continued decline of the mining industry, and the state’s ranches and farms mortgaged to the hilt and in deep debt, many local banks, particularly those owned by George Wingfield, failed in 1932. After a run on the banks, a two-week state bank holiday was declared on November 1, then extended into December. The Wingfield banks went into receivership in 1933. Many livestock men and farmers were forced into bankruptcy.

The 1933 legislature cut the ad valorem tax on taxable property and slashed the state’s budget. The only tax passed was on insurance premiums. Arguably the worst years for Nevada during the Great Depression were from 1932 through 1934.

Congressional legislation favorable to mining during the New Deal era, and specifically the Silver Purchase Act of 1934 strongly supported by Nevada U.S. Senator Key Pittman, reinvigorated the state’s mining industry. With the end of Prohibition in late 1933, the state legislature in 1935 created a liquor tax and licensing fees. In addition, the legislature increased property taxes and the motor vehicle fuel excise tax and dealer licensing fees.

Thanks in part to the efforts of Senator Pittman, Nevada received the highest per capita federal dollars among the forty-eight states benefiting from President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal programs. At the same time, increased federal dollars boosted state highway construction.

By 1935, the State of Nevada enjoyed a budget surplus. It shared that news with the nation and world while promoting its modest taxes. Governor Richard Kirman joined business leaders from throughout the state in a “One Sound State” campaign. The intent was to draw wealthy people to Nevada. California millionaires were particularly targeted because the state income tax had been increased by the California legislature in 1935. The extensive national marketing campaign advertised Nevada as a state with “no income tax, no inheritance tax, no sales tax, no tax on intangibles, but with a balanced budget and a surplus.”

Literally scores of millionaires--among them Max Fleishmann, Wilbur D. May, LaVere Redfield, and E. L.
Myth #143: The Great Depression in Nevada by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

Cord (who became a state senator)—established residency in Nevada. The taxes on all the property purchased at Lake Tahoe, in and around Reno and Las Vegas, and throughout Nevada, helped fill the state’s coffers. By 1939, the state surplus was so large that the property tax rate, which had been raised by the 1937 legislature, was cut by 20 percent. A March 20, 1939 San Francisco Chronicle editorial entitled "Nevada Fires on Fort Taxation" playfully noted, "The legislature thought the surplus was getting too big, so it handed out a dividend to taxpayers by cutting taxes one-fifth. Unbelievable, but it is true. These people just do not belong in the United States."

The Great Depression was clearly over in Nevada by 1939 while the rest of the nation continued to struggle until the United States’ entrance into World War II.

Photo credit: One Sound State poster courtesy of Guy Rocha.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal; the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley; the Humboldt Sun; the Battle Mountain Bugle; the Lovelock Review-Miner; and the Nevada Observer (online version)
The "One Sound State" was not so sound after World War II.

The smallest state in the union boomed with the influx of newcomers and Nevada military veterans returning home and starting families. New students, without the baby boomers yet in schools, inundated Reno and Las Vegas area classrooms. Health care facilities were generally outdated and inadequate. Social welfare programs were practically non-existent. While Nevada did impose a 1 percent tax on the gross winnings of gambling-license holders in 1945, and another 1 percent in 1947, the revenue generated was not enough to keep pace with the infrastructure demands created by exponential growth.

"Nevada likes to call itself 'the one sound state,'" renowned author John Gunther wrote in his book, Inside U.S.A. (1947), "and postcards are available pointing out that it has no retail sales tax, no corporation tax, no state income tax, no inheritance tax-'and no thumb tax' on the roads. But the inadequacy of the schools and hospitals makes this boast a mockery."

With Nevada seemingly bursting at the seams, the newly-created Legislative Counsel Bureau ordered Legislative Counsel Jeff Springmeyer on November 7, 1947 to make a study of sales taxes throughout the country and the world. The final report in May 1948 noted that "Sales taxes, first widely adopted in the United States during the depression of the 'thirties, are now imposed by twenty-seven states and the Territory of Hawaii, and provide the largest single source of State revenues. Eleven states, however, have nullified or abandoned this form of taxation, four after popular referenda." The in-depth study concluded "the State sales tax is lucrative, feasible if not easy to administer, and regressive. The controversy hinges on the desirability, in each jurisdiction and in the Nation as a whole, of adding to or lessening the tax burden of middle and low-income groups."

Despite the efforts of Assembly Majority Leader Harry Claiborne, a sales tax bill introduced in 1949 lost by a narrow margin on the Assembly floor. Legislation approved that legislative session providing for a freeport tax exemption, whereby all inventories held for resale within or outside the borders of the state were tax-exempt, sparked a warehousing boom. However, as with the 2 percent tax on gambling, the revenue generated by the new industry was inadequate to meet the growing need for new infrastructure in Nevada.

Republican Charles Russell soundly defeat incumbent Democrat Vail Pittman in the 1950 race for governor after pledging no new taxes. The 1951 legislature followed suit and avoided raising taxes. The late Mary Ellen Glass wrote in Nevada's Turbulent '50s (1981), "A narrow tax base and a general lack of enthusiasm among the legislators for new or revised taxes combined to bring about what ultimately became a genuine crisis."

By the time the 1953 legislature opened, the baby boom in Nevada was overwhelming the elementary schools. At the same time, newcomers continued to flood into the state, most of them moving to greater Reno or Las Vegas. In response, the legislature passed an appropriation for education higher than the governor recommended, but less than educators requested.

Governor Russell, recognizing the ever-growing crisis with mushrooming school enrollment in the 1953-54 school year, created the Governor's School Survey Committee. In addition, the governor called the seventh special session in state history proclaiming, "Enrollment in the schools of many counties has been increasing so rapidly during the last several years that collapse of the elementary and high school education system, due to deficit spending, is a distinct threat."

Besides the approval of emergency funds to operate the schools, the special legislative session appropriated $25,000 for a study of the school crisis. The Peabody Report, prepared by a team of professionals from the George Peabody College for Teachers, recommended basic support funding
formulas and the consolidation of the more than 200 school districts into seventeen county-based districts.

The 1955 legislature reorganized the school districts, enacted the Peabody formulas, and passed a 2 percent sales and use tax. Governor Russell, who had dropped his no new tax pledge in his 1954 reelection campaign, promised to help the schools. He signed the bill.

The tax fight was not over however. An initiative petition to repeal the sales and use tax found its way onto the November 1956 general election ballot. Nevadans overwhelming supported the new tax by a vote of 60,685 to 27,499.

Arguably that vote sounded the death knell for Nevada's twenty-year-old "One Sound State" economic policy aimed at attracting the country's wealthiest citizens to Nevada as a tax shelter.

Photo credit: Cover of 1948 report by the Legislative Counsel Bureau on the Survey of Sales Taxes Applicable in Nevada courtesy of the Nevada State Library.

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Few people know that Nevada U.S. Senator Francis G. Newlands was a member of the United States Senate inquiry into the sinking of the passenger ship Titanic during its ill-fated maiden voyage. Newlands' biographers make no mention of his membership on the Commerce Committee subcommittee investigating the maritime disaster of April 14-15, 1912.

Newlands' best known legacy is the Truckee-Carson Reclamation Project (Newlands Project) in western Nevada, created by Congress in 1902 when he was a member of the House. He is also remembered for the Newlands Resolution which resulted in the Republic of Hawai'i being annexed and made a U.S. territory. Chevy Chase in Washington, D.C. and Maryland, owes its origin to Newlands and his business partners. His tenure in Congress spanned some 24 years between 1893 and 1917 when he died in office.

The reason Commerce Committee Chairman Knute Nelson and subcommittee Chairman William A. Smith, both Republicans, picked Newlands as one of the three Democrats to sit on the investigative body is unknown. However, on April 18, 1912 Senators Smith and Newlands took a train from the nation's capital and were waiting for the rescue ship Carpathia to dock in New York City, anxious to ensure that J. Bruce Ismay, president of the White Star Line and the surviving Titanic crew, would remain in the United States to give evidence. The two senators directed twenty subpoenas be served.

The inquiry opened on Friday morning, April 19 at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. Ismay was sworn in by Chairman Smith and the first witness to take the stand. Smith established the tone of the inquiry by asking Ismay most of the questions, but Newlands was not to be outdone quizzing the White Star Line executive about the ship and its lifeboats.

Henry Brooke Adams, an American historian who had return tickets to Europe on the Titanic, captured the popular sentiment in the country regarding Ismay in a letter written to Newlands:

Ismay is responsible for the lack of lifeboats, he is responsible for the captain who was so reckless, for the lack of discipline of the crew, and for the sailing directions given to the captain which probably caused his recklessness. In the face of all this he saves himself, leaving fifteen hundred men and women to perish. I know of nothing so cowardly and so brutal in recent history. The one thing he could have done was to prove his honesty and his sincerity by giving his life.

After two days of hearings in New York City, the subcommittee moved to what is now the Russell Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C., on Monday, April 22. All seven senators were present. Senator Newlands participated for the first ten days of the hearing until April 30. Newlands focused a great deal on the lifeboats when interviewing survivors. On the seventh day of the hearing, April 25, his questioning of Able Seaman George Moore is particularly insightful.

Senator Newlands: So all the crew knew that the boats were not sufficient to carry all the passengers and crew off.

Mr. Moore: I suppose they did sir.

Senator Newlands: But they regarded the ship as unsinkable?

Mr. Moore: Yes, sir.

The inquiry lasted until May 25, inclusive of 18 days of hearings. Eighty-two witnesses testified, among the most prominent being Guglielmo Marconi. The transcript of the proceedings was over 1,000 pages.
Many of the witnesses were interviewed separately by the senators, although Chairman Smith spent the last seven days interviewing witnesses by himself. The subcommittee issued the report on May 28, 1912 and Senators Smith and Isidor Raymond of Maryland made speeches to the Senate. The Titanic inquiry is considered among the most important Senate investigations in the 20th century. The report’s recommendations led to substantial reforms in international maritime safety.

Senator Francis Newlands of Nevada deserves to be remembered for his role in this tragic episode in American and international history.

Photo credit: Photograph of Francis G. Newlands courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society.

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While the State of Nevada has authorized a number of impressive tax studies since World War II, the legislature essentially ignored the recommendations of the last one in November 1988. The study cost almost $400,000.

The Price Waterhouse/Urban Institute report had been authorized by the 1987 legislature at the urging of Clark County Assemblyman Marvin Sedway and Washoe County Senator William Raggio to assess the impact of the tax shift six years earlier. In 1981, acting on Governor Robert List's recommendation, the legislature shifted from principal state reliance on the relatively stable property tax to the less stable (and regressive) state sales tax. At the same time the state sales tax was nearly doubled. The volatility of the new tax structure was evident in a sixteen-month recession beginning later in 1981. Nevada was clearly no longer "recession-proof" and Governor List lost his reelection bid.

There were many compelling findings about the tax shift in the comprehensive 1988 study. Arguably among the most important finding described the future of Nevada's state and local fiscal affairs under the new tax structure.

"The state tax system produces revenues that are narrowly in balance with the present expenditure requirements of the state's General Fund as defined by current policy. However, beginning in the mid-1990s an adjustment of revenues and/or expenditures on the order of 5 to 10 percent of General Fund revenues will be required just to finance the current scope and quality of services."

The study warned that "The projected fiscal imbalance will occur earlier if a serious recession occurs in the next few years."

The legislature received the report on February 1989. The special Governor's Commission to Study the Fiscal Affairs of State and Local Governments in Nevada, created by the 1987 legislature to review the report, noted that "The study provided the tools whereby the Governor and the Legislature with the support of the people of Nevada can construct a fair and adequate tax structure for the future."

In 1990, the University of Nevada Press published the report as a book entitled A Fiscal Agenda for Nevada. Later that year, Nevada voters overwhelmingly supported an initiative effort to constitutionally prohibit a state income tax, although the study had cautioned that "The option to enact a personal income tax should not be foreclosed by constitutional prohibitions."

With the state enjoying a robust economy, the 1989 and 1991 legislative sessions felt no immediacy to set a new fiscal agenda, although the Legislative Commission had issued a Study of Taxation in Nevada (December 1990) which included recommended changes to the tax laws. Not long after the 1991 legislature adjourned, however Nevada entered another serious recession. The projected fiscal imbalance that the Price Waterhouse/Urban Institute report warned about had come to pass. Program enhancements approved by the recent legislature were withdrawn and, in addition, base state budgets were slashed by more than 10 percent.

When it came time to address revenues and the tax system in 1993 in the midst of a recovering economy, the State of Nevada conducted its business as if the Price Waterhouse/Urban Institute report did not exist and the recession was no longer an issue.

Significantly, during the time the study was conducted in 1988, the only serious competition to Nevada's gambling industry was gambling in Atlantic City. Clearly, the spread of casino gambling throughout the nation in the last twenty years, and particularly the proliferation of tribal casinos in California and
surrounding states raises fundamental questions about Nevada’s long-standing dependence on tourism to sustain its economy and provide essential tax revenues.

As journalist Dennis Myers observed in his November 5, 2008 Pahrump Valley Times column about a new tax study recently proposed by Senator Raggio, "... no study will be of much value if its fate is that of the 1988 study and it is simply ignored to death."


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Currently same-sex marriage, constitutionally prohibited in Nevada since 2002, is a hot-button social issue in the United States. Reno quickie weddings and easy divorces for heterosexual couples received just as much attention for years. However, you wouldn't know it today.

The once-controversial migratory divorce business died out in the 1970s when other states liberalized their divorce laws. In addition, the quickie wedding business with no waiting period, blood test or medical certificate, currently generates little controversy. It, too, has dramatically declined as heterosexual couples find it easier to tie-the-knot in the state in which they reside. Let's look back some 100 years when Reno acquired a bad reputation for making it easy for people to do what they wanted.

At the time the Central Pacific Railroad founded Reno in 1868, Nevada required the person pursuing a divorce to live in the state for six months. The residency period was liberal for its time and addressed the transient nature of the state's population associated with the boom and bust mining economy.

Just the same, Dakota Territory, created in 1861, had only a three-month residency requirement and, like Nevada, allowed multiple grounds for divorce. By 1879, Sioux Falls had a thriving divorce colony and Fargo was not far behind. After Congress created North Dakota and South Dakota in 1889 the divorce laws remained the same. Only after social conservatives successfully lobbied the state of South Dakota to increase its residency period to six months in 1893, and the state of North Dakota to one year in 1899, did divorce attorneys and prospective divorcees seek out Nevada, and particularly Reno. Any significant competition from Oklahoma Territory with its three-month residency was eliminated when Congress in 1896 established a one-year residency requirement in territorial divorce cases.

A California interlocutory divorce law in 1897 which, in effect, prohibited divorced persons from remarrying until a year after the decree also augmented Reno's growing tourist business. Soon California divorcees migrated to Reno for quickie weddings despite a question if the marriages were legal. In 1902, a California Supreme Court ruling on the Golden State's divorce law validated the Reno weddings.

The divorce of Englishman Earl John Francis Stanley Russell, a member of the House of Lords, and subsequent wedding to Mollie Cooke Sommerville in 1900, brought international attention to western Nevada. Beginning in late 1899, the couple spent their six-month residency at the Lake Tahoe community of Glenbrook. Both received divorces from their respective spouses in Genoa, then the Douglas County seat. The following day, April 15, 1900, they wed in Reno. Upon the couple's return to England, Lord Russell was arrested for bigamy and tried in the House of Lords. In 1901, his peers sentenced him to three months in prison on the grounds that Nevada divorces were not valid in Great Britain.

If Lord Russell's scandalous divorce and wedding put Reno on the world map, then U.S. Steel Corporation President William Ellis Corey's divorce kept it there. Corey's two-year public affair with actress Maybelle Gilman prompted wife Laura to take up residence in Reno in November 1905. The highly-publicized divorce brought considerable attention to Reno, particularly for New Yorkers whose state had a draconian divorce law.

When the South Dakota state legislature increased the residency period for divorce to one year in 1907 at the behest of social conservatives, and the voters approved the action the following year, the national press, including the New York Times, crowned Reno the nation's divorce capital.
Myth #147: When Reno Had a Bad Reputation and Flourished by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

For years to come, just mentioning the name Reno conjured up the image of divorce. Many of the divorcees remarried in Reno--some became residents--and hundreds of thousands of others interested in matrimony made the pilgrimage to Nevada’s once-largest city for a quickie wedding. Reno enjoyed the prosperity and notoriety, and except for a brief period between 1913 and 1915 when Nevada’s residency for divorce was increased to one year, ignored social conservatives for the better part of the 20th-century.

The tables have turned. In 2012, the number of marriage licenses issued in Washoe County (8,662) was the lowest amount since 1938 (7,833), the year before California required couples to get a premarital exam. Other states, including California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and Washington, DC are leading the way in legalizing same-sex marriage. The quickie wedding business in Reno, without the ability to perform same-sex marriages, will eventually go the way of easy divorce.


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In the heart of downtown Carson City stands Nevada's first federal government building, an impressive 19th century multi-story red brick structure. A 1972 Historic American Buildings Survey report on the edifice claims that Nevada U.S. Senators James W. Nye and William M. Stewart were instrumental in the passage of the congressional bill authorizing the building's construction. In truth, Nye had been dead for more than nine years and Stewart was not serving in the Senate at the time.

How did the distinguished Harvey J. McKee, National Park Service supervisory architect and Professor Emeritus at Syracuse University (my alma mater) get it wrong and deny other politicians their legacy? For one, he trusted Senator Stewart's Reminiscences (1908). The memoir, published shortly before the senator's death, is riddled with errors and exaggerated claims, as Stewart's biographers have since identified. McKee wrote that "Nevada Senators Stewart and Nye were largely responsible for the [100,000] appropriation," noting that Stewart asserted on page 278 of Reminiscences that "[I] secured mandatory legislation with an additional appropriation for the construction of the present Government Building at the capital."

Actually the Congressional Record reports that Nevada U.S. Senator James G. Fair on December 4, 1883 introduced S. 55 providing "for the erection of a public building for the use of the United States courts, post-office, and other Governmental Offices in the city of Carson City." Stewart, who was appointed by the state legislature as Nevada's first U.S. Senator in 1864, had left the office in 1875, and was not appointed again as senator until 1887. McKee, in reading Stewart's embellished memoirs, also confused Senator Nye's support for a U.S. Mint in Carson City in the 1860s with the later federal building. Nye served as Nevada's second U.S. Senator until 1873 and died in New York three years later.

It can be argued that the principal father of Nevada's first federal building was actually Representative George W. Cassidy. Long-time journalist C. C. Goodwin in his memoirs As I Remember Them (1913) wrote that after Cassidy's distinguished eight-year career in the Nevada State Senate, "an appreciative constituency sent him for two terms to Congress [1881-85] and he held his own there and did much for the state."

On December 11, 1883, Cassidy introduced H. R. 947 providing for a federal building in Carson City. While the house bill never came up for a vote, Cassidy used a clever parliamentary maneuver to get the companion senate bill passed by the House of Representatives on January 5, 1885. President Chester A. Arthur signed the bill eight days later. Nevadans had to thank U.S. Senators Daniel W. Voorhees (Indiana) and John J. Ingalls (Kansas) for getting the senate bill passed in the Senate on March 3, 1884 as Nevada Senators Fair and John P. Jones missed the vote.

It took over a year to find a suitable location in Carson City for the federal building. On March 1, 1886, the federal government purchased a lot on Carson Street bounded by Spear, Plaza, and Telegraph streets. The Carson Opera House was located on the site and was soon moved to the north side of Spear Street. Mifflin E. Bell, U.S. Treasury supervising architect, designed the structure with its imposing clock tower. The construction contract was awarded on May 25, 1888 and the cornerstone laid on September 29 later that year. The building was completed and occupied on May 19, 1891 and cost $134,605.53 to construct.
The federal district court moved to Reno in 1965 and the post office moved to Carson's nearby Washington Street in 1970. A quit-claim deed was recorded on May 17, 1971 transferring the building from the federal government to the State of Nevada. The State Library operated in the building between 1972 and 1992. The old federal building has since been restored and renamed for former Nevada U.S. Senator Paul Laxalt, the current occupant being the Commission on Tourism.

Photo credit: Top: The Carson City federal building, now known as the Laxalt Building, ca 1900, NSB-0245. Bottom: The federal building, ca 1920s, CCC-0125. The Kitzmeyer Building is the other prominent structure in both images. Photos courtesy of the Nevada State Archives.

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After 75 regular legislative sessions, the record for governors' vetoes and legislative veto overrides set in Nevada's first legislature was not only broken, it was smashed. Governor Jim Gibbons' legacy includes 48 bills vetoed in 2009. Lawmakers overrode 25 of the vetoes and may increase the number at the 2011 legislature. The record number of vetoes by Governor Henry G. Blasdel, 38, and the record number of legislative veto overrides, 11, had never been seriously challenged until Governor Gibbons battled with the 2009 legislature. Historically most governors' vetoes were sustained. What happened in the first legislative session in 1864-65 to account for so many vetoes and veto overrides?

Republican Governor Blasdel in his 1864 inaugural address said he intended to cooperate with the first Nevada Legislature. After all, only two Democrats sat in the body, one in the Senate and one in the Assembly. The nation's 36th state was very much dominated by the Union Party. (This was the wartime name given to the Republican Party, to make it more palatable for Democrats to vote for Lincoln's reelection.) Just the same, the new governor soon had major issues with a legislature controlled by his own party.

In his 1935 history of Nevada, U.S. Representative James G. Scrugham, a former governor, wrote that "The [1864-65] legislature showed a tendency to disregard the provisions of the constitution in more than one particular. The revenue bills exceeded the constitutional taxing powers, and someone devised an ingenious method of getting around the constitutional prohibition against special franchises. There were also several 'relief acts' which the governor vetoed on the ground that they were special bills."

Governor Blasdel's fights with the legislature were not based on rigid ideology, as was the case with Governor Gibbons more than 140 years later. As the state's first elected chief executive, Blasdel's principal concerns focused on the legislature exceeding its constitutional authority. For instance, he particularly objected to the language in a Virginia & Truckee Railroad right-of-way bill that, in effect, granted a monopoly. "It certainly was not the intention of the framers of our constitution that ever a special franchise should be granted by the Legislature, except for municipal purposes, by this bill, you grant not only a special, but an exclusive franchise for railroad purposes . . . ." Blasdel declared. The Legislature overrode the governor's veto.

While Blasdel's disputes with the legislature were mostly over the law and Gibbons' disputes were mostly over ideology, there is also some overlap in their conduct. Both men were zealots, teetotaler Blasdel on Christian morals and doctrinaire Gibbons on anti-tax ideology. Zealotry is rare in governors; like most public officials, they tend to be pragmatists.

In Blasdel's case, this showed up most prominently in his 1869 veto of a legalized gambling bill, a fight that has analogies to this year's veto battles. He and the lawmakers were actually close together on the issue - both wanted to crack down on gambling. But where Blasdel wanted it prohibited outright, legislators believed that prohibition would only make it seem alluring to the public. A legislative committee report argued that "a prohibitory law will not in the least contribute to the suppression of such evil, but, on the contrary, will add another, to wit: The crime of setting at defiance the laws of our state." The committee recommended enacting a bill to use tax law to suppress gambling, a technique later used in federal anti-drug efforts. A bill "to license it [gambling] heavily" was passed, but Blasdel, unwilling to compromise, vetoed it because he wanted an outright ban. His inflexibility earned him another override.

Photo credit: Photograph of the portrait of Governor Henry Goode Blasdel, GOV-0002, courtesy of the Nevada State Archives. The portrait hangs in a corridor of the Nevada State Capitol.

Historical Myths of the Month are published in the Reno Gazette-Journal; the Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley; Humboldt Sun; Battle Mountain Bugle; Lovelock Review-Miner, and Nevada Observer (online version).
The popular American cowboy-humorist and actor Will Rogers visited Nevada many times prior to his tragic death in an airplane crash with pilot Wiley Post on August 15, 1935.

For example, Rogers spent time in northern Nevada in August and September 1930 while being filmed for the movie "Lightnin." Scenes based on Nevada's quickie-divorce business were shot near Lake Tahoe, particularly at Tahoe Tavern, and Reno.

Rogers flew from Reno to attend the Winnemucca Rodeo on August 30, where he met up with Walter "Death Valley Scotty" Scott and Governor Fred Balzar. In an interview with the Humboldt Star, Rogers, after meeting the five candidates for governor, asserted "Had I known that all of Nevada's governorship aspirants were as homely as they are, I certainly would have filed for the office on the Democratic ticket, as I'm sure I'm better looking."

"Just got back from a great little western town called Winnemucca, Nevada," Rogers wrote in his nationally-syndicated column. Referring to Nevada's libertarian spirit, he noted that "You can get a divorce without lying; a drink without whispering and bet on a game of chance without breaking a promise."

However, claims that Rogers just prior to his death in 1935 visited the Dangberg home ranch outside Minden--one version including his flying to the ranch with Wiley Post--lack any supporting documentation.

Thanks to the extensive research of Gardnerville's Bill Palmer, it's clear that Will Rogers knew Fred Dangberg. A squib in the Record Courier newspaper of September 19, 1930 notes that Rogers was "a guest of H. F. Dangberg of Minden." In fact, the dateline for Rogers' August 15 newspaper column is Minden, Nevada. Rogers visited Dangberg a number of times during the filming of "Lightnin."

A lengthy stay by Rogers in Carson Valley during the height of his busy career should have been noted in the area newspapers. One claim has him visiting for a week in 1935, intending to buy the Dangberg Ranch after he returned from his flying excursion with Wiley Post to Alaska. No known primary or secondary sources confirm the visit or his intention to buy the Dangberg home ranch. However, as Bill Palmer noted in a letter to me, "His personal and business affairs were largely either not written down or never made public."

Perhaps most telling is that Rogers' obituary in the Record Courier of August 23, 1935, entitled "America's First Citizen Was Well Known in Valley," makes no reference to a recent visit to Carson Valley by Rogers alone, or with Wiley Post, only the visits during the filming of "Lightnin" in 1930. It's hard to imagine that the local newspaper would have overlooked a recent visit by Rogers with or without Post.

"The nation mourns the untimely death of Will Rogers, cowboy, humorist, philosopher, actor, who wisecracked his way into the hearts of millions of people. No American was held in higher esteem or more deeply beloved than Will Rogers. Although his unusual ability as an actor and writer, elevated him to a high pinnacle, in affluence and wealth, he chose to remain just the plain Will Rogers, a friend of the millionaire and worker, without distinction. Several years ago when 'Lightnin' was being filmed, he was a frequent visitor at the Dangberg home ranch in this valley. He made the acquaintance of many people of the community and his passing brings sadness to them as well as millions that loved him."
Myth #150: When Did Will Rogers Visit Nevada? by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

The video series "Exploring Nevada" includes a visit to the Dangberg Home Ranch Historic Park and is available on the Nevada Department of Cultural Affairs website.

Photo credit: Dangberg Home Ranch Historic Park, Nevada Division of State Parks.

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"One of Nevada's mysteries, a decades-old enigma, is why unions have never caught on in the north," according to a recent newspaper column. Actually there is no mystery.

Labor unions did thrive in northern Nevada until the aftermath of the 1952 "Right-to-Work" law. While it is true that it has been decades since organized labor has been a major force in the northern part of the state, the fact remains that from the 1860s until the 1950s union strength was principally in northern Nevada. Among other labor legislation still in effect, we can thank the Reno trade unions and the Comstock miners' unions for Labor Day becoming an official state holiday in 1903.

Unions caught on in northern Nevada with the founding of the Gold Hill Miners' Union in 1866. It was followed by miners' unions being organized in Virginia City in 1867, Silver City in 1873, and then in virtually every mining town throughout Nevada. The template for miners' unions in the gold, silver and copper mining towns throughout the western United States was the Comstock miners' unions.

Members, or former members, of the Comstock miners' unions were elected Storey County sheriff, district attorney, and district judge. Union miners served in the state legislature and one, William Woodburn, was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives and later served as Attorney-General. A candidate running for a seat in Congress could not afford to ignore the miners' unions in the latter 19th and early 20th-century.

Beginning in 1902, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) conducted an extensive organizational drive in northern Nevada centered in Reno. Virtually every trade was unionized in Reno, Sparks, Carson City and Virginia City, amounting to dozens of locals. In conjunction with the railroad brotherhoods and the miners' unions, the trade unions had a powerful lobby in the state legislature. Governor John Sparks was first elected in 1902 as a friend of labor. Patrick McCarran, with his election to the legislature in 1902, and throughout his career as a U.S. Senator, enjoyed the support of the AFL. Labor Day was officially celebrated on a rotating basis between Reno, Sparks, Carson City and Virginia City until World War I.

As in the rest of the country during the Harding, Coolidge and Hoover presidencies, organized labor did not fare well in Nevada in the 1920s. At the same time, with the decline of precious metal mining in the Silver State, the Comstock miners' unions, and other miners' unions throughout the state, folded.

The New Deal Era under President Franklin Roosevelt reinvigorated the union movement. Trade unions prospered in Nevada in the 1930s, particularly in Las Vegas during and after the construction of nearby Hoover Dam. Reno and Sparks' unions flourished, too. By the late 1940s, organized labor was flexing its muscle in Nevada's two largest cities.

In 1949 after contract renewal talks broke down, a culinary union strike was called on July 3 for the July 4th weekend, which, because it was combined with the Reno rodeo, was the town's big tourism event of the year. The strike and the short notice enraged business leaders, especially casino owners, who were successful in portraying themselves as victims by locking out their employees and inviting all tourists to a public park for low priced or free picnics where employers themselves were food and drink servers. The event shifted public sentiment sharply against unionism in northern Nevada. The employers used that shift to get a "Right-to-Work" law passed by voters in 1952.
Essentially the new law invoked section 14b of the 1947 federal Taft-Hartley-Act prohibiting labor unions from compelling workers to join a union post-employment (the union shop). Efforts by organized labor to repeal the state law using the initiative process and in the legislature failed over the years. Today, Nevada is among 22 states with "Right-to-Work" laws.

While most trade unions have managed to survive in northern Nevada since the advent of the "Right-to-Work" law, the culinary local is only a shadow of its former self. In the end, southern Nevada has emerged as a union stronghold and northern Nevada, where unions were once prominent and powerful, appears to the newcomer as a place where "unions have never caught on."

Photo credits: Top: headline from the Nevada State Labor News of July 3, 1949 when the Culinary Union went on strike in Reno. Bottom: Headline from the Nevada State Labor News of July 6, 1949 announcing that striking union members had been locked out of their jobs by Reno hotels and casinos.

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When one thinks of celebrities getting “quickie” divorces, Reno comes to mind, or perhaps Las Vegas. However, during the time the Silver State was known world-wide for its migratory divorce business, the rich and famous, including motion picture and television stars, also found their way to other county seats of government to “untie the knot.” The Douglas County seat of Minden is a case in point.

Silent-screen actress and producer Mary Pickford's Minden divorce in 1920 has received considerable attention over the years. On the other hand, few people are aware that actress and director Ida Lupino was divorced there in 1951.

The fifteen-year-old London-born child-star moved to Hollywood in 1933. Lupino's career spanned forty-eight years and included acting in fifty-nine films and directing eight others. She was among the first female directors in Hollywood and became the first woman to direct herself in a major feature film. She also appeared in fifty-eight TV episodes and directed fifty others. According to biographer William Donati, “Lupino became the only woman ever to direct an episode of the famous Twilight Zone” in 1964. Other directorial credits include episodes of Have Gun Will Travel, The Untouchables, The Fugitive, Alfred Hitchcock Presents, and Gilligan's Island. Lupino may have been the first married female character to retain her own name ("Eve Drake") in a television series when she co-starred in 1957-58 with real-life husband Howard Duff ("Howard Adams") in CBS's Mr. Adams and Eve, based in part on the two stars' actual experiences as a married couple.

Lupino married three times. Her divorce from second husband, producer and writer, Collier Young, brought the Hollywood star to Glenbrook, Lake Tahoe, on September 7, 1951. Pregnant with actor Howard Duff's child, Lupino decided to divorce Young after less than three years of marriage. She brought her close friend writer Diane Meredith along so both the women could get a Nevada divorce while working on a movie script. Duff, well-known at the time as radio's private eye Sam Spade, accompanied them on the trip and periodically visited Lupino during her six weeks residency. Lupino leased Sawmill Harbor, a rustic lakeside house where actress Rita Hayworth had stayed earlier that year while pursuing a divorce from Prince Aly Khan.

It took four days for the press to discover that Lupino was in Douglas County. By that time, Lupino and Meredith were spending time with Clark Gable who was at Glenbrook intending to divorce his fourth wife Lady Sylvia Ashley.

On September 30, Lupino, Gable, and Meredith were among a “Galaxy of Stars” at the launching of a 1951 anti-communist "Crusade for Freedom" campaign in the Reno High School gymnasium. The rally in support of Radio Free Europe included Gable auctioning a "silver brick" for $800 to hotel magnate Charles Mapes, Jr. Lupino presented the fund-raising brick to Mapes. The 1500 people in attendance also witnessed Lupino and Gable outside the new high school releasing two giant balloons bearing anti-communist messages.

A week later Lupino travelled to the Wagon Wheel Club at Stateline, Lake Tahoe, where Secretary of State John Koontz presented her with a scroll recognizing the actress-director as a new citizen of Nevada. Attendees at the dinner event included Harvey Gross, owner of the Wagon Wheel, and Lupino's mother and aunt.
On October 20, Lupino was granted a divorce by Judge Clark J. Guild in the same Minden courtroom where Mary Pickford received her divorce decree from actor Owen Moore 31 years earlier. The next day, Judge Guild, who had presided in the Carson City divorce of actors Carole Lombard and William Powell in 1933, conducted the wedding ceremony between Ida Lupino and Howard Duff at Glenbrook. Clark Gable attended the reception.

Lupino gave birth to Bridget Mirella Duff on April 23, 1952. Her tumultuous marriage to Howard Duff lasted until 1984. She died on August 3, 1995, and today her legacy in the motion picture industry has been virtually forgotten.

**Photo credits:** Top: the rustic Glenbrook house known as Sawmill Harbor, where Lupino completed her required 6-week residency. n.d. Photo courtesy of Bob Jepson.

Middle: Ida Lupino is officially greeted as a new citizen of Nevada by Secretary of State John Koontz (l), while Harvey Gross (center), owner of the Wagon Wheel Club at Stateline, Nevada, watches. *Nevada State Journal*, October 9, 1951.


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