

NEVADA GALLERY: PRISMS & PERSPECTIVES

Welcome to *Nevada: Prisms & Perspectives*, the latest version of the Nevada Historical Society's *Wilbur S. Shepperson Nevada Gallery*. All of the interpretation and collections—artifacts, photographs and maps—come from the Nevada Historical Society. *Nevada: Prisms & Perspectives* utilizes the Historical Society's collections to tell five crucial stories about life in the Silver State. Each story is complete in itself, but all five are intimately related to each other. Please join us in experiencing Nevada's fascinating heritage.

Living on the Land: Although the eastern Sierra Nevada, the Great Basin, and the Sonoran Desert of southern Nevada appears to be a hard place in which to survive, people have been taking their living from the land here for more than 10,000 years. Native Nevadans learned to live easily on the land, taking only what they needed. About 1,000 years ago in the southern part of the state, the Anasazi built adobe towns and farmed the rich bottomlands of the Virgin and Muddy River valleys, until they moved on to the south and east. More recently, four major groups have occupied what is now Nevada. The Washoe are in the corner around Lake Tahoe. The Northern Paiute range stretches up into what is now Oregon and Idaho, and down to the southwest toward the Owens Valley. To the east the Western Shoshone fills the middle section, and the Southern Paiute range includes parts of both Nevada and Utah.

When Euro Americans began arriving in the Great Basin in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, they first sought wealth in the form of beaver pelts used in making fashionable hats. As some came to stay, they turned to farming and ranching, both cattle and later sheep. By the last part of the century traditional Native American life was no longer possible in Nevada and many of the state's indigenous inhabitants turned to the new ranches and towns for jobs. Some women, in particular, adapted ancient arts to new markets. Most notable of these was the Washoe basket maker, Dat so la lee, who made her living in the first part of the twentieth century selling her baskets as pieces of art. Today ranching and farming continue to prosper in Nevada. In addition to cattle, sheep, and dairy farming, favored products include alfalfa, garlic, potatoes, and onions.

Riches from the Earth: The Great Basin has been the source of fabulous mineral wealth for hundreds of years. Native Nevadans for centuries mined salt and turquoise. More recently, prospectors heading back east from the first wave of the California Gold Rush found traces of the yellow metal in streams on the eastern slope of the Sierra. The real excitement began in 1859, however, with the "Rush to Washoe," as thousands of former 49ers headed to the booming Comstock Lode camps of Virginia City, Gold Hill, and Silver City.

Mining brought modern civilization and towns to Nevada. Nevada silver and gold built the stock exchange in San Francisco, helped pay for the Civil War, and fostered statehood for Nevada in 1864. Camps boomed and then went bust all over the state—from Treasure Hill to Eureka to Austin to Belmont to Candelaria to Columbia and to El Dorado Canyon. Men and women from all the continents of the earth came to make their fortunes; the fortunate made a living.

Then, for more than twenty years, there was nothing and the state almost blew away. In 1902, Tonopah, in central Nevada, suddenly boomed followed in a few years by the even more fabulous Goldfield. About the same time large-scale copper mining started in White Pine County.

Nevada has never really looked back. Industrial minerals of many sorts, including uranium and oil, are found throughout the state. Gold mining has continued in many places for decades. Today Nevada is the largest producer of gold in the country and mining remains a major industry in the Silver State.

Passing Through: For decades, on their way to somewhere else people have been passing through what is now known as Nevada. Interstate 80, in fact, just about a mile south of here, is the latest version of U.S. 40, which was the Victory Highway, which was built along the route of the Central Pacific Railroad, which was along the path of the old wagon road the Donner Party took to get to California, which was also the route into the Sierra Nevada that took John C. Frémont and his party to Lake Tahoe, which was the path the Washoe used to move into the mountains for the summer season. Located east of Reno and the Forty-Mile Desert this modern superhighway follows the old Humboldt River route that brought so many pioneers to the Far West.

Further south, U.S. 50 follows the route explored by the Simpson expedition in 1859 and the Lincoln Highway in the early twentieth century. Heading west, it generally follows the path of the Carson River, past Dayton and Genoa, were the oldest Euro American settlements in Nevada, and then on to other passes across the Sierra—Luther Pass, Big Trees Pass (Kingsbury Grade), and Carson Pass. In southern Nevada, Interstate 15 is the newest version of the old Arrowhead Highway, which first brought automobile tourists to Las Vegas. That highway paralleled the Union Pacific Railroad (originally the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake), which carried freight for the mining camps of central Nevada and was responsible for creating Las Vegas that singular oasis in the Mojave Desert. Before the railroad the route was the Old Spanish Trail.

Neon Nights: Everyone knows the truth about Nevada. It is a land of enchantment offering fun, food, and instant wealth. The Corbett-Fitzsimmons fight in 1897 brought notoriety to the Silver State. Then speedy divorce—"Renovation"—as well as quickie marriages, kept the state's racy reputation alive. Gambling was made legal in 1931 in order to support tourism and business in the face of the Great Depression.

The early casinos were rather dark and smoky. As soldiers and sailors came through Reno on the way to the coast during World War II, a new prosperity hit the clubs and they began to expand and improve. With the growth of California after the war, the market took off and the clubs went right with it, creating the modern gambling meccas that beckon in the desert. Bright lights, architectural innovation, first-class entertainment, exciting games, great cuisine—all go into Neon Nights.

The Federal Presence: Although Nevada is the seventh largest state in the Union, the federal government owns 87 percent of the land. That simple fact has made the federal presence central to the development of the Silver State in the twentieth century. The construction of Hoover Dam (1931-1935) brought abundant water and electrical power to Clark County in the south and sparked the transformation of Las Vegas from a division point on the railroad into a vast playground for adults, and one of the fastest growing cities in the country. World War II brought thousands of men and women in the military services, passing through and staying to work in defense industries. Huge military bases sprouted up throughout the state. After the war, the testing of nuclear bombs spurred further growth. Even today, after the testing has ended, Nevada is facing federal pressure to become the storehouse for the nation's nuclear waste. Not only is the federal government the main landlord in Nevada, federal policies and actions have had a great impact on the state's growth and development.

RENO HISTORY GALLERY

Welcome to *Reno History Gallery*, the latest version of the Nevada Historical Society's *Janice Pine Reno History Gallery*. All of the interpretation and collections—artifacts, photographs and print ephemera—come from the Nevada Historical Society. *Reno History Gallery* utilizes the Historical Society's collections to tell five themes about how Reno became the Biggest Little City in the World.

Tough Little Town on the Truckee: When the first white men passed through this area in the 1840s, the land along the Truckee River was inhabited by Washoe and Paiute peoples. In the late 1840s and 1850s, thousands of travelers on their way to the California gold fields would linger a few days in the Truckee Meadows to allow their animals to feed on the native grasses before crossing the Sierra Nevada. The meadows, fed by the river, offered an oasis, but to travelers the river was also an obstacle.

In 1857, Charles Gates and John Stone attempted to build a bridge across the river at a site in the eastern Truckee Meadows, but spring floods, fed by snow melt in the mountains, washed it away. In 1859, Charles Fuller erected a bridge and a log shelter for travelers upstream from Stone and Gates' Crossing and the place became known as Fuller's crossing. That same year, a gold discovery in the hills twenty miles to the south changed the direction of the California gold rush ten years earlier and inaugurated what became known as the "Rush to Washoe." Soon Virginia City emerged as the center of the fabulously rich Comstock Lode mining area, and movement in and around the region increased, suggesting the potential for greater traffic at the Truckee River crossing.

Reno Noir: America's 20th Century Sin City: A mining boom that commenced in southwestern Nevada in 1900 gave the state an economic shot in the arm. Reno benefited from the new boom, both economically and through the arrival of George Wingfield, a millionaire who had made his fortune in Goldfield. From Reno, the powerful Wingfield ran and expanded his empire, which included such diversified endeavors as mining, banking, ranching, hotels, and politics. The coming of the twentieth century also began to change the spirit of the town, which then had a population of about 4,000. In 1903 Reno became an incorporated city (after an earlier unsuccessful attempt in 1897).

There was much new construction in the city, with builders and architects concentrating on permanence and style, while culturally Reno demonstrated its growing refinement through the addition of several new theatres, an expansion of the university, a Carnegie Library, and the founding of the Nevada Historical Society in 1904. The town burst on the national scene in 1905 when William Corey, the president of U.S. Steel Corporation, came to Reno for a much publicized divorce. Once the country discovered how easy it was to get a marriage dissolved under Nevada's lenient laws, a migratory divorce trade sprang up and Reno became the divorce Mecca of the world; a title it held for sixty years.

It was during this early period that Reno garnered the label Nevada's "Sin City". Activities such as gambling, prostitution, prize fighting, quick marriage and easy divorce brought to Reno a colorful array of people from all walks of life. Except for a brief time during the Progressive Era, Nevada discovered that when its traditional economic mainstays of mining and agriculture fell prey to the vagaries of boom-and-bust, legislation legalizing "sin" filled the fiscal gap with remarkable dependability.

On the Road Again: Travel and Tourism in the Biggest Little City: From the beginning, transportation has been a significant theme in the history of Reno and the Truckee Meadows. The emigrant trails, stage roads, the Pony Express, highways, commercial aviation, and the railroad have all served to bring people and goods into and through the region. The transcontinental railroad, built through the area in 1868, represented the most important event in the sometimes sputtering creation of Reno. (In 1903, Reno's neighbor to the east, Sparks, also began life as a railroad town – a new division point on the Southern Pacific Railroad.)

By the early twentieth century, a new means of transportation was making an impact on the development of the Truckee Meadows. The Lincoln Highway was created to provide a continuous improved route for automobiles between New York and San Francisco. Federal aid for road construction was awarded in 1916, and the route through western Nevada was set by 1921, passing through Fallon, Sparks, and Reno to the California state line. A branch led south through Carson City and the communities along the Lake Tahoe shore. In 1927, completion of the Lincoln Highway, and the parallel Victory Highway, was celebrated with an exposition held at Idlewild Park in Reno.

With the establishment of highways, automobile tourism became an economic force in the region, and before the end of World War II easy access by automobile – as well as by train and plane – to Reno’s casinos thrust the gaming industry into the forefront of the local and state economies. Drawn by gambling, divorce, and Reno’s beautiful natural setting, automobile tourists flocked to the area, and businesses catering to the automobile tourist sprang up.

Everyday Reno: People, Places, and Things: Against the backdrop of its “sin city” reputation and an economy that relies on the tourist trade, there is – and always has been – an everyday Reno, a place, where ordinary people live and work, go to school, worship, play, and socialize. This side of the Biggest Little City is represented through its homes, businesses, schools, and churches, its social organizations, government, local events, arts and culture, and, of course, people.

The buildings and institutions that developed in the first decade of the twentieth century are indicative of the town’s transition from a dusty railroad town to a stable, more cultured community. The Carnegie Library and the creation of the Nevada Historical Society, both founded in 1904, are two examples, as is the Washoe County Courthouse which was constructed during 1909-1911 from plans by Nevada’s leading architect, Frederick J. DeLongchamps. The City of Reno, which was incorporated in 1903, built an imposing City Hall on Front (later First) Street. In 1905, an elegant new bridge was built over the Truckee River in the center of town, and through the beneficence of Clarence Mackey, the University of Nevada embarked on a program of building construction and expansion. The university’s Mackay Field – eventually replaced by the current Mackay Stadium – provided a fine setting for football games.



NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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*Admission is \$5 for adults
 Children ages 17 and under and Members are FREE*

