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Nevada
Historical Society Quarterly

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Front Cover: Judge George F. Talbot on the front porch of his home, the Nye-Stewart residence, in Carson City. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

FROM AMERICA'S LITTLE ITALYS TO THE BOOMTOWN IN THE DESERT
Italian-Americans in Las Vegas, 1947–1970

Alan Balboni

Gambling has been the foundation of Las Vegas's growth into the adult entertainment capital of the world, and Italian-Americans provided building blocks for this foundation. They were well represented among the almost two hundred thousand citizens who migrated to the greater Las Vegas area in the twenty-three years after Bugsy Siegel's Flamingo Hotel officially opened in 1947. Some came to enjoy southern Nevada's sunny climate, or to work at the Nevada Test Site, or to fulfill a tour of duty at Nellis Air Force Base, but the great majority were drawn by the employment opportunities associated with the phenomenal growth of legalized gambling, euphemistically termed *gaming* in Nevada.[1]

While the Italian-American population of the United States averaged about 5.5 percent during the years under review, the number of Italian-Americans in the greater Las Vegas population rose from less than 2 percent to about 9 percent in the same period.[2] In contrast to the earlier Las Vegas settlers, almost all of whom came from California, northern Nevada, or mining areas in the West, the overwhelming majority of post-World War II Italian-American migrants came from the large urban areas east of the Mississippi River. This should not be surprising as over 90 percent of the country's Italian-Americans lived in this region. Particularly significant numbers came from Buffalo, Brooklyn, Pittsburgh, Steubenville, Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, and St. Louis. Other sources of noteworthy Italian-American migration were Boston, the other boroughs of New York City, Kansas City, New Orleans, Newark, Philadelphia, Providence, and Newport in Kentucky. Of course, Italian-Americans from northern Nevada and California also continued to settle in the Las Vegas area, and this group included those who had grown up in the East but had moved to California during or after World War II.

Las Vegas, with its profitable and expanding legal gaming industry, and employment based on personal or family relationships, was particularly attractive

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for the many Italian-Americans with previous experience in gambling.[3] Ironically, Senator Estes Kefauver also contributed to the appeal of Las Vegas. His well-publicized investigations of organized crime during 1950–51 led to increased nationwide demand for enforcement of state laws prohibiting everything from numbers rackets to slot machines. While this unwelcome publicity convinced professional gamblers from every ethnic background to come to Las Vegas, it provided a particular impetus for Italian-American and Jewish entrepreneurs whose success in illegal gambling enterprises often made them the focus of national and local law enforcement efforts.[4]

Several Roman Catholic parish priests discerned some basic patterns in the migration of Italian-Americans from eastern cities. Not infrequently, one member of a family would gain employment in the gaming industry and then, upon learning of other job opportunities, would inform family and friends from the old neighborhood. Sometimes older family members, with relatives and friends now in Las Vegas, would retire there, too.[5]

While the Italian-Americans in Las Vegas did not create any quaint neighborhoods of pizzerias, pastry shops, and the melodious sound of Sicilian and Calabrian dialects characteristic of the Little Italys of Chicago, New York City, or Boston, they did have a major impact on the development of Las Vegas as a resort city in the sunbelt. Men of Italian background managed many major and minor gaming establishments, owned numerous businesses, particularly restaurants, built many hotels, motels, apartment houses, public buildings, and churches, and financed numerous real estate and commercial enterprises. In addition, Italian-Americans served on the Las Vegas City Council and Clark County Commission, as well as on the city councils of neighboring Henderson and North Las Vegas. These prominent Italian-Americans came from all areas of the United States that had significant numbers of inhabitants of Italian ancestry, although California was over-represented. Included among them were the sons and grandsons of men and women who had come to the United States from every region of Italy.

Contrary to rather widely held beliefs as to the extent of Italian-American ownership of Las Vegas casinos, only one of the major Strip properties, the Stardust, was built by an Italian-American, Tony Cornero. His pre-Las Vegas career was not unlike that of Moe Dalitz, Jake Kozloff, Milton Prell, Jay Sarno, or Bugsy Siegel, men associated with the establishment, respectively, of the Desert Inn, Last Frontier, Sahara, Caesars Palace, and Flamingo, as well as with the operation of illegal enterprises before coming to Nevada. Cornero was born in northern Italy, but grew up in California. Convicted of rum-running during Prohibition, he came to Las Vegas when gambling there was again legalized. With his brothers he then built the Meadows, the plushest casino of that era. When the Meadows proved unprofitable, he began operating gambling barges off the southern California coast. His frequent bouts with California officials were inconclusive until federal authorities finally intervened in 1939, having

The Stardust on the Strip in the late 1970s, begun by Tony Cornero. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

determined that the extensive water-taxi traffic caused by the popular gambling barges reduced the nation's national security. Cornero had an indomitable spirit, though, and despite the hostility of the Las Vegas city commissioners in 1944 toward his planned casino in the Apache Hotel, he returned in 1954 to build a thousand-room hotel on the Strip. He did not realize his dream, dying near the craps tables of the Desert Inn on July 31, 1955, with the Stardust only 70 percent completed.[6]

Several other Italian-Americans owned gaming properties on the highways to Los Angeles and Boulder, in the outlying areas of Clark County, or in the downtown area. Sam Baker (né Panetri) was the son of Sicilian immigrants. His past no less shadowy than that of many other Las Vegas entrepreneurs, he came to Las Vegas in 1947 from Chicago after living in New Orleans and Albuquerque. He, too, saw the potential of Las Vegas as a gambling center. Lacking the capital of men like Bugsy Siegel or Tony Cornero, Sam acquired the Big Hat, a small casino with a bar and grill, located on the old Los Angeles Highway.[7] He was successful, in spite of a temporary interruption of business following the shooting of Arthur Morgan, a former acquaintance from Albuquerque, with whom he had had a long argument at the bar. Sheriff Glen Jones investigated the incident, eventually concluding that Sam acted in self-defense.[8]

Far from the Strip and downtown was Searchlight, forty miles south of Las

Vegas. It had been a bustling gold-mining center at the turn of the century, but was only a small town when World War II began.[9] Willie Martello, a southern Californian with experience in the operation of bars and clubs in the Los Angeles area, recognized Searchlight's potential: a place where servicemen from the Mojave Desert army camps and dam workers at construction sites along the Colorado River could eat, drink, gamble, and buy female companionship. Willie not only established the El Rey Club and a small hotel there shortly after the war, but also built an airstrip to attract gamblers from California. The El Rey Club was destroyed by fire in 1962. Sharon Richardson, Willie's niece, reports that he was not discouraged. With some financial assistance from Las Vegas casino owner Doc Bayley, he bought the Crystal Club, located on the other side of Searchlight's main thoroughfare, and renamed it the El Rey Club. But the rapid growth of Las Vegas doomed Willie's efforts to transform Searchlight into a resort city, and two years later, in declining health, he sold out and returned to California.[10]

Emilio Georgetti was the most prominent of the Italian-Americans who contributed to the growth of gaming in the downtown area during the 1950s. He arrived in the Bay Area of California from northern Italy when he was seventeen and, like many other Las Vegas entrepreneurs of this era, quickly profited from managing illegal gambling enterprises. He was particularly successful in running illegal slots operations in San Mateo County, but, once again like many of his peers, he also invested in legitimate businesses—in his case, a packing plant in Oakland and a restaurant in San Francisco.[11] Shortly after Georgetti and his wife became Las Vegas residents in 1948, he entered into partnership with Benny Binion, who had previously built a gambling empire in Dallas. Their relationship as owners and operators of the Westerner was characterized by distrust and disagreement. Georgetti testified before the Kefauver Committee, a United States Senate committee charged with investigating organized crime, that Binion was extremely dissatisfied with the men Georgetti hired to run the Westerner.[12] Binion agreed with this in a 1976 interview, as did Harry Claiborne, their attorney, in a recent interview with the author, adding that the decision as to which partner would buy out the other was made by a flip of a coin.[13]

Georgetti won the toss and remained at the Westerner, but his troubles persisted. There were the constant rumors about his Mafia connections; then he was cited for contempt of Congress for his initial failure to testify before the Kefauver Committee; and finally he was sued by his pit boss, Robert Peccole. Judge Frank McNamee decided that Georgetti had reneged on his agreement to accord Peccole a 0.0916 percent interest in the Westerner. The fact that Robert Peccole was the brother of a city commissioner and his attorney was George Franklin, a former county commissioner, may have contributed to Georgetti's decision to return to the Bay Area, where he had better knowledge of the power structure.[14]

Italo Guelfi, another enterprising Italian-American from the San Francisco Bay

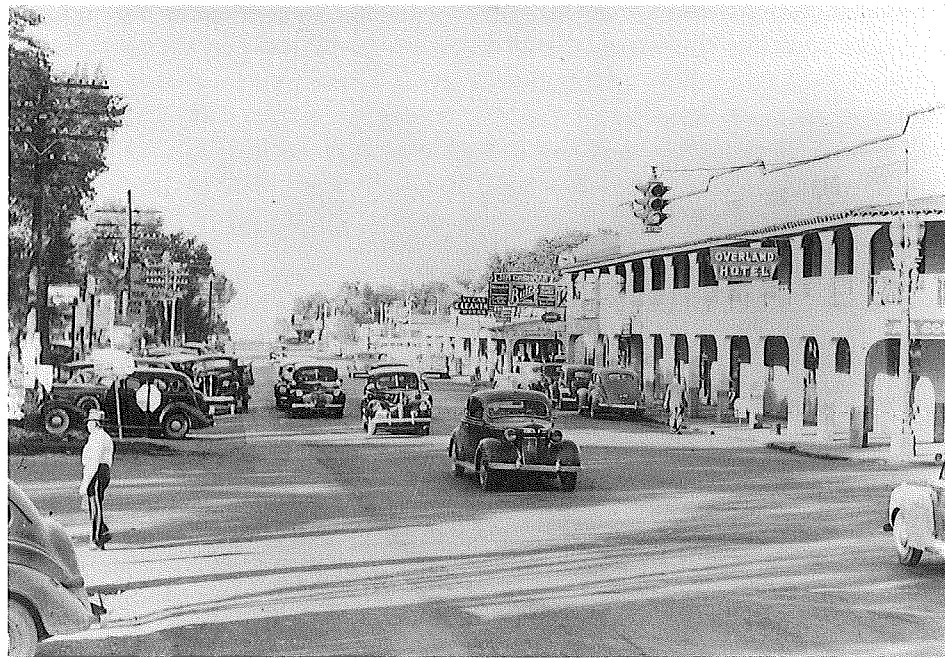
Area, was among several investors (mostly Italian-Americans) to whom Georgetti later sold the Westerner. Guelfi's business experience in Oakland, which included food and liquor distribution, prepared him well for casino and hotel management in Las Vegas. In 1954, after selling his share of the Westerner, he and several other associates of Italian background bought the Golden Gate. He and his partners (whom he subsequently bought out by 1970) successfully managed the property, eventually employing another Californian, Syl De Gregorio, as pit boss and later general manager.[15]

While Emilio Georgetti and Italo Guelfi were the most widely known Italian-American owners of downtown gaming properties in the 1950s, there were others who owned small shares. In addition, several Italian-Americans were principal or part owners of downtown race books in the 1950s, with Frank Sala (Santa Anita Race Book) and Sonny Remolif (Saratoga Race Book) the most prominent.[16] Sala came to Las Vegas from Reno, and Remolif, like Georgetti, Guelfi, and Andy Fava, came from the Bay Area.

After Tony Cornero's death, Frank Schivo, Vic Silvestri, and the Canino brothers, Joseph and Tony, were the most prominent Italian-American entrepreneurs on the Strip. Primarily gaming managers, they also had limited ownership roles. From 1956 through the mid-1960s, Joseph and Tony Canino were manager and assistant manager, respectively, of the Silver Slipper, a small Strip casino whose dimensions were more appropriate to the downtown area.[17] Like Georgetti and Guelfi, they were rumored to have had Mafia connections—in this case, in Denver, their hometown, where their father had owned and operated a casino. They weathered the familiar charge, but not the padlocking of the Silver Slipper by state Gaming Control Board agents on April 23, 1964. The discovery of five shaved dice led the agents to close the Silver Slipper, the first time the board had ever taken such action. The Canino brothers and the principal owners, Frank King and Robert Schulze, claimed ignorance, but the Gaming Commission revoked their licenses five weeks later.[18]

Frank Schivo and Vincent Silvestri had more long-term success than the Canino brothers. Schivo had been the manager of the Club Bingo, which opened in 1947 at the site of the present-day Sahara, and Silvestri had developed his expertise in gambling management in western Pennsylvania, his birthplace. They joined with Milton Prell, who had run a very profitable gambling club in Butte, Montana, during World War II, and six other partners, none of whom was of Italian background, to build the Sahara, which opened in October 1952. Schivo and Silvestri remained there through the 1960s, serving as casino day-shift boss and slots manager, respectively.[19] They were recognized as effective managers who helped establish the Sahara as a major Strip resort.[20]

Italian-Americans were well represented among all job categories in the casinos on the Strip and downtown. Some began as dealers and followed the gaming-industry career ladder to become floormen, pit bosses, and then shift bosses. A good example is Pete Bommarito, whose career during this period included



Intersection of Main Street and Fremont Street, late 1940s. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

service at the Riviera, Silver Slipper, and Dunes. Others quickly moved into floormen positions, where they remained permanently. Phil Dioguardi, a floorman at the Stardust throughout the 1960s and in the decades that followed, is a fine example. Still others, such as Carmine (Minnie) Cardello, long associated with the Tropicana Hotel, and Mike Bonfiglio, who began his career as a dealer at the Desert Inn in 1961, served for many years in direct casino management, assuming their present roles as hosts only in the 1980s. All came to Las Vegas in the late 1940s or early 1950s from cities east of the Mississippi River.

Frank Modica, who came to Las Vegas from Jamestown, New York, in 1947, and Frank Fertitta, who came from Galveston, Texas, are the two most successful of the many Italian-Americans who worked first as dealers. Each was willing to leave, more than once, a relatively secure position in order to advance his career. Frank Modica, the present chief executive officer of the Showboat, a well-established and profitable hotel/casino on the Boulder Highway, began his atypical career in rather standard fashion as a dealer at the El Dorado Club. He then moved to the Showboat as a twenty-one dealer and later worked as a boxman at the craps tables. Becoming assistant to the president in 1967, he served in executive positions first at the Landmark and later at the Desert Inn in the early 1970s, eventually returning to the Showboat.

Frank Fertitta had the most interesting career. He came to Las Vegas in 1960

at the suggestion of his uncle, a floorman at the Stardust. He worked at the Stardust as a twenty-one dealer through 1963, when he moved to the Tropicana to work in the same capacity. He recalls that the tips (*tokes* in Las Vegas language) were much better at the Tropicana. In 1966, he was promoted to floorman, and then eventually to shift manager before moving to the recently opened Circus-Circus as baccarat manager. When Bill Bennett bought Circus-Circus in 1974, Fertitta took a similar position at the Sahara. At this point in his career, he began seriously to consider ownership of a gaming property. He pursued this goal as a partner of Carl Thomas during 1976–77, when he was general manager of the Fremont, a major downtown property. They and another partner opened the Bingo Palace in the latter part of 1977. When Nevada gaming regulators charged Thomas with being involved in a 1970s skimming operation at the Tropicana, Fertitta bought him out, and the other partner as well. He then oversaw the development of this property, now called Palace Station.[21]

Ed Nigro also played an important role in the gaming industry in the 1960s, but he did not follow the usual career paths. He joined the army Air Corps as a cadet when he enrolled at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1940. His military career included flying combat missions in World War II and the Korean conflict, high-level staff positions at the Pentagon, and appointment as the Air Force's youngest brigadier general. An unusual set of circumstances brought General Nigro to Las Vegas. Howard Hughes's close associate, Robert Maheu, had been a longtime personal friend of Ed Nigro. He knew that Nigro's management skills, high energy level, and loyalty to superiors prepared him well for a top-level position in Hughes's new, expanding gaming empire. Initially Nigro refused his friend's pleas to come to Las Vegas, but finally succumbed when Maheu made an exceptional salary and benefits-package offer. General Nigro was appointed president of the Sands in 1967, and about eighteen months later rose to deputy chief of Hughes's Nevada operations. All chief executive officers of Hughes's casinos reported to him. A year later Maheu and Nigro, friends of almost thirty years, fell into bitter disagreement about several issues, including management of the properties. General Nigro's son recalls that Maheu warned Nigro that he would never work again in Las Vegas. Maheu's prediction proved untrue when Bud Jones and Del Webb hired Nigro as executive vice-president of the Sahara Nevada Corporation. Nigro later served as president of the Nevada Resort Association, and died at age fifty-four following a heart attack in 1973.[22]

While many Italian-Americans were managers in the casinos, few held such positions in Las Vegas's labor unions. This should not be surprising considering that Italian-Americans, when not employed in management, gravitated towards non-union positions. They were well represented in the ranks of both dealers and proprietors of shops; in contrast, their representation among construction trade workers and service providers in hotels was much lower. Mike Pisanello, who came to Las Vegas in 1955 with his family from Pennsylvania, was the only

Italian-American to achieve a labor union leadership position. Moving from the Dunes showroom in 1959, he became a business agent for the largest labor organization in southern Nevada, the Culinary Union. Subsequently promoted to assistant to the president, he was elected vice-president in 1978. He also achieved recognition as a leader of the Italian-American Club, which had almost four hundred members in the 1960s.[23]

Among the better-known gourmet-room and showroom captains and maître d's were many Italian-Americans with origins in eastern cities or in Italy. Nick Kelly (né Fiore), Bruno Mandini, Mario Marino, Johnny Morelli, Ray Pistelli, Pietro Museto, Emilio Moscelli, and Marty Antonucci were among the most prominent. Nick Kelly was certainly the best remembered.[24] Maître d' at the Sands in the 1960s, Nick had worked closely with several Sands owners while at the Copacabana in New York City. He was a bachelor and devoted virtually all of his leisure time to developing the Italian-American Club. Whether in an official leadership position or not, Mike was the guiding force of a club whose membership was dominated by resort-industry employees.[25]

Italian-American performers were drawn to Las Vegas. Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin were the most important, but there were many other Italian-American entertainers, ranging from headliners to afternoon lounge singers. There were featured on-stage performers in the numerous extravaganzas on the Strip, as well as a variety of directors, scene designers, builders, and other off-stage personnel. The many musicians of Italian heritage were particularly noteworthy. Lorraine Hunt (née Perri), who began her fifteen-year singing career with Jerry Colonna at the Riviera in 1957, and Roland DiIorio, a prominent member of Louis Prima's band, recall that no ethnic group had greater representation among performers of the 1950s and 1960s than the Italian-Americans, several of whom, including Sam Butera, Sonny King and Louis Prima, made Las Vegas their home.

Scores of Italian-Americans owned or managed downtown and Strip restaurants, many of which were among the finest Las Vegas eating establishments. Italian-Americans with experience in the restaurant business began coming to Las Vegas soon after the opening of the Flamingo, and by the mid-1950s they owned more than one third of the dining establishments in the city. Throughout the 1960s, more than half of the most renowned restaurants were owned or managed by Italian-Americans.[26] None was more prestigious than Louigi's, located on the Strip between the Desert Inn and the Sands. "Louigi's was the flagship Italian restaurant." "Everyone—politicians, entertainers—went there." These were the typical comments made about Louigi's by men who worked in Las Vegas in the 1950s and 1960s.[27] Louigi's was started in 1951 by two partners. Louis Coniglio, the Italian-American partner, came to Las Vegas from Los Angeles in 1946.[28] Located near Louigi's, the Villa Venice, owned and operated by Sam Baker and his wife, was also one of the better restaurants in the 1950s and early 1960s. It was particularly popular with Strip casino and hotel workers, and

Aerial view of some of the oldest sections of Las Vegas, 1950s. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

some Las Vegans recall that Italian-Americans reputedly involved with organized crime would dine there on visits to Las Vegas.[29]

Two sisters from the Niagara Falls area made a major contribution to satisfying the appetites of both locals and tourists for fine Italian food. Maria Perri and Angie Ruvo and their husbands, Albert and Louis, opened the Venetian Pizzeria near the downtown area in the mid-1950s. Quickly recognized for its pizza and spaghetti, the restaurant soon expanded its menu to include other Italian specialties. After almost ten successful years, they built the Venetian Restaurant about one mile west of the Strip. Lorraine Hunt, daughter of Maria and Albert, recalls that her parents and the Ruvos decided to retire about 1971. They sold their very popular restaurant to several Italian-Americans who had recently come from Chicago. They had hoped to travel and enjoy a leisurely existence, but the temptation to return to the restaurant business proved too strong. Maria began helping Lorraine and her husband at the Bootlegger, which opened in 1972. Soon Maria was adding more and more Italian specialities to the menu, and both natives and tourists were filling the tables. In the mid-1970s Angie and Louis Ruvo bought back the Venetian. Both restaurants continue to enjoy excellent reputations for fine Italian food.[30]

Three Italian-Americans were prominent in food and beverage distribution. One, John DeLuca, a migrant from the Bay Area by way of southern California,

came to Las Vegas during World War II. He invested his expertise and capital in the beverage-distribution business and by 1951 had become the principal owner of Nevada Beverage Company, which dominated liquor distribution to Las Vegas businesses. Active in civic and philanthropic affairs until his death in 1960, DeLuca received honors from both Italian-American and Jewish-American organizations.[31]

Frank Longo was the operating manager of New York Meats, which had a near monopoly on the distribution of meats to the major Las Vegas hotels in the 1950s and 1960s. This company was owned by Irving Devine, a well-known gambler. Several of Devine's contemporaries recall that both he and Longo were thought to have connections with organized crime, though such rumors did not interfere with both becoming members of the eminent Las Vegas Country Club in the late 1960s. Less controversial during this period was Mike Maini, a produce distributor who was a leader in the Las Vegas Junior Chamber of Commerce and the Food Service Executive Association, as well as a member of the Board of Directors of the Italian-American Club in the mid-1960s. While Longo had resided in New York prior to moving in Las Vegas, Maini, born in Providence, had grown up and pursued his early business career in Los Angeles.[32]

Significant numbers of entrepreneurs with experience in waste disposal and construction were among the several thousand Italian-Americans who came to Las Vegas after the opening of the Flamingo. In fact, two families related by marriage, whose ancestors lived in the same region of northern Italy and who also had the same surname, have provided garbage-disposal services to greater Las Vegas for more than thirty-five years. Al Isola and his brother-in-law, John "Red" Isola, had operated a major garbage-disposal business in Oakland, California. When Al visited Las Vegas in 1954, he saw the great potential of the small but growing desert city. He persuaded John to join him in buying 45 percent of the then existing waste-disposal business belonging to Max Chason, who remained a partner until illness forced him to retire in 1965. Their company, Silver State Disposal, and its subsidiaries have had contracts with Las Vegas and Clark County since the mid-1950s, and in 1965 they gained Henderson's contract. They never experienced any serious competition, in part because they and other top-level managers of Silver State, most of whom were of Italian background, were committed to cost containment and used the latest technologies in waste disposal. Of course, their substantial involvement in civic affairs contributed to the success of their business. They and their wives were also active in the establishment and development of the Italian-American Club.[33]

While serious charges of dishonesty or even of mismanagement were never leveled at the Isolas, their Italian ancestry and the nature of their business led occasionally to vague rumors of associations with organized crime. When Ed Reid, a Las Vegas reporter, and Ovid Demaris were doing research for their book, *The Green Felt Jungle,* Reid contacted Oakland residents who knew the

Isola families to determine if there were any links to organized crime. Reid later told Al Isola at a social event, much to the embarrassment of Al's wife, that he should feel pleased that no such links had been uncovered.[34]

Not surprisingly, a number of young Italian-Americans with experience in construction moved to Las Vegas, hoping to take part in the building boom accompanying the rapid expansion of the gaming industry. Several prospered, developing construction companies that have continued to play a major part in the region's growth; others were moderately successful and found a niche in some aspect of commercial or residential construction; and, of course, a few failed. Italian-Americans were important not only as general contractors, but as specialists in masonry, painting, and plumbing.[35]

The career of one early contractor, Bernard Provenzano, illustrates the opportunities that Las Vegas presented at various stages of its growth. Provenzano had established a plumbing business in Las Vegas during World War II. He was moderately successful and became active in civic affairs. A series of legal difficulties, culminating in a brief term at a federal minimum-security facility for violation of antitrust laws, ended his plumbing career.[36] The strong-willed Provenzano returned to Las Vegas after completing his sentence, re-entered the construction business and eventually built many houses, including a major development of half-acre estates on Vegas Drive. His election to the presidency of the Italian-American Club in the early 1970s reflects the willingness of Las Vegans to forgive past transgressions of successful citizens.[37]

Domenic Bianchi and Tony Marnell came to Las Vegas from southern California. Bianchi, who was born in Italy and reared in Indiana, and Marnell, born in Pennsylvania of Italian parents, worked first as masons on the final construction phases of the Sands, and then spent several years working primarily for the Pardee Corporation, the area's major residential builder in the early 1950s. In 1956 they formed a masonry-contracting partnership which lasted for two decades. Their business expanded as Las Vegas grew. They acted as subcontractors in house construction, business developments, hotel construction on the Strip, and casino renovations in the downtown area. They also did much of the original masonry work for McCarran Airport and the Convention Center.[38]

As subcontractors, Bianchi and Marnell worked closely with other major Italian-American builders, such as Frank and Louis Miranti, Ray Paglia, and Gus Rapone. The Miranti brothers, executive officers of American Homes, who had previously worked in southern California, built several large single-family developments during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Ray Paglia came to Las Vegas from Cleveland in 1960 and began building houses. He then expanded his business to large-scale apartment construction, and finally in the early 1970s played a major role in constructing the Continental, about a mile east of the Strip. The army Air Corps sent Gus Rapone to the Las Vegas Gunnery School during World War II. Deciding to launch his career in Las Vegas, he became one of the principal officers of Sierra Construction by the early 1960s; this company had

specialized in federal government projects in the 1950s and later successfully competed for contracts to build gaming properties.[39]

J. A. Tiberti, the premier Italian-American contractor in southern Nevada, also extensively engaged the Marnell/Bianchi Company for subcontracting work. Like Gus Rapone, Tiberti came to Las Vegas during World War II. As a surveyor for the Army Corps of Engineers, he was assigned to work at the Gunnery School. A Colorado native, he, too, saw the potential of Las Vegas and decided to stay. With two associates he formed Waale, Camplan, and Tiberti Construction, and, among other accomplishments, built houses in the Bonanza Village area near downtown.[40] In 1950, he and his wife established their own company, which undertook during the next twenty years a great diversity of successful projects, including the renovation of Hoover Dam, construction and remodeling of various downtown and Strip hotels, and construction of a First Interstate Bank building, two Roman Catholic churches, and numerous public buildings. In addition, they gained many contracts from the federal government for construction or renovation projects at the Nevada Test Site and the Indian Springs and Nellis Air Force bases.[41]

Italian-Americans were not quite as significant in banking circles as they were in construction. However, several bankers did contribute greatly to the area's development. Harry Manente, who grew up in Reno, managed the main Las Vegas office of the First National Bank of Nevada. During the 1950s he was "Mr. Banking of Southern Nevada." He is warmly remembered as a generous, caring man whose word was his bond. Manente's superiors in Reno were very skeptical about prospects for the long-term growth of Las Vegas, believing throughout the 1950s that the southern Nevada boom would soon end. Struggling against this narrow view, Manente advanced credit to many Las Vegans to begin or expand their businesses.[42] When the bank opened its second office in Las Vegas in 1953, Reno Fruzza, another Italian-American originally from the Reno area, was appointed assistant to the manager, Reed Whipple. In 1962 he was made manager of the bank's new branch on the Tonopah Highway (now Rancho Drive).[43] A third Italian-American, Ollie Raggio, came to Las Vegas from California in the mid-1950s to manage the installment-loan department. Promoted to Harry Manente's assistant, he became manager when a stroke incapacitated Manente in 1961.[44]

Guido Testolin, who served as assistant vice-president of the Bank of Nevada and managed its Strip office in the 1960s, originally came to Las Vegas in 1938 from Wyoming at the urging of his uncle, Berto Testolin, a Prohibition bootlegger who later entered the saloon business.[45] Guido returned from military service after World War II to work for John DeLuca. He did not enjoy his assignment in a liquor-distribution warehouse and soon thereafter became a clerk at the Bank of Nevada. He advanced into management positions, first as manager of the West Charleston branch and then in 1962 as manager of the Strip branch.

Most active in Italian-American affairs, he served as treasurer of an Italian club that William Peccole, then a city commissioner, founded in the early 1950s.[46]

Six Italian-Americans achieved prominence in either real estate or insurance. Like most Las Vegans, they were not natives of the city. William Peccole and Al Anniello came from California. Peccole arrived in the early 1930s at age seventeen with his father, who soon became a bar owner and major holder of Las Vegas real estate. Anniello, who had been reared in Rhode Island, arrived in 1961. Phil Mirabelli, a nephew of P. O. Silvagni, had come to Las Vegas from New Jersey in 1940. Angelo Manzi and Frank Sala grew up in northern Nevada. Manzi came to Las Vegas from Yerington in 1942; Sala came to Las Vegas in 1958 from the Reno area, where he had been in the real-estate business. Lou La Porta, who grew up in Westchester County, New York, was assigned to the Gunnery School at roughly the same time as Gus Rapone. Seeing the potential of the Las Vegas area and recognizing that the dry climate would reduce his wife's sinus problems, he stayed.[47]

William Peccole was the most successful. By the early 1960s he was recognized as a leading landowner and developer of successful shopping malls.[48] Perhaps the wisest of Peccole's many purchases of desert was the area west of Rainbow Boulevard and north of Sahara Boulevard, which is now known as the Peccole Ranch. Peccole bought this land in the early 1950s and retained it even though there was virtually no development west of Rainbow Boulevard for almost thirty years. Demonstrating his attachment to his Italian heritage, Peccole stipulated in his sale of some of this land that all of the streets in the proposed large single-family residential development would be given Italian names.[49]

Although Lou La Porta owned and operated his own insurance agency, while Angelo Manzi was associated with New York Life Insurance Company, they were alike in many respects. Both had the outgoing personalities and high energy levels typical of successful insurance agents. The Reverend John McVeigh, assistant pastor at St. Anne's Church in the late 1950s, recalls that Lou La Porta's agency was one of two, Craigin and Pike being the other, often used by the growing Roman Catholic population in southern Nevada. Harry Claiborne, an attorney in the 1950s, remembers Angelo Manzi as "the best salesman I ever saw." Both were active in a great variety of civic organizations and charities, and both sought elective public office, though only La Porta was successful.[50]

Frank Sala, who had been active in real estate and advertising in the Reno area for more than twenty years, was keenly aware of the tremendous gaming and population growth in Las Vegas. He invested in several gaming properties and served as manager of the Santa Anita Race Book during the late 1950s. He became active in the booming real estate market and in 1961 sold his interests in casinos and race books to concentrate on real estate. He and Chuck Ruthe began a successful real-estate partnership which lasted until 1975. Sala was a leader in

the organizations and regulatory agencies of his profession, serving as president of the Las Vegas Board of Realtors in 1967, the state Real Estate Board in 1970, and the Nevada Real Estate Advisory Commission later.[51]

There were fewer Italian-Americans in the professions than in business ownership and management. Their representation among Las Vegas area attorneys, dentists, physicians, and teachers was limited in the 1950s, and only in the late 1960s did they reach a level approximating the percentage of Italian-Americans in the general population.[52] This could be expected for two reasons. First, in the 1950s there were not large numbers of Italian-Americans in these professions in the eastern cities from which so many Las Vegans originally migrated.[53] Second, the Las Vegas population initially grew much more rapidly than did the cultural amenities and improvements in the quality of life. Thus it was not a particularly attractive place for professionals to locate.

The first lawyer of Italian background to settle permanently in Las Vegas was John Manzonie. Reared in northeastern Nevada, he was admitted to the bar in 1954, established his practice in Las Vegas in 1955, and soon thereafter formed a partnership with Harry Claiborne. By 1961 Gene and Albert Matteuci, grandsons of Vincent Matteuci, one of the earliest Italian-American pioneers in Las Vegas, had joined Manzonie as the only other attorneys of Italian surname in Las Vegas. After gaining experience as chief deputy district attorney of Clark County, Gene Matteuci was appointed city attorney of Boulder City in 1962 and served in that capacity until 1965. He then entered private practice in partnership with Mahlon Brown. Remaining active in local politics, Gene served as chairman of the Democratic Committee of Clark County during 1966–67. Albert Matteuci spent most of the 1960s working in the law firm of Milton Keefer, who was chairman of the Gaming Commission in the early part of that decade. By 1969 there were only four other Italian-Americans among the ranks of the more than 120 attorneys practicing in southern Nevada.[54]

A Union Pacific Railroad surgeon, John Demman was the first Italian-American physician in Las Vegas. A West Virginia native who was graduated from Creighton University Medical School, Demman was appointed the Union Pacific's district surgeon in Caliente, Nevada, in 1935 and continued in that capacity until he was transferred to Las Vegas in 1948. Both his wife, Mary, and Dr. Joseph La Mancusa, who came to Las Vegas in 1961, describe John Demman as an energetic man who had an extensive private practice in addition to his responsibilities as district surgeon for the Union Pacific. He was appointed chief-of-staff of St. Rose de Lima Hospital in Henderson in the mid-1950s, and Sister Roberta Joseph, a long-time administrator at the hospital, recalls that he continued to serve in that capacity through the mid-1960s.

The next two physicians, Drs. Ralph La Canna and Donald Romeo, came to Las Vegas in 1959. Dr. Romeo, an avid sports fan, was appointed ringside physician by the Nevada Boxing Commission soon after establishing his Las Vegas practice. In 1962 four other physicians of Italian background joined Drs.

Demman, La Canna, La Mancusa, and Romeo, and by the late 1960s the percentage of Italian-Americans among Las Vegas physicians was similar to that of the Italian-Americans in the Las Vegas area population as a whole.[55]

Several Italian-Americans who had entered public school teaching in the 1950s became administrators in the Clark County School District in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Prior to 1960, only three Italian-Americans—Katherine Tambini, Harvey Dondero, and Joseph Santrafel—had served as Las Vegas School principals or assistant superintendents. Four who began teaching in the late 1950s and early 1960s achieved prominence in the following decades. Frank Bursa continues to serve as principal of Las Vegas High School, while the Silvestri brothers, Charles and Louis, retired from the school system in 1989, the former after serving as deputy superintendent of the Clark Country School District for many years, and the latter after serving as principal of both junior and senior high schools. Mario Monaco was first appointed as a school principal in the mid-1960s, and he continued in administration for more than twenty years, retiring in 1988 while principal of the Southern Nevada Vocational Technical Center. While Bursa and the Silvestri brothers came from the East, Mario Monaco grew up in Montana.[56]

The number of Italian-Americans employed by the City of Las Vegas and Clark County was relatively meagre, more reflective of the proportion of Italian-Americans in the southern Nevada population before 1947 than in the 1960s. This is not unexpected as the overwhelming majority of Las Vegas migrants were drawn by private sector jobs. Since even dealers at Strip properties realized better incomes than most public-sector employees, few Italian-Americans sought city or county positions.

A few Italian-Americans achieved responsible positions in Las Vegas area governmental agencies. The most notable were Al Bossi, Aldo Barozzi, Julius Conigliaro, and John Pisciotta.[57] Bossi, whose family had migrated to the United States from the Piedmont region of Italy, grew up in West Virginia, earned a degree in civil engineering, and settled in the San Francisco area after military service. He served as traffic engineer for Alameda County in the early 1950s, coming to Las Vegas to serve in the same capacity at the request of city officials in 1956. He recalls being a one-man department for his first ten years, trying to develop a system of traffic management during a period when the population expanded faster than public services. Al Bossi was a prime mover in the establishment of the Italian-American Club in 1960 and became its first president.

Aldo Barozzi came to Las Vegas from southern California with his parents in 1931. They operated a successful restaurant and eventually acquired substantial real estate in the downtown area.[58] Mary Jane, Aldo's wife, remembers that he worked for the City of Las Vegas, then for Clark County, and finally for the J. M. Montgomery Construction Company, which built water lines linking Lake Mead with Las Vegas and Henderson. Once the lines were completed, the Las Vegas Water District sought Aldo's engineering expertise, and he began a career of

more than twenty-five years with the water district in 1955. During this time he served briefly as acting general manager, and for many years as assistant to the general manager.[59]

Julius Conigliaro joined the Las Vegas Fire Department in 1953, less than one year after he and his wife left Brooklyn. After playing a major role in organizing the firefighters as a local of the affiliated International Firefighters, AFL-CIO, he served on the local's board of directors for five years and was then elected secretary-treasurer in 1963. He helped not only in gaining public support for substantial pay increases, but also in gaining collective bargaining for firefighters. The latter effort required Conigliaro, who had been appointed a captain in the Las Vegas Fire Department in 1960, to spend a good deal of time and effort lobbying the Nevada legislature during its biennial sessions. William Bunker, deputy fire chief of the Clark County Fire Department, son of a former Nevada State senator, and now the department's lobbyist in the state capital, recounts that Conigliaro gained a reputation as an intelligent, well-informed, and honest lobbyist in his efforts for the Dodge Bill (which gave public-safety employees the right of collective bargaining) in 1969 and, later, for lowering the retirement age for firefighters.[60]

John Pisciotta was employed by the Clark County Building Department as a structural engineer in 1967, and was promoted to director in 1972. Forced to resign in 1977 for allegedly favoring two hotels in which he held ownership, he came under considerable criticism after the tragic 1980 fire at the MGM Grand Hotel because he had overruled state and local fire marshals on installing a sprinkling system.[61]

Italian-Americans were well represented among candidates for public office. In 1947 Al Corradetti, who had served for several years on the City Commission, and William Peccole received the most votes among the eleven losers in a contest for a City Commission seat. William's brother, Robert, then a bar owner and property manager, unsuccessfully ran for Las Vegas justice of the peace in 1948, receiving 5,166 votes of the 11,433 cast. Corradetti retired from public life, though both Peccoles ran again. In 1949 William Peccole decisively defeated long-term city commissioner and Nevada Beverage Company owner Pat Clark. Robert, however, was unsuccessful, losing to Reed Whipple in his bid for a seat on the City Commission in 1951. Two years later in 1953, William Peccole, having entered public life as a reform candidate, lost his seat to Harris Sharp after a campaign in which Hank Greenspun, owner and editor of the *Las Vegas Sun*, charged Peccole with blatant dishonesty.[62] Peccole was subsequently indicted on the charge of soliciting a bribe, but then acquitted. Neither Peccole ran for public office again, though one must assume that William, at least, was pleased when one of his insurance and real-estate business employees, Philip Mirabelli, outpolled Harris Sharp in a City Commissioner contest in 1961. Mirabelli served until he was defeated in 1969 by Dr. Alexander Coblentz.[63]

While William Peccole was serving on the City Commission, two other Italian-

A view of Main Street, Las Vegas, in the late 1940s. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

Americans, who like Peccole had come to Las Vegas as teenagers, entered politics. Jack Pettiti, who had joined the Mormon Church when his family lived in Utah, was elected to the Clark County Board of Education in 1950. Dick Ronzone had come to Las Vegas from the Tonopah area with his parents and was elected to the same board in 1952, a year after being elected president of the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce and two years after failing to gain election to the Nevada Senate. Pettiti then went on to serve twelve years (1959–71) on the North Las Vegas City Council, and ten years on the Clark County Commission. Ronzone, too, sought other elective offices after serving one term on the school board. Before serving on the Clark County Commission in 1972, he had won election to the University of Nevada Board of Regents and later to the Nevada Assembly.

Lou La Porta, whose New York origins were mentioned earlier, began his political career in 1953 by gaining 58 percent of the votes in a five-man contest for the Ward 3 seat (four-year term of office) on the City Council of Henderson. He decisively won re-election in 1957 to a two-year term, but was defeated by Frank Morrell in 1959. The next year two seats were added to the County Commission, and La Porta, a Democrat, easily prevailed over his Republican opponent. He won a second four-year term in 1964. In 1968, he decided to concentrate on his insurance business and did not seek re-election.[64]

Ethnicity was not a significant factor in southern Nevada elections. Unlike Eastern cities, Las Vegas had no ethnic neighborhoods, and many voters were

unable to classify family names as belonging to any particular ethnic group. Phil Mirabelli, Lou La Porta, Jack Pettiti, and Dick Ronzone agreed that an Italian surname may have gained them a few votes and cost them an equally small number. Only Mirabelli took a leadership role in an Italian-American organization. Italian-surnamed politicians were like most of the area's Italian-Americans, not deeply concerned about their ethnic origins (only 6–8 percent of adult Italian-Americans were members of the Italian-American Club or Sons of Italy in the late 1960s).

Conclusion

The Italian-American baccarat and twenty-one dealers, casino and hotel managers, entertainers, restaurant owners, builders, businessmen, public servants, and elected officials have all contributed materially to the growth of the greater Las Vegas area. But Las Vegas is as much a state of mind, an image, and perhaps even a myth, as it is a physical presence. Part of its lure to millions, then and now, is the idea that in Vegas the usual rules do not apply. One can completely forget whether it is morning, noon, or night in the windowless and clockless casinos. One forgets normal constraints on behavior as vast amounts of money are won and lost, tremendous quantities of food are served in sometimes bewildering artificial milieux that range from poolside Hawaiian luaus to Roman feasts, and hundreds of performers parade in stage spectaculars. The air of excitement is enhanced by the thought that a well-known music or movie star may be gambling in the casino, and, equally so, that an underworld figure may be nearby, perhaps the casino's secret owner—the man who really makes things happen in Las Vegas.[65]

What could possibly be more intriguing, more evocative of the mystery of Las Vegas than the word *Mafia?* Even before the *Godfather* movies, the word conjured images of swarthy men in silk suits, occasionally speaking a strange language in hushed tones, and living by standards unfathomable to millions of ordinary people. Reinforcing these images was the fact that criminals of Italian heritage, like criminals of other ethnic backgrounds, invested their capital and expertise in Las Vegas.[66] In addition, a tourist reading the Las Vegas papers found news of reputed Mafia figures, and the presence of so many dealers, floormen, pit bosses, and shift bosses with Italian names seemed to substantiate the Mafia's presence. In talking with these casino workers, the visitor might well have heard that certain Italian-American pit bosses and shift managers actually ran everything at a Strip property, or even that the leader of the Chicago, Kansas City, or Milwaukee mob had been a recent visitor at the Italian-American Club.

Perhaps Italian-Americans, merely by their combined image and extensive presence in Las Vegas, have enhanced the lure of Las Vegas as a unique destination—an adult Disneyland where fantasies come true. In any case, the achievements of Las Vegas's Italian-Americans have been significant in transforming this small western city into an international sunbelt resort.

NOTES

[1]John W. Findley, *People of Chance: Gambling in American Society from Jamestown to Las Vegas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 173, discusses the population growth. "Boomtown in the Desert," a chapter in Eugene Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt: Las Vegas, 1930–1970* (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1989), presents a comprehensive picture of the rapid development of Las Vegas.

[2]The extent of the Italian population in the United States over-all population was, and remains today, a subject of dispute, with estimates ranging from 4 percent to as high as 8 percent. See Joseph Velikonja, "Demographic and Cultural Aspects of Italian Americans," in Graziano Battistella, ed., *Italian Americans in the 80s: A Sociodemographic Profile* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1989) for information from the 1980 United States Census. This author's estimate of the Las Vegas Italian-American population relies on the incidence of Italian names. Resources include voter-registration lists published in the *Las Vegas Age* (30 October 1936) and the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (26 April 1957), and telephone directories for the years under review (Special Collections, University of Nevada, Las Vegas).

[3]The family-based value system of Italian-Americans, particularly those of southern Italian origin, is discussed in many works, notably Richard D. Alba, *Italian-Americans: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985), and Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood: The Dilemma of the Italian-Americans* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974).

[4]The nature and extent of the illegal enterprises operated by the men who later became Las Vegas's founding fathers is an often-told tale. Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris, *The Green Felt Jungle* (New York: Trident Press, 1963), chs. 1–5, provides a thorough if somewhat sensational review of this matter. See also George Stamos, "The Great Resorts of Las Vegas: How They Began," *Las Vegas Sun Magazine*, series (April–December 1979). In these works, as well as in the proceedings of the Kefauver Committee, Italian and Jewish names figure prominently.

[5]Interviews with the Reverend Caesar Caviglia, the Reverend Benjamin Franzinelli, and the Reverend John McVeigh.

[6]Alan Balboni, "Tony's Carpet Joint," *The Nevadan* (28 January 1990), pp. 12S–13S. See also John F. Cahlan, "Reminiscences of a Reno and Las Vegas Newspaperman, University Regent, and Public Spirited Citizen" (Oral History Project, University of Nevada, Reno, 1969), 115–18. Special Collections, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

[7]Interview with Jacqueline Allen (née Oliva), a relative of Sam Baker.

[8]*Las Vegas Review-Journal* (26 March 1948), p. 1.

[9]Jane Ann Morrison, "Spotlight on Searchlight," *The Nevadan* (9 October 1977), pp. 3–4.

[10]Interviews with Rose Hill and Sandy Sandquist. See *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (3 December 1946), p. 7; (1 September 1949), p. 5; (1 February 1950), p. 10, for information on some of the business activities of Willie Martello and one of his brothers. See *Las Vegas Sun* (20 May 1990), p. 1AA, for information on investments of two other brothers.

[11]U.S., Congress, Senate, Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce, Part 10 (Nevada-California), 1951 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 540–41, 638–39.

[12]*Ibid.*, 636.

[13]Lester Ben "Benny" Binion, "Some Recollections of a Texas and Las Vegas Gaming Operator" (Oral History Project, University of Nevada, Reno, 1976), 35. Special Collections, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

[14]*Las Vegas Review-Journal* (16 November 1950), p. 1; (22 November 1950), p. 1; (17 May 1951), p. 1.

[15]Interviews with Syl De Gregorio, William Peccole, Guido Testolin, and another Italian-American who wishes to remain anonymous.

[16]Reid and Demaris, *Green Felt Jungle*, appendix; interviews with Thomas Foley, William Papagna, and Frank Sala.

[17]*Luskey's City Directories*, 1956–62, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

[18]Reid and Demaris, *Green Felt Jungle*, 208–9; interview with Ted Canino.

[19]Stamos, "Great Resorts" (3 June 1979), pp. 6–7; interview with Charles Silvestri.

[20]Interviews with Frank Modica and Charles Silvestri.

[21]*Luskey's* 1954–69. See also George Stamos, "A Class Act—The Desert Inn," *Nevada Day 1864–1989* (Las Vegas: University Medical Center Foundation, 1989), 86, for additional information regarding Mike Bonfiglio. The author also received information about the careers of Phil Dioguardi, Pete Bommarito, Carmine Cardello, and Frank Modica from William Peccole, Al Bossi, Dan Rotunno, and Frank Modica. Frank Fertitta's post-1976 career is discussed in the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (9 September 1989), p. 63; (3 November 1989), editorial page.

[22]Interviews with Reno Fruzza and Ed Nigro. See also "Del Webb Hotel Chief Ed Nigro Dead at 54," *Las Vegas Sun* (2 July 1973), p. 1.

[23]Interviews with Al Bossi, Harry Claiborne, Judy Pisanello, and Joe Todaro (a Culinary Union official).

[24]Interviews with the Reverend Caesar Caviglia, Rudy Guerrero (maître d' at the Sands), Frank Musso, Giovanni Parente (maître d' at the Dunes), and others.

[25]Interviews with Al Bossi, Tony Ricci, and Guido Testolin.

[26]*Luskey's*, 1954–69.

[27]Interviews with Lou La Porta, the Reverend John McVeigh, Wilbur "Butch" Leypoldt (Clark County sheriff, 1954–60), and others, including Elliot Krane.

[28]"Retired Las Vegas Restaurateur Dies," *Las Vegas Sun* (13 January 1990), p. 13. Many interviewees report that by the end of the 1960s the Villa d'Este, also owned by an Italian-American, had replaced Louigi's as the finest Italian restaurant.

[29]Interviews with Jacqueline Allen, Rudy Guerrero, and Toni Lamb (née Tucci), who is, and was in the 1950s, a twenty-one dealer. She was the first wife of Ralph Lamb, sheriff of Clark County in the 1960s.

[30]*Luskey's* 1954–67; interviews with Russell Anderson, Reno Fruzza, and the Reverend John McVeigh substantiate Lorraine Hunt's recollections.

[31]Alan Balboni, "From Laborer to Entrepreneur: The Italian-American in Southern Nevada, 1905–1947," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 34(Spring 1991), 257–70.

[32]Interviews with Julius Conigliaro, Frank Musso, Tony Tegano (pit boss at the Dunes in the mid and late 1960s, and presently owner of Tango Pool Company), Don Vincent, and an Italian-American who wishes to remain anonymous.

[33]Interviews with Al Bossi, Reno Fruzza, Tom Isola, and Al Isola. See "Largest Private Transfer Station Open for Business," *World Wastes* (March 1983), 14–15, for the Isolas' commitment to state-of-the-art technology in waste disposal.

[34]Interviews with Al Isola and Tom Isola.

[35]*Business-Professional Directory* (Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce), 1954; *Luskey's*, 1954–69; *Directory of Licensed Contractors* (State Contractors Board), 1967.

[36]*Las Vegas Review-Journal* (30 December 1944), p. 2; (22 February 1946), p. 5; (4 February 1951), p. 3; interview with John Manzonie.

[37]Interviews with Al Bossi, John Manzonie, Tony Ricci (an officer of the Italian-American Club in the 1960s and 1970s); *Luskey's*, 1968–69.

[38]Interviews with Tony Allotta (a subcontractor in the 1960s), Domenic Bianchi, Mike Fauci (son of Charles Fauci, a small contractor in the 1950s and 1960s, and now president of M. G. Fauci Construction Company), and Tony Marnell; *Luskey's*, 1956–69.

[39]*Luskey's*, 1957–69; interviews with Domenic Bianchi, Lou La Porta, and Ray Paglia (one of Ray Paglia's sons). See also Gene Moehring, *Resort City*, 25, regarding extensive residential building by the Miranti brothers.

[40]*Las Vegas Review-Journal* (7 November 1947), p. 2; interview with J. A. Tiberti.

[41]Interviews with Tony Allotta, Julius Conigliaro, the Reverend John McVeigh, and J. A. Tiberti. See *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (3 February 1950), p. 1, for Indian Springs Air Force Base construction; (27 May 1960), p. 1, for award by Clark County School District to Tiberti Company of $2,220,000 contract to build Western High School. (Actually, J. A. Tiberti does recall building three houses during the 1947–70 period.)

[42]Interviews with Harry Fletcher (his father was an official of the First National Bank of Nevada and a friend of Manente), Joseph Foley, Reno Fruzza, Frank Modica, William Peccole, and Frank Sala. See also Moehring, *Resort City*, 231, as to just one of Manente's many civic contributions.

[43]Interviews with Harry Fletcher and Reno Fruzza.

[44]Interviews with Harry Fletcher, Joseph Foley, and Reno Fruzza.

[45]Interview with Guido Testolin. See also *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* (5 November 1937), p. 4; (5 April 1940), p. 7, for additional information on Berto Testolin's business interests.

[46]"Biennial Report of Superintendent of Banks," *Appendix to Journals of Senate and Assembly,* 1959 (Vol. II), 1961 (Vol. II), 1963 (Vol. III), and 1969 (Vol. II); interviews with William Peccole and Guido Testolin.

[47]*Luskey's,* 1954–69; interviews with Al Anniello, Harry Claiborne, Lou La Porta, David Manzi, Phil Mirabelli, William Peccole, and Frank Sala. See *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal and Boulder City Journal* (22 February 1946), p. 12, for information on real-estate holdings of Peter Peccole, William's father.

[48]Interviews with Al Bossi, Phil Mirabelli, William Peccole, and Guido Testolin. Builders' Square and Charleston Plaza were two of the most notable malls planned by Peccole.

[49]William Peccole Strada sets the southern boundary of the development.

[50]*Luskey's,* 1954–69.

[51]*Ibid.,* 1957–69; interviews with Reno Fruzza, Dan Rotunno, and Frank Sala.

[52]*Luskey's,* 1954–69.

[53]Gambino, *Blood of My Blood,* 78–80, discusses the high levels of illiteracy of southern Italian immigrants and the limited education of most second-generation Italian-Americans. Speaking at the Italian-American Club in Las Vegas on November 17, 1989, Gambino said that Italian-Americans differed from many other ethnic groups because their educational attainments followed their economic advancements rather than preceeded them.

[54]Interviews with Al Bossi, Harry Claiborne, John Manzonie, and Gene Matteuci; *A Political Directory for the Incorporated Communities of Nevada,* compiled by Waller H. Reed for the Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada (1982); *Luskey's,* 1961–69.

[55]Interviews with Dr. Joseph La Mancusa and Dr. Donald Romeo.

[56]*Luskey's,* 1954–69; Harvey Dondero, *History of Clark County Schools,* compiled and edited by Billie F. Shank, Clark County School District (1986); interviews with Frank Bursa, the Reverend Caesar Caviglia, Mario Monaco, and Charles Silvestri.

[57]*Luskey's,* 1954–69.

[58]Interviews with Mary Jane Barozzi (née Gallagher), Olga Moe (née Silvagni), and William Peccole.

[59]"Former Water District Exec Dies," *Las Vegas Sun* (30 January 1989), obituary page; *Luskey's,* 1951–69. See Moehring, *Resort City,* 15–16, for general information on development of water resources in the early 1950s.

[60]*Luskey's,* 1954–69; interviews with Al Bossi and Julius Conigliaro. Another Italian-American, Charles Perri, was appointed captain in the mid-1960s.

[61]*Las Vegas Review-Journal* (19 November 1990), p. 1. Mr. Pisciotta has not returned this author's many calls.

[62]*Political Directory;* Moehring, *Resort City,* 71–72, 100–101; Binion, "Some Recollections," 69.

[63]*Political Directory.* Peccole stressed in the interview that he did nothing to bring about the defeat of Sharp, whom he regarded as a friend.

[64]*Political Directory;* interviews with Lou La Porta, Jack Pettiti, and Dick Ronzone.

[65]Candace Kant discusses the cinematic image of Las Vegas as a place where dreams come true in "City of Dreams," *Nevada Magazine,* 50 (January/February 1990), 11–14, 54–56. See also *idem,* "City of Dreams," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly,* 33 (Winter 1990), 1–12.

[66]See Humbert S. Nelli, *The Business of Crime: Italians and Syndicate Crime in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), for a most balanced presentation of the complex and emotionally charged issue of the roles of certain ethnic groups in organized crime. See also Ovid Demaris, *The Last Mafioso* (New York: Times Books, 1981), for an insider's perspective on the Italian-American and Jewish involvement in organized crime.

NELLIE VERRILL MIGHELS DAVIS
The "Spirit-of-Things-Achieved"

Sherilyn Cox Bennion

When Nellie Verrill Mighels came to Carson City in 1866, the bride of a recently discharged veteran of the Civil War, she made the last leg of her journey by stagecoach. She moved with her city, her state, and her country into the twentieth century and died in 1945, the year the atomic bomb ended World War II. As a pioneer, she usually observed the conventions, but could act with audacity when the occasion demanded. As a journalist, she reported on church meetings, legislative sessions, and a championship prize fight, and she ran the *Carson City Daily Appeal* after the death of her first husband. As a wife, she lent support to two men who followed active careers as publishers and politicians. As a matriarch, she held the reins of a family of children and grandchildren that spread across Nevada and the West. She was, in many ways, representative of the women of the West.

Lucy Ellen (Nellie) Verrill was born in her parents' house on Patch Mountain in Greenwood, Maine, on September 10, 1844. Her father, George W. Verrill, had taught school, farmed, and worked as a carpenter and a storekeeper. During Nellie's youth he kept a general store. A staunch opponent of slavery, he also commanded the Greenwood militia. Her mother, Lucy Hilborn was an accomplished tailor and made all the family's clothes. Nellie said that her parents taught their children to speak and write correctly and that each evening the whole family gathered to read the Bible, taking turns reading aloud.[1]

The town physician was the father of Nellie's future husband, Henry Rust Mighels, whom she met when he visited his family in 1860. She was sixteen; he was thirty. After he said goodbye, he called to her, "I'm coming back to marry you when you are old enough."[2]

Henry had studied medicine with his father for a year, then learned oil painting. In 1850 he traveled to California by way of New Orleans and Nicaragua, where he ran a hotel for a time. In San Francisco he worked as a sign and decorative painter before turning to journalism in 1856, first as assistant editor of

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Nellie Verrill Mighels Davis, c. 1875. (*Photo by Bradley & Ruldson, San Francisco; courtesy of Henry Rust Mighels III)*

the *Butte Record* of Oroville, then as local editor of the *Sacramento Bee.* When the *Marysville Appeal* was established in 1860, he became its first editor. A strong Unionist, he returned to the East to fight in the Civil War, receiving a commission as captain in 1862. He was shot through both hips in June 1864 during the Petersburg campaign and was honorably discharged later that year. After nearly dying of gangrene in a hospital at Annapolis, he went to his parents' home to recover, and apparently decided that Nellie was "old enough," for he began a campaign to win her heart.

He returned to California in April 1865 and soon received word that friends planned to start a pro-Union paper in Carson City, Nevada, and wanted him as editor.[3] They named the new paper *The Carson Daily Appeal,* in honor of Henry's editorship of the *Marysville Appeal.* It began—and for many years continued—as a small-format, four-page daily.

Wonderful letters still in family hands trace the course of Henry and Nellie's romance.[4] The correspondence began while Henry served in the Union army. He combined descriptions of his various military locales with romantic avowals and humor. In March 1863 he wrote:

> I am glad to tell you frankly that I love you with all my worthless heart—But let us both make light of that fact—fact as it is, for it is worse than useless to make the matter a serious one—So, Nellie you may laugh at the confessions of a poor old bachelor—and when, one of these days—you may gladden the board and fireside of some most fortunate lord of creation you have my consent to point your finger at me—or my picture and say—"that old chap was dead in love with me once." And then, if I am present I will say "Yes,—that's a fact,—and I am not cured of the malady yet."

Nellie maintained the same teasing tone, but without any professions of love. She suggested he wanted her picture to make fun of, but she intended to have a good one taken, in case he might show it to some handsome young officer. She addressed him as "My Friend Harry" and often closed with an admonition like this one of March 27, 1864: "Good bye Harry. Be a good boy and do just as I say in all things and I'll think of you every day for a month."

After his arrival in Carson City, Henry began to make plans for their marriage, which he hoped would take place as soon as he achieved a secure financial footing. Still, Nellie vacillated. "I dare not engage myself to you fearing I may not love you, and I am sorry to have you feel so sure of me when I am no surer of myself," she wrote in May 1865. She told him that she wouldn't even have considered his proposal if he hadn't agreed to give up drinking, and she asked him to forgo chewing tobacco as well. He agreed. In October 1865 she wrote that two paragraphs in a copy of the *Appeal* he had sent were causing "anxious thought," for they indicated that the writer had enjoyed partaking of alcoholic beverages. An exchange of letters required two months, so it was December before she received an explanation of the use of the "editorial we" and understood that it referred not to the editor but to the printers who had actually done the drinking.

Henry Rust Mighels. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

At one point, Nellie asked if Henry would like a correspondent from the Pine Tar State and went on to explain that she once edited a paper, although it was only a lyceum paper. "Yet," she continued, "I was complimented for the editorial insomuch that people said some of my brothers must have written it!" By the time Henry's positive response arrived, she had changed her mind about an editorial career. However, she did send him a copy of a poem she had written in praise of milk. Its final verse:

> Fill with the foamy milk the cup,
> Till it rises high and higher up,
> Then lift to the lip, with smile and bow,
> And drink the health of "good mooly cow."

Henry printed the poem, with a by-line, in the *Appeal,* to Nellie's considerable embarrassment.

Finally, on November 26, 1865, Nellie wrote that she would be his, "to have and to hold, until death claims his own, dating from Jan. 1, 1866." She continued, "I guess, (pshaw! you little country girl) I know that I—I—love you dearly, and will try very hard to make you happy. There! It's out and didn't quite choke me after all." Henry received her "glorious" letter on Christmas Day and felt "richer than President Lincoln did when Sherman made him a Christmas present of Savannah." The promise, he said, was "the most precious gift I ever received," and he vowed to retain the letter conveying it for the rest of his life.

Making arrangements for a wedding proved complicated. The *Appeal* and certain financial dealings were at a stage that required Henry's presence, so it was difficult for him to return to Maine. Nellie wrote that she would make the trip west alone, if necessary, but Henry thought that unwise. In addition, Nellie had been caring for her two younger sisters since the deaths of her parents. Henry wanted to make a home for them, as well as for Nellie, but her older brothers had reservations about letting the girls go so far away. Nellie began making wedding preparations, which she did not particularly enjoy. She wrote, "Getting ready to be married is a humbug. I don't believe in it and don't mean to get married ever again. It's too hard work and I'm inclined to think won't pay."

Finally, in July 1866, Nellie began her trip west. Her brother took her to New York, where she met Nevada State Treasurer Eben Rhoades, a friend of Henry's who had been in the East on state business and had agreed to serve as her escort for the twenty-eight-day journey. They traveled by steamer from New York to Panama, across the isthmus on a narrow-gauge railroad, and to San Francisco by another steamer. There Henry met her and took her to stay with friends in the city. The couple then traveled by boat to Sacramento, where they were married on August 20, 1866. A stagecoach, driven by the legendary Hank Monk, took

them to Placerville, California, and on to Carson City. Nellie recalled that the trip from Placerville to Carson City took twenty-four hours at top speed. "It was simply wonderful—two summits to cross and steep roads up and down through grand scenery in and around beautiful Lake Tahoe. I enjoyed every bit of the way and think that first trip over the Sierra Nevada Mountains the finest thing that ever happened to me."[5] On later trips, Nellie and Hank became friends, and he occasionally let her handle the reins.[6]

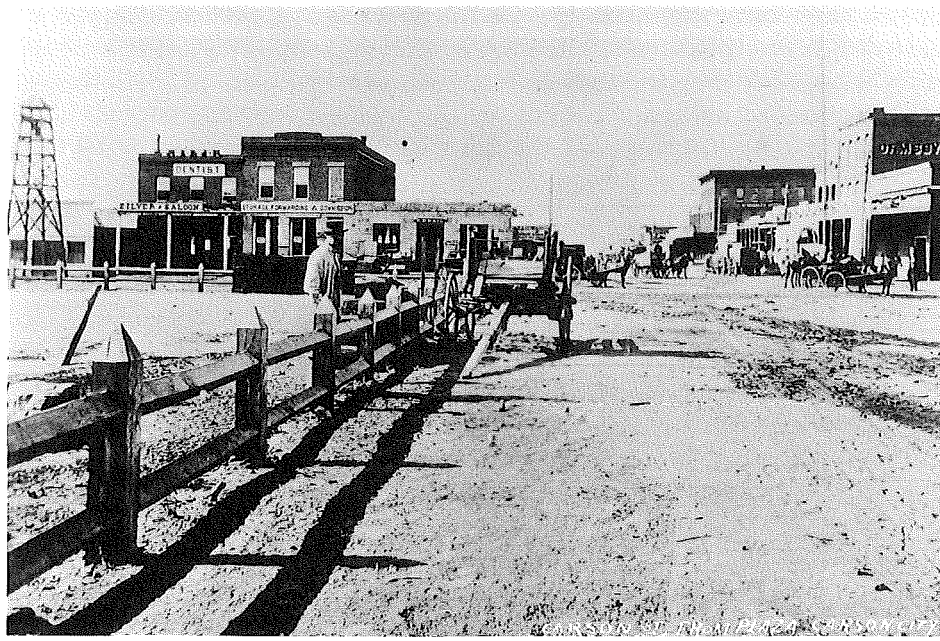
Nellie also helped Henry handle the newspaper, of which he had become part owner. According to an obituary, he made her "his partner and confidential adviser in all his affairs, whether of politics or of business."[7] First she took responsibility for the business management of the paper, then learned to write stories and set type.

"My first experience with reporting was given me by my husband," she recalled, "when he gave me pencil and paper and told me to take down the sermons each Sunday at church. The proceedings were much longer than at present and I was called upon to fill two columns for the paper."[8] Henry wielded a "heavy blue pencil," cutting out "big words and girlish expressions."[9] Because the *Appeal* used no by-lines, it is impossible to determine exactly which stories Nellie wrote. Reports of sermons, for which she seems to have been responsible, usually summarized main points briefly but completely, as in this excerpt:

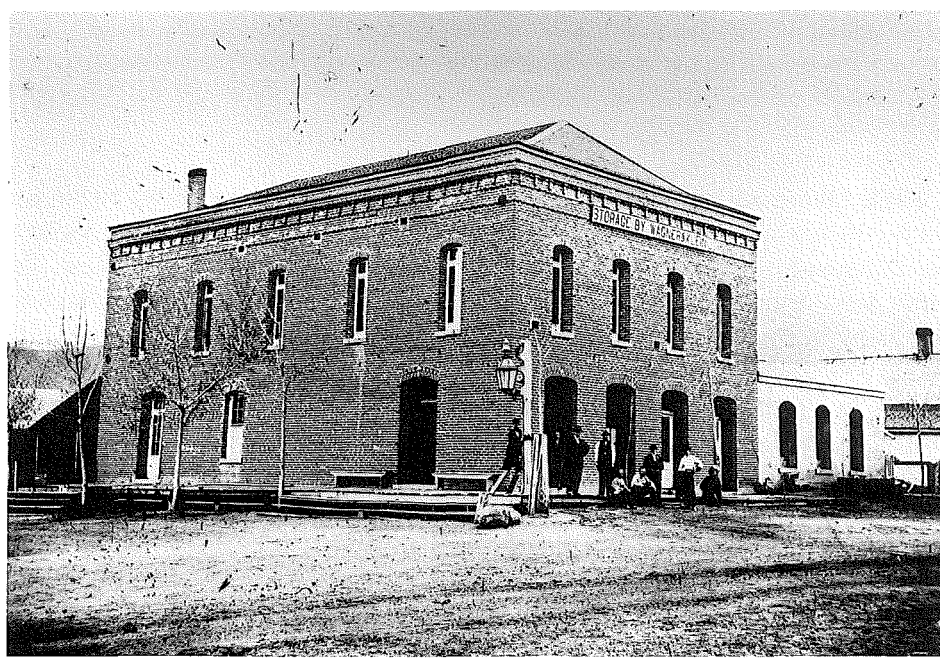
> A Christian government has showered blessings upon us. We must give an account of our performances. There is no substitute in this wide world for a Christian life and work and hope. As we do our work let us remember that our work will be a lie if it is not done in love and with forbearance.[10]

While taking an active part on the paper and in the community, Nellie undoubtedly considered her family as her primary obligation. When she wrote to her sister-in-law in 1875 to congratulate her on the birth of a daughter, she confessed, "I must say I do feel as I was in some way defrauded that I have no new baby in my arms and no promise of one to look forward to. Yet my little house is full of young life and I am happy that all my flock are spared, are in health and perfect development thus far. . . . I do love little ones ever so dearly!"

Henry also enjoyed his family, but he added politics to his family and journalistic interests, becoming actively involved in political life almost as soon as he reached California. He ran for the California Assembly in 1858 but was defeated, and he lost a race for the position of Nevada state printer in 1870. Later he served as a Nevada state legislator, as state printer, and as speaker of the state assembly, and ultimately ran an unsuccessful campaign for the post of lieutenant governor. He became ill with cancer, and Nellie cared for him, as well as for their three sons and daughter and her two younger sisters. She also set the type for



Carson Street in Carson City in the 1860s. The fenced area on the left is the Plaza, the future site of the Capitol. (*Nevada Historical Society*)



The Wagner & Klein storage building in 1875 Carson City; later it housed the *Carson Appeal* offices. It is now called the Brewery Arts Center. (*Nevada State Museum*)

his editorials in their home office and likely edited telegraph news and exchange items, keeping the paper going almost single-handedly. The children were pressed into service, too.

Henry bought out his partner on the paper so that Nellie would have complete control of it and prepared a book of sketches and short stories called *Sage Brush Leaves*, published after his death. He intended proceeds of its sale to help support Nellie and their four children. A fifth was born three months after Henry's death but lived only three weeks.

Henry died in Nellie's arms on May 27, 1879. As he seemed to lapse into unconsciousness, she asked, "Do you know me, Harry?" He opened his eyes, smiled, and replied, "I think we've met before." This anecdote was part of a tribute appended to the second edition of *Sage Brush Leaves*. Henry dedicated the book to Nellie, writing that its contents had first been printed "from copy passed at arm's length from writer to compositor," with Nellie as compositor. He continued, "Thirteen years ago (come August), that printer and this writer became partners for better and for worse, by the help of Rev. Dr. Stebbins; and so the domestic nature of our work, as also the propriety of this dedication become apparent to the reader."[11]

After Henry's death in 1879 Nellie listed her name on the paper's masthead as proprietor under Henry's as founder. She evidently took an active role in running the paper, because she listed no other editor. Her daughter credited her with "a good business head" and stated that "there wasn't much she didn't know or understand about the newspaper."[12]

In 1877 Nellie had covered the sessions of the Nevada legislature. "We couldn't afford to pay a reporter the $25 a month, so I did the work myself," she recalled. "It wasn't so hard. My husband taught me to write down high spots of a speech. By the time the speaker had quit orating and had come to another high spot, I would be through writing the first high spot. By that method I managed to give an accurate account of the proceedings."[13] The legislative reports, as published by the *Appeal*, presented action-by-action coverage of daily sessions in short, simple sentences, often filling several columns of the paper. Editorials or brief notes commented on legislative doings. As the *Appeal*'s reporter, Nellie may have written the following:

> That was a strange sight in the House yesterday when Joe Woodworth was reading that long bill which was vetoed by the Governor. Members were sitting around with their feet on the tables, some were writing, some eating crackers and smoking cigars, and all endeavoring to pass the time in the best manner possible. Joe has a clear, open voice, but when a legislator is hungry and tired, when he has already been sitting in his seat for a couple of hours and more, and the bill is uncommonly long and dry, then Joe loses his control of his audience, and his words become like seeds sown upon unfruitful ground.[14]

A fellow reporter, Samuel Post Davis, covered the legislature for the Virginia City *Chronicle*. Born in Connecticut, he had come to Nevada after working for

newspapers in Chicago, Omaha, San Francisco, and Marysville, and had become a friend of the Mighels family. Sam attended sessions of the Senate, while Nellie took notes in the Assembly. Then they traded news.[15]

She returned to the same duty in 1879, sending stories to both the *Appeal* and the *Chronicle,* whose financial difficulties had led it to dispense with Sam's services. The author of a collection of biographical sketches of state officers praised her work:

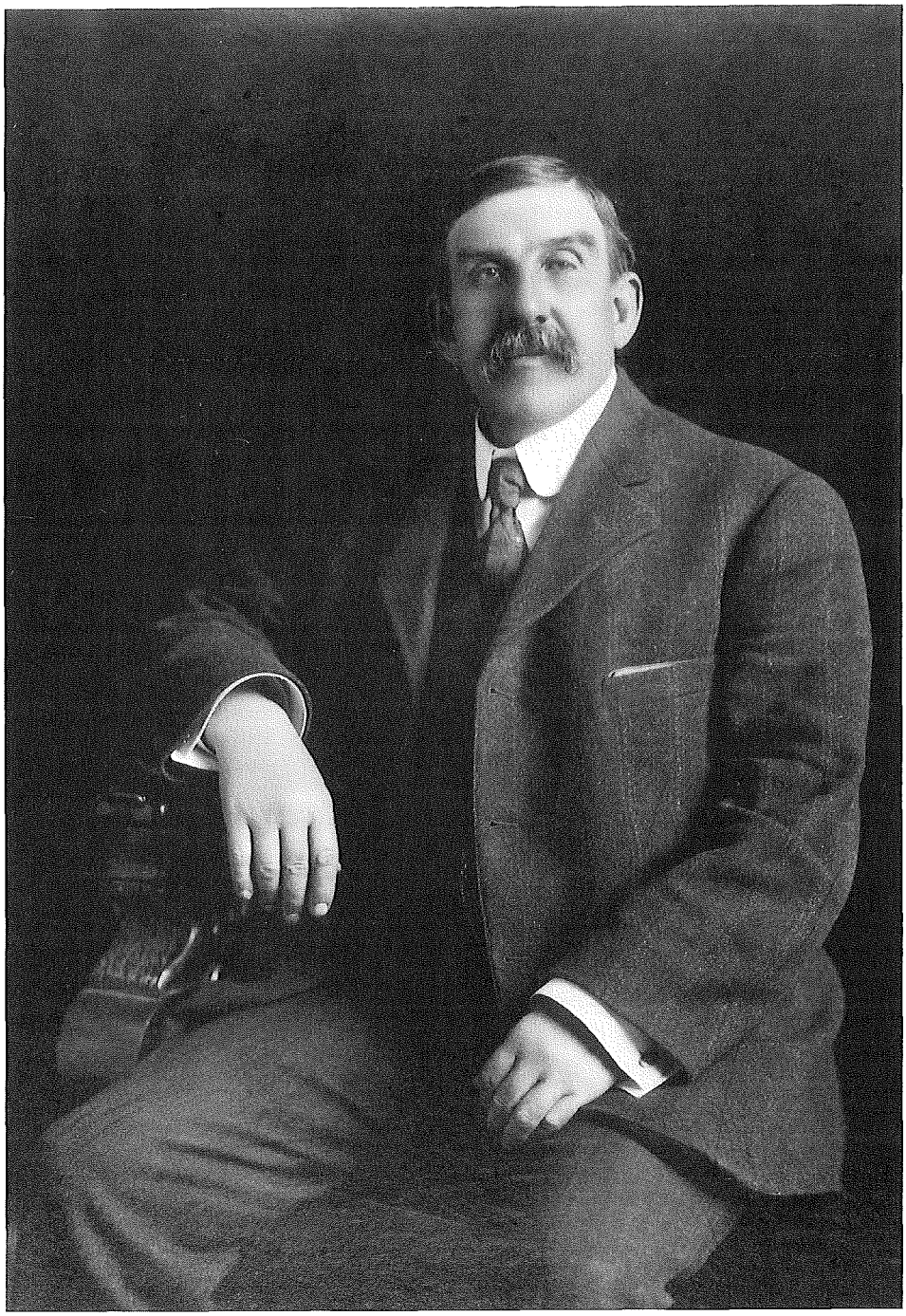
> This highly esteemed and cultured lady has been Legislative reporter for the *Morning Appeal* during the session, and by the exhibits given in its columns, proved herself equal to the arduous duties devolving on those who intelligently report the proceedings of a legislative body. Mrs. Mighels is a lady that has made many friends during the present session, and contributed largely towards making the *Appeal* a first-class morning paper.[16]

The legislature awarded her $100 in gold for her fine work.[17]

She hired Sam to assist her on the *Appeal* in November 1879. He soon proposed, but Nellie thought it proper to wait for two years after Henry's death before remarrying. Sam showed her a letter offering him a job in Oregon and threatened to accept it if she didn't marry him.[18] The ceremony took place in July 1880. He was thirty; she was thirty-five. His name appeared on the masthead as editor in October. She apparently left running the paper largely to Sam but returned to newspaper reporting from time to time and continued to have a say in the paper's business management. She told a newspaper writer that Sam was an excellent writer but not a businessman.[19] Her son Philip supported this view in an 1894 letter: "I sincerely wish his heart were not so warm—that he might be less generous to ingrates—that he would listen to & follow the counsels of his wife." In 1881 Sam moved the family to Salt Lake City for a year at the request of his friend, Charles C. Goodwin, editor of the *Salt Lake Tribune,* so that Sam could help out on that paper.

Sam had always wanted a ranch, and Nellie agreed to buy one if it were close enough to town so the children could attend school. They found 600 acres just north of Carson City, and Sam resumed his duties at the *Appeal* and started investing in fine cattle. However, difficulties over water rights prevented development of a working ranch. A railway line ran past the property, and family members could catch the train to travel to Reno, thirty miles north, instead of traveling there on a rough dirt road. Although Sam always was ready on time, Nellie moved more slowly. One of the Mighels boys would run ahead to hold the train, and, as a daughter recalled, the more Sam fussed, the slower Nellie got—an incompatibility the couple never resolved.[20]

On one occasion Nellie tried her hand at sports writing, covering the March 17, 1897, Corbett-Fitzsimmons championship fight in Carson City. Her husband accompanied her to their ringside seats. She later recalled that she was to write about the fight from the feminine angle for a Chicago paper, which paid her $40,



Samuel Post Davis. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

but as none of the Chicago dailies credited any of its fight coverage to a woman, perhaps the story actually appeared elsewhere. She added that she wrote it under a fictitious name to avoid embarrassment: "I was afraid that some of my friends in the east would read it and I would be disgraced by being present at the fight. . . . Only Fitzsimmons' wife and two girls from the red light district and myself represented the feminine element in the audience."[21] However, she missed the blow to the solar plexus that felled "Gentleman Jim" in the fourteenth round. "I was so afraid somebody would get hurt, I was just petrified. . . . Fitz' back was toward me. Corbett just sank slowly to the floor. Fitz let him down easy and 'Gentleman Jim' took the count."[22]

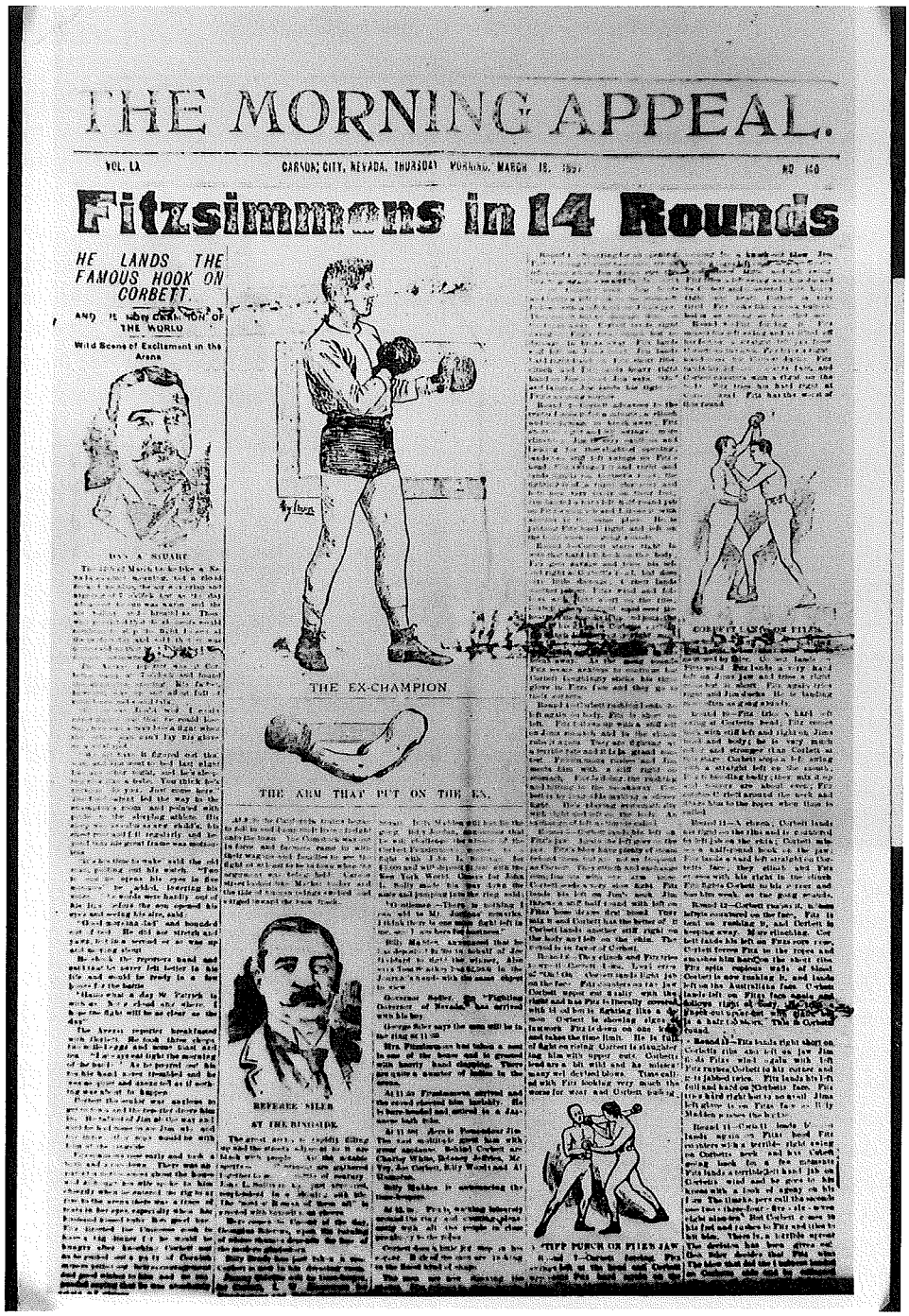
Corbett seemed much less gentlemanly than his freckle-faced opponent, Nellie maintained. He swore at his trainers and was generally disagreeable, so Nellie favored Fitzsimmons and bet on his victory with a friend, William Woodburn. They bet the best pair of gloves in town, but she never collected. "Every time I saw him after the fight, he said he hadn't found a pair of gloves good enough for me," she reported.[23]

Although, in retrospect, Nellie stressed the womanly delicacy of her reaction to the prospect of brutality in the ring, her daughter recalled that at the time she commented that she had seen better fights out in the back yard among her own boys.[24]

Like Henry, Sam had political aspirations, winning an appointment as deputy secretary of state in 1895 and election to the post of state controller in 1898 and 1902. He lost that position in 1906 and returned to the *Appeal* for a few months in 1907 before starting a four-year term as the state industrial and publicity commissioner. Nellie apparently had a high opinion of Sam's political skills. In 1906 he was approached about running for governor but turned down that opportunity in the belief that the incumbent had a better chance to win; he then persuaded the governor to run for re-election, much to Nellie's chagrin. She thought Sam should have run. When the possibility that Sam might become lieutenant governor came up, Nellie "had a fit," according to their daughter. "She didn't want him to take anything so mediocre as that; that was just nothing at all."[25] Sam kept writing, even during his years in politics, and gained fame as a humorist, short-story writer, poet, and historian. He completed a two-volume history of Nevada in 1913. He and Nellie had two daughters.

During his later years, Sam spent much of his time in San Francisco, writing special reports for newspapers there. Nellie made several trips to be with him, and he expressed his affection in letters while they were apart. In one he wrote:

> I don't need a photo to recollect your face which has been such a beacon light to me all these years—the face that has frowned and smiled on me all these years, has made me happy and made me sad all these years and I have learned to love more than any other mortal face. I bless the day Heaven gave me such a faithful loving wife to lavish all the love of one woman's confiding heart on me and transmit that love to my children.[26]



THE MORNING APPEAL.

VOL. LX CARSON, CITY, NEVADA, THURSDAY MORNING, MARCH 18, 1897. NO 160

Fitzsimmons in 14 Rounds

HE LANDS THE FAMOUS HOOK ON CORBETT.

AND IS NOW CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

Wild Scene of Excitement in the Arena

THE EX-CHAMPION

THE ARM THAT PUT ON THE EX.

REFEREE SIELS AT THE RINGSIDE

"THE PUNCH OR FITZ'S JAW"

Carson Morning Appeal coverage of the Corbett-Fitzsimmons fight. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

Sam admitted in the same letter that he had sometimes been wayward and done things he ought not to. He added, "but every time my love recedes from the shore of fidelity does not the next wave well higher?"

Nellie retained ownership of the *Appeal* after Sam's death (March 17, 1918), leasing it to various editors, including her son, Henry R. Mighels, Jr.. Henry, Jr., had run the paper from 1898 to 1906, while Sam was occupied in politics, and he was subsequently its owner from 1927 to 1932. Like his father, he won election to the Nevada Assembly. He also served as clerk of the state Supreme Court. Upon his death of a heart attack (November 11, 1932), his wife, Ida B. Mighels, took over the paper and kept it until her death in 1938. Although she had not done any newspaper work before, she managed the paper successfully. Her son called her an excellent businesswoman.[27] He and his sister inherited the paper but sold it because of difficulty in finding qualified typographical workers as World War II approached.

One of Nellie's longtime interests was the Leisure Hour Club, founded in 1896. She served two terms as president, spearheading a successful drive for a clubhouse and laying the cornerstone for it in 1910. The club had a course of study each year, and members paid dues of ten cents a month for the privilege of presenting papers, participating in discussions, and performing in theatricals that raised funds to furnish the clubhouse. Nellie embroidered monograms on the club's linen tablecloths.

When California members of the Federation of Women's Clubs contemplated organizing a Nevada chapter, they needed five organizations to join. One of these was the Leisure Hour Club, with Nellie as its delegate. The Californians hesitated, however, when they discovered that the club membership included males as well as females. Nellie told them, "Well, I'm very sorry that's the way you feel. We like our men members, so I'll just bid you good-bye and go home." The threat proved effective, and the federation admitted the club, although its male members couldn't vote on federation matters. Nellie became the first president of the Nevada federation.[28]

She helped organize the American Red Cross in Nevada during the Spanish-American War and served as its second state president. She also belonged to the Women's Relief Corps, an organization for relatives of Civil War veterans, and the Pythian Sisters of Nevada, serving as president of both. She joined the California Press Association early in her journalistic career.

As an elderly woman, Nellie became an inveterate card player. A newspaper story written to honor her as she approached her ninetieth birthday reported that she sat up until midnight playing cards. The reporter questioned her about her early experiences. Had she known Mark Twain, who worked for the *Territorial Enterprise* in Virginia City from 1862 to 1864? Her answer was no, but she knew girls who had gone out with him. "They used to tell me that Mark was a very poor beau. In the first place he was lazy. In the second, he never had any

money." Nellie also had a low opinion of Twain as a journalist, his trouble being that "he liked to write what he felt like writing, without regard for the facts."[29]

Nellie obviously retained her respect for objective reporting, although she no longer wrote much, the newspaper story continued. "I just don't feel the urge," she said. However, at age ninety-four she submitted to radio station KOH (Reno) an account of her experiences as the first woman to cover the Nevada legislature. It was aired by the station and awarded a $5 prize as best story of the week. She also retained her interest in politics, keeping up with current events by reading newspapers, magazines, and books. She complimented President Franklin D. Roosevelt on the fine job he was doing, with special praise for "his feeling for the plain people."

She maintained active memberships in Carson City clubs and said she still felt young. Why? "Because I am interested in everything that's going on." Still, she offered no recipe for longevity. "I eat whatever I like and plenty of it. I never use cosmetics. When I was a girl, we did not dare use rouge or lipstick. Nice girls didn't." She wanted to go on living as long as she remained interested in life. "When I lose interest, then I hope to die. Because one who is not interested in people or things is dead anyway."

She remained a strong-willed woman, the matriarch of the family who directed its affairs.[30] She died at the age of 100, on June 23, 1945, just three months short of her 101st birthday, and was buried in Lone Mountain Cemetery in Carson City, between the graves of Henry Mighels and Sam Davis. Her son, Philip Mighels, writing to her from London in 1899 in response to receipt of a family photograph, provided a tribute that might have served as an epitaph:

> . . . but my Mum is distinctly the dominating brain, the unfailing dynamic—the queen of the tribe. How appropriate that you sit in the middle, for it seems that the others properly surround you as a sort of fountain head; you seem to me the logical centre of the composition, the history of the race. It is hard for me to express exactly the sensation I get by looking at the group, but it is something as if you were the spirit-of-things-achieved, the expression of a life well lived & of things well done.

Notes

[1]George E. Verrill, *The Ancestry, Life, and Work of Addison E. Verrill of Yale University* (Santa Barbara: Pacific Coast Publishing Company, 1958), 24.

[2]Nellie Mighels Davis, typescript of account in Davis family scrapbook (microfilm, Special Collections, University Library, University of Nevada, Reno).

[3]Verrill, *Ancestry*, 31–32.

[4]Unless otherwise noted, letters quoted are from the collection held by Mylie Mighels Herman of Penn Valley, California.

[5]Nellie Mighels Davis, typescript of account.

[6]"Mrs. Nellie Davis Continues Active in Carson after Eventful Career," undated newspaper clipping in Davis family scrapbook (microfilm, Special Collections, University Library, University of Nevada, Reno).

[7]"Dead," *Daily Appeal*, 29 May 1879, p. 2.

[8]"Carsonite Observes 92nd Birthday in Reno," *Nevada State Journal*, 11 September 1936, p. 1.

[9]"The Knave," *Oakland Tribune*, undated newspaper clipping in Davis family scrapbook (microfilm, Special Collections, University Library, University of Nevada, Reno).

[10]"St. Peter's Episcopal Church. Introductory Sermon by Rev. H. L. Foote," *Carson Daily Appeal*, 17 October 1876, p. 3.

[11]Henry R. Mighels, *Sage Brush Leaves*, 2d ed. (San Francisco: Edward Bosqui and Co., Printers, 1879).

[12]Lucy Davis Crowell, "One Hundred Years at Nevada's Capital," Mary Ellen Glass, interviewer (oral history, University of Nevada, Reno, 1965), 7–8.

[13]"Veteran Woman Editor Recalls Old West," undated newspaper clipping in Davis family scrapbook (microfilm, Special Collections, University Library, University of Nevada, Reno).

[14]*Carson Daily Appeal*, 19 January 1877, p. 3.

[15]"Veteran Woman Editor Recalls Old West."

[16]Hugh J. Mohan, *Pen Pictures of the State Officers, Legislators, Public Officials, and Newspaper Men, at the Capitol during the Ninth Session Nevada Legislature* (Virginia City, Nevada: Daily Stage Steam Printing House, 1879), 63.

[17]Henry R. Mighels (grandson of Nellie Davis), telephone interview, 17 April 1989.

[18]Crowell, "One Hundred Years," 14.

[19]"The Knave."

[20]Crowell, "One Hundred Years," 23–24.

[21]"Mrs. Davis Tells Story of Reporting Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight," undated newspaper clipping in Davis family scrapbook (microfilm, Special Collections, University Library, University of Nevada, Reno).

[22]Nick Bourne, "The Nevada Rambler," undated newspaper clipping in Davis family scrapbook (microfilm, Special Collections, University Library, University of Nevada, Reno).

[23]*Ibid.*

[24]Crowell, "One Hundred Years," 56.

[25]Davis, typescript account, p. 19.

[26]Samuel Davis to Nellie Davis, undated letter in Davis family scrapbook (microfilm Special Collections, University Library, University of Nevada, Reno).

[27]Henry R. Mighels, interview, 18 October 1990.

[28]Crowell, "One Hundred Years," 42.

[29]"Veteran Woman Editor Recalls Old West."

[30]Henry R. Mighels, interview, 18 October 1990.

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

REMNANTS OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH ADMINISTRATION IN NEVADA

Ronald M. James and Michelle McFadden

The National Register of Historic Places has recently listed the Mesquite Museum/Library and the Lovelock Vocational Agriculture Building, two structures that are significant in Nevada history. These modest buildings, constructed in 1940 to 1941 and funded by the National Youth Administration (NYA), have a similar and related history; they were constructed by Nevada youth as part of a New Deal plan designed to educate and sustain students during economic hard times. The NYA is not commonly thought of as a promoter of building construction, but these two examples demonstrate the complexity and diversity of the New Deal in general and, more specifically, of this single program as it was applied in Nevada.

The NYA was inspired largely by Eleanor Roosevelt, who once said, "I have moments of real terror when I think we might be losing this generation."[1] While the federal government created the Civilian Conservation Corps to care for the most desperate cases—young people who no longer attended school and were dropping out of society—the NYA was designed to assist those who, although still in school, were threatened with having to drop out because of lack of funds. Created on June 26, 1935, by executive order, the NYA was initially attached to the Works Progress Administration.

There were two divisions of the NYA, one of which dealt with work for students. This program provided funding chiefly for students whose families were on relief and who needed support to stay in school. The second division provided training for young people who had dropped out of school, enabling them to assume their places in the labor market as qualified workers.

Audrey Williams, who became the head of the new agency, decided that the national office would impose only the most general guidelines on the NYA so that state and local officials could tailor the program to fit local needs. John

Ronald M. James is the Nevada state historic preservation officer. Michelle McFadden serves as staff architectural historian with the Nevada Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology in Carson City.

Salmond points out that "By early 1937, more than 400,000 young people were receiving assistance [nationwide through the NYA], and the monthly number rarely dropped below 300,000 thereafter. By the time the program was terminated in 1943, more than 2 million young people had received assistance."[2]

Initially the NYA worked on parks projects and community efforts that required little capital but a great deal of labor. This approach was largely abandoned by 1937, replaced by one that called for more technical training, since this was more in keeping with the spirit of the NYA. In 1939 the NYA began yet another transition as it positioned itself in coordination with the federal effort to prepare for war. Increasingly the youth were trained in the defense industry and, as Salmond points out, "From mid-1940, its nondefense functions were progressively shed until by 1942 it was involved solely in the war effort."[3]

Nevada's participation in the NYA was minimal. Although the New Deal was generally effective in Nevada, limited participation was generally the rule because the population was small and the state suffered less from the Depression than others.[4] It consistently ranked at the bottom in the nation for the number of schools and students participating and for the amount of funds expended. The *Final Report of the National Youth Administration: Fiscal Years 1936–1943* points out that between 1939 and 1940 only 38 Nevada schools and colleges participated in the NYA Student Work Program. At the same time, Nevada had only 301 students participating—213 in the School Work Program and 88 in the College Work Program. In comparison, Delaware, the next highest state, had 50 schools and 507 students involved. During 1940–41, for further contrast, Illinois had 25,466 students participating, and Pennsylvania had almost 30,000. During the fiscal year 1941–42, Nevada's enrollment dropped to 218, and by the following year it had declined to 31, reflecting the national process of phasing out the NYA. Similarly, the Nevada Out of School program employed 227 young people in 1940, continued with 268 in 1941, and fell to 187 in 1942. Between 1936 and 1943, a total of $373,742 was distributed in Nevada through the NYA for both programs. This represents the smallest amount given to any state. Delaware, recipient of the next largest amount, received $794,928, while Pennsylvania, which received the most, was awarded $47,998,272.[5]

The NYA in Nevada supported college students at the University of Nevada (located in Reno); they were employed to grade papers and to help professors.[6] It appears that the program designed to employ young people not enrolled at the university took a variety of forms, but the specifics of the program are not well documented.

The buildings constructed by the NYA in Lovelock and Mesquite provide excellent opportunities to understand how the program was implemented in Nevada for those who were not university students. Although construction of buildings was not one of the projects commonly funded by the NYA, between 1937 and 1942 more than thirteen hundred vocational farm shops were erected by NYA youth working under qualified supervisors across the nation. These

Lovelock Vocational Agricultural Building. (*Ganther Melby Lee, Architects & Planners, Reno)*

buildings were typically built in small communities and were approved and co-sponsored by the state boards of vocational education.[7] The building in Lovelock falls into this category.

Construction on the Lovelock Vocational Agriculture Building was initiated in 1941. Reno architect Russell Mills, who designed the structure, estimated the cost at $8,000. He planned for about $5,000 for materials. The NYA provided $2,000 in cash for materials and furnished paid student labor to assist in the construction. The Pershing County School Board furnished the additional $3,000 needed for materials. Students who worked on the project were allowed fifty hours per month, for which they were paid $16.00. Supervision was provided by two instructors, one from the State Vocational Department and the other from the NYA. Apparently, between eleven and sixteen young men were employed by the project, with an estimated duration of six months from January to June of 1941.[8]

Russell Mills designed several buildings in northern Nevada, roughly between 1935 and 1955. Originally from Berkeley, California, Mills apparently moved to Nevada in the mid-1930s. Documentation on his training is not readily available, but he was a member of the Nevada State Association of Architects.[9] His work suggests that he was influenced by modern architectural styles, including Art Deco and Moderne. In 1940, Mills designed the Sparks City Hall.

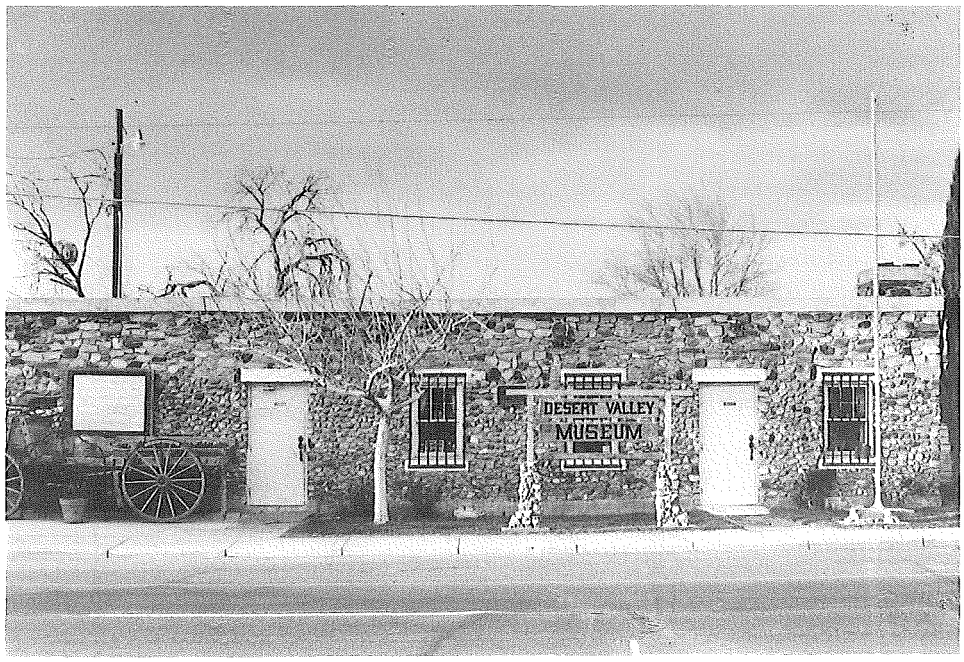
Other Nevada projects include private houses in the Lake Tahoe basin (Carnelian Bay), Reno, and Elko. He also designed a Reno country club in the mid-1950s (which burned shortly after construction), a fraternity house associated with the University of Nevada in Reno, and the Brown Elementary School south of Reno.[10] In the 1950s, Mills completed the design for the Pershing County High School in Lovelock, which was constructed near the Vocational Agriculture Building. In 1955, Mills was elected to the Reno City Council. It appears that his career as an architect ended about that time.[11]

Examples of Art Deco and Moderne architecture are rare in Nevada, usually assuming modest proportions and simple application. Structures in these modern styles in Nevada include several buildings in Reno, which experienced a minor construction boom during the 1920s and 1930s. These buildings include the El Cortez Hotel (1931) and the Mapes Hotel-Casino (1947), both of which were listed on the National Register in 1984. Additional examples of Nevada include the Art Deco Nevada State Supreme Court Building in Carson City, designed in 1935 and listed on the National Register as part of the Frederick DeLongchamps thematic nomination in 1987, and Las Vegas High School, a Mayan Revival Art Deco design built in 1931 and listed on the National Register in 1986. In addition, the Lincoln County Courthouse of Pioche, Nevada, constructed in 1937, displays modest Moderne design elements.

The Sparks City Hall and the Pershing County High School display Mills's interest in the Moderne style, a simplified version of Art Deco. As with the Lovelock Vocational Agriculture Building and many other buildings of the period in Nevada, Mills's Moderne designs include restrained references to the style. The Vocational Agriculture Building displays linear detailing and simple, limited ornamentation, typical of Mills's other buildings. It is, therefore, an excellent example not only of this architect's career, but of how this style of architecture expressed itself in Nevada.

The construction project in Mesquite in 1941 also provided students with vocational training and a limited salary. The building itself, however, was designed as a museum and library, and, although its purpose was to benefit the youth of the community, it was not intended to serve as a perpetual source of vocational training. Walter Warren Hughes, a local resident, acted as supervisor and builder. The building housed the Mesquite Branch of the Clark County Library for about a year, after which it was used as a clinic and hospital until 1977. It then lay vacant for several years until the Boy Scouts assumed control, and in 1985 the building became the Desert Valley Museum.[12]

The modest size of the Mesquite Museum/Library corresponds to the limited population of Mesquite in 1940 (510 people) and to an economically sluggish agricultural community. Indeed, no architect was hired for the project, and construction funds ran out by the time the walls had reached the top of the windows. Volunteers finished the project, and lumber for the roof was acquired by trade: Five students agreed to work at Johnny Bower's local lumber mill in



Mesquite Museum/Library. (*Photograph by Michelle McFadden, Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology*)

exchange for the material. A shift in the size of the rocks in the wall provides evidence of the break in construction; smaller stones dominate as far as the top of the windows, and above are larger rocks, which took less time to set in place.

Initially the NYA project employed between fifteen and twenty-five high-school students, who earned fifty cents a day for work. About five worked at a time. The students hauled rock from the nearby Virgin River. An article in the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* at the time of the January 1941 ground breaking pointed out that "When completed, the building will house old pioneer and Indian relics as well as mounted specimens of insects and birds prevalent in the Virgin Valley. In connection there will be a school library which will be open to the public." The article also pointed out that the students received training in "rock masonry, carpentry, plumbing, blacksmithing, and landscaping of the grounds."[13] The fact that this building, which continues to serve the community, was completed stands as testimony to the New Deal program and to the voluntary efforts of Mesquite's youth who donated their labor when funds were depleted.

The Mesquite Museum/Library building is constructed in a vernacular adaptation of Pueblo Revival, a style of architecture rarely found in Nevada. The only other known example is the Lost City Museum, built by Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) workers in 1935 in Overton, Nevada, about twenty-five miles to

the southwest. The Lost City Museum was erected to house artifacts gathered from the Anasazi ruins at Lost City, which overlooked the Colorado River. The site was soon to be flooded by the rising waters of Lake Mead, produced by the Hoover/Boulder Dam project. CCC workers were employed to build the museum and to create replicas of the ruins for museum use. The Pueblo Revival style of architecture was considered appropriate for a museum designed to house Anasazi ruins since these native Americans traditionally employed pueblo architecture. Because the Lost City facility was constructed only a few years before the Mesquite NYA project, which was also intended in part as a museum to preserve Indian relics, it seems clear that Hughes, the project supervisor, selected this style of architecture as appropriate. As one of the few historic uses of Pueblo Revival architecture in Nevada, the Mesquite Museum/Library is of considerable importance. That it also represents the legacy of the New Deal works projects in Nevada makes it all the more significant.

Together, the Mesquite and Lovelock buildings serve as reminders in Nevada of a little-known, short-lived New Deal program. Listing on the National Register of Historic Places provides the structures with the recognition they deserve as symbols of the New Deal in Nevada and of a contribution to the state's heritage by its youth. Readers who know of additional buildings related to the National Youth Administration are encouraged to contact the Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology, Carson City (702) 687–5138.

NOTES

[1]John Salmond, "National Youth Administration," in *Franklin D. Roosevelt: His Life and Times, an Encyclopedic View*, Otis L. Graham, Jr., ed. (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1985), 278.

[2]*Ibid.*, 279.

[3]*Ibid.*

[4]See Harold T. Smith, "New Deal Relief Programs in Nevada 1933–1935" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nevada, Reno, 1972).

[5]Federal Security Agency: War Manpower Commission, *Final Report of the National Youth Administration: Fiscal Years 1936–1943* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1944), 242–50.

[6]Russell R. Elliott, personal communication, 24 January 1991. Elliott, professor emeritus, University of Nevada, Reno, was enrolled at the university during the late 1930s.

[7]Federal Security Agency, *Final Report*, 152–53.

[8]*Lovelock Review Miner*, 16 January 1941, 1:8. See also the cornerstone on the building. A photograph is on file in the Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology, Carson City, Nevada.

[9]Richard D. Adkins, Ronald M. James, and Richard A. Bernstein, "Nevada Architects and Builders," in *Nevada Comprehensive Preservation Plan*, 2d ed., William G. White and Ronald M. James, eds. (Carson City: Historic Preservation and Archeology, 1991), A57.

[10]See Edward S. Parsons (1907–91), "Charrette! The Life of an Architect," Mary Ellen Glass, interviewer (oral history, University of Nevada, Reno, 1980–81), 101–2, 109–11, 161, 207, 252, 297.

[11]Gordon A. Simpson (1888–1980), "Memoirs of a Canadian Army Officer and Business Analyst," Mary Ellen Glass, interviewer (oral history, University of Nevada, Reno, 1967), 484–85. See also plans for the Pershing County High School, Pershing County School District, Lovelock, Nevada; and see Adkins, James, and Bernstein, "Nevada Architects and Builders."

[12]Much of the information on this building is based on papers on file with the Desert Valley Museum in Mesquite, Nevada. A summary history written by museum staff is also on file with the Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology, Carson City, Nevada.

[13]*Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 17 January 1941.

BOOK REVIEWS

Prevailing over Time: Ethnic Adjustment on the Kansas Prairies, 1875–1925. By D. Aidan McQuillan. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. 292 pp., figures, tables, appendices, notes, bibliography, index.)

To a generation reared on television's presentation of American history, immigrants and ethnic groups were those who left eastern or southern Europe around the turn of the century, entered the United States at Ellis Island, settled in the cities of the Northeast, and worked in factories. Of course this stereotype ignores the facts that the United States was a nation of immigrants long before and after the Ellis Island experience and that the newcomers hailed from virtually all continents and countries. McQuillan's solid and worthwhile *Prevailing over Time* is a reminder that even nineteenth-century European immigration was far more varied than is now popularly supposed.

McQuillan studies a fifty-year record of three groups that settled in the prairie-plains of central Kansas: Swedes, German-Russian Mennonites, and French Canadians. Except for some of the more important figures in the first stages of settlement, only a few individuals are mentioned; the focus is upon groups and group behavior. Also, the emphasis is almost exclusively on agricultural activities, with little attention paid to those immigrants and their descendants who chose to live in the villages in or near the farm communities studied.

After describing their European beginnings and their motives for emigrating, McQuillan examines the American experience of these groups by concentrating on six sample Kansas townships (two for each group) in which the newcomers made their homes. His major themes include the growth of these communities, the extent of Americanization, their economic progress, and their decisions as to the most suitable crop or combination of crops and livestock. The author believes that, of the three groups, the Mennonites in particular appeared to have "an uncanny ability to create the right system for the times" (p. 188). The French Canadians (despite their Catholicism) seem to have been less isolated culturally and the most similar to the "Americans" in their farming practices. However, despite these and other divergences, McQuillan finds that the three groups, in their responses to the physical and economic environments, were seldom markedly different either from each other or from their American neighbors.

The author has employed a wide variety of published and unpublished documents and secondary works. His main reliance, however, is on state agricultural and population censuses. Four appendices, mostly of a statistical nature, shed further light on methodology and conclusions.

Michael J. Brodhead
University of Nevada, Reno

Sagebrush Trilogy. By Idah Meacham Strobridge, with an introduction by Richard A. Dwyer and Richard E. Lingenfelter. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1990.)

Idah Meacham Strobridge has been called "Nevada's first woman of letters," for she seems to have been the first female to write and publish pieces about life in the high desert of the Silver State. She collected a series of sketches and tales into three volumes—*In Miners' Mirage-Land* (1904), *The Loom of the Desert* (1907), and *The Land of Purple Shadows* (1909). Nearly a hundred years later, the University of Nevada Press has reprinted the three in a single edition, *Sagebrush Trilogy*.

The introduction, by Richard A. Dwyer and Richard E. Lingenfelter, while helpful, says little to prepare the reader for the attraction of Strobridge's prose. She does not pretend to be a literary lion. Rather, she sees herself as a word artist and suggests, in the foreword to her last book, that her portfolio resembles what "the painter brings back to his studio after his working-vacation is over. Mere suggestions and rough outlines are they—the first impressions of what he saw." It is useful to quote Strobridge's personal assessment because it is indeed an accurate appraisal of her technique.

Sagebrush Trilogy is not a collection of finished short stories with well-developed plots, keen irony, or compelling characters. Neither is it a gathering of accomplished nature essays with accurate scientific observations or colorful detail. Strobridge's métier is the brushstroke, the straightforward combination of words—a sentence or simple paragraph—that outlines the event or the scene or the personality. So her prose must be read almost in glances, as one might page through a sketchbook of preliminary drawings or drafts.

Such a technique compels the reader to fill in the rest of the colors, to flesh out the characters, to find a conclusion beyond the confines of the printed page. Romantic anecdotes, for example, only hint at concealed emotions or passion—Martha Scott runs away to Hawaii, then returns a year later to her Nevada husband without comment, moving "in the same apathetic way as before the stirring events of her life." Single sentences only introduce a panoramic vastness, the Quin [*sic*] River "but a varnish of moisture, miles in width, on the surface of the great plain where sun and wind soon combine to rub it all away."

Idah Strobridge grew up between Winnemucca and Lovelock. Although—for her California and eastern contemporaries—she evokes a gray landscape broken by picturesque relief, her books speak more to the hearts of those who know the wide open spaces well and who can transcribe her pictorial suggestions into something more. Besides, who among us can resist a doughty author who dedicates her writing "To YOU Who were born in the West—who live in the West—who love the West," and who writes with conviction that "in the Desert all things seem possible."

Ann Ronald
University of Nevada, Reno

Regulating Danger: The Struggle for Mine Safety in the Rocky Mountain Coal Industry. By James Whiteside. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. 265 pp., illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index.)

While coal mining east of the Mississippi River has been widely chronicled, the coal fields of the West were discovered by historians only after the 1973 energy crisis. Since then numerous articles and several books have been published. James Whiteside explains that Colorado is the focus of his *Regulating Danger,* yet this study of underground-mine safety, a significant contribution, also deals adequately with mining in Montana, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming.

More than seven thousand men and boys and one woman (Utah's 1984 Wilberg mine fire) have died in the subterranean mines of these five states since the 1880s. The mine owners were not wholly to blame, Whiteside believes, noting that the causes of accidents and death also lie in the total industrial environment.

The mine operator's influence upon the law and its exercise, while limited at the statehouse, was greater in the county courthouse, and his authority in company towns, camps, and mines was absolute. When an explosion or the sudden fall of rock or coal extinguished life, the coroner's jury generally protected the operators. Between 1904 and 1914 "negligence of the deceased" was ruled in eighty-five of ninety-five Huerfano County (southern Colorado) fatalities. Nine tables identify the causes of death, and photographs document working conditions and tragedies.

Many accident victims were new immigrants, idle workers, or farmers who went underground without proper training (surface, or strip mining, is not included in the study). But like experienced miners, they were responsible for their own safety. This remained the case even after the United States Bureau of

Mines was formed in 1910, and after legislators had revised codes relating to mining practices. Thus national and state reforms reflected the interests of management.

The United Mine Workers of America organized Montana and Wyoming miners between 1903 and 1907 without violence. Although decades passed before operators in Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah allowed unionization, they did accept the workmen's compensation legislation promoted by the union. Adopted by all five states by 1917, the laws limited the liability of operators while freeing them from expensive lawsuits.

Safety did not improve significantly as production fell during the 1920s and 1930s. Strikes and unemployment plagued the industry, and the union movement weakened until New Deal legislation gave labor the right to organize. Although prosperity returned during World War II, the introduction of diesel locomotives and growing competition from petroleum, natural gas, and hydroelectric power hurt the coal industry despite its own increasing mechanization. Still, fatality rates dropped as the unions improved working conditions and federal safety regulations were broadened. Nevertheless, accidents such as the 1984 mine fire in Wilberg, Utah, remained possible; it took twenty-seven lives.

Regulating Danger, which grew out of Whiteside's 1986 dissertation at the University of Colorado, is a valuable addition to the literature on the hazardous nature of underground western coal mining.

Glen Barrett
Boise State University

NEW RESOURCE MATERIALS

Nevada Historical Society

M. N. Stone Papers

In 1868, a twenty-six-year-old ex-Confederate army officer named Marshall Ney Stone moved to Virginia City, Nevada, and began practicing law. Initially as a member of the firm of Thomas H. Williams and David Bixler, then in partnership with Ogden Hiles, and finally in an office of his own, Stone was a leading member of the Virginia City bar until he and his family departed for Salt Lake City in 1890. An ardent and active Democrat, he was, nonetheless, unsuccessful in electoral politics—possibly because of his Civil War activities. He was defeated in contests for a district court seat in 1874 and the state Supreme Court in 1882.

The Nevada Historical Society has just acquired a collection of Stone's business papers for the years 1869 to 1889. Dealing principally with his legal work and financial matters, they include correspondence of Stone, Bixler, Williams, and others; bills for legal services; memoranda relating to court cases; legal agreements; and receipts for sales of mining stock. The bulk of the material relates to civil law suits involving individuals or Comstock mining companies.

Because they constitute primary evidence of the activities of various prominent Comstock lawyers and their offices, the Stone papers are a valuable addition to our research collection.

George F. Talbot Correspondence

The society has recently received a group of letters written to Nevada lawyer and jurist George F. Talbot between 1891 and 1901. Donated by Maxine Sloboda in memory of Merle and Irene Rock, the fifty-two letters are almost exclusively personal ones from Mary Elizabeth (Lizzie) Beck, the schoolteacher and daughter of Virginia City merchant H. S. Beck who was Talbot's wife. The letters were written to Talbot before their marriage and during it, continuing through the period of its acrimonious break-up in the mid-1890s. There is also one letter from Lizzie to George several years after their divorce.

The letters are significant for their depiction of the private side of a public relationship in nineteenth-century Nevada, and because they tell us something more about George Talbot, a prominent state district court and Supreme Court judge, university regent, water-rights authority, and trustee of the Nevada His-

torical Society, who during his lifetime volunteered very little information about his personal affairs.

Unionville School Records

As the largest town spawned by the Humboldt mining boom of the early 1860s, Unionville, on the eastern side of the Humboldt Range overlooking the vast Buena Vista Valley, outlived all its early competitors, among them Star City, Santa Clara, and Humboldt City. Even after it lost the Humboldt County seat to Winnemucca in 1873, Unionville, with its farms, stores, post office, and school, remained a small but active supply center for the surrounding area.

The community's strikingly situated wooden schoolhouse was built in 1871, replacing an earlier structure made of adobe. Classes were held in the new building, to which a belfry was soon added, until 1955.

Richard and Anita Fray, former owners of the Unionville schoolhouse, have made it possible for the Society to acquire a volume containing early records of Unionville's Buena Vista School District. Commencing in 1871 and continuing until 1877, these records include minutes of school-board meetings, a register of school warrants, and other entries that document the building of the new school, the hiring of teachers, and the payment of school-district bills. Among board clerks maintaining the records, which will be of value to anyone studying Unionville or early education in the state, were Christian Lark, H. G. Cavin, and future Nevada governor John H. Kinkead.

Eric N. Moody
Manuscript Curator

University of Nevada, Reno
Oral History Program

The University of Nevada Oral History Program will shortly issue a number of new publications. For information on availability and cost, telephone the program at 702–784–6932.

The Free Life of a Ranger: Archie Murchie in the U.S. Forest Service, 1929–1965 (by R. T. King). Derived from forty-six hours of interviewing, this narrative focuses on the evolution of Forest Service policy and practice, as witnessed by an extraordinarily effective and observant forest ranger, Archie Murchie. He recounts his experiences in the Helena, Wyoming, Wasatch, Challis, Humboldt, and Toiyabe national forests, 1929–65. He describes range, timber, and wildlife management, tells of many adventures with animals, describes fire-fighting techniques, and relates the varied responses to the political and regulatory practices of the Forest Service.

The Free Life of a Ranger will be published in September in a first printing of 1,000 copies. Publication is made possible in part by a grant from the USDA Forest Service, Toiyabe National Forest.

Clarence Ray, as yet untitled (by Helen M. Blue). A lifelong professional gambler, Clarence Ray describes his trade and the numerous Las Vegas clubs he owned and operated on the city's black Westside from the 1930s to the 1970s. Mr. Ray also discusses his efforts as a black civil-rights leader, as well as the evolution of the Westside from the 1920s to the present. This publication will be available in the fall, and is third in a series on blacks and civil rights in Las Vegas.

Nota bene . . .

We are seeking at least fifty standing orders for all publications of our office. Such a list will enable us to do large-lot print runs of each volume, thereby reducing the unit cost of our books by up to 70 percent. The standing orders will also ensure that the Oral History Program collection is more widely circulated than is now possible. If you or your organization is interested, please telephone our office. Prices will range from $15 to $25 per publication, and up to six volumes will be published each year.

By agreement between the University of Nevada Press and the Oral History Program, all publications of the Oral History Program are now available for purchase through the press. For more information or a price list, please call the University of Nevada Press at 702–784–6573.

Copies of the Oral History Program's *Annotated Collection Catalog* are still available for $5.95. Copies of the 1987 and the 1989 *Master Index,* an in-depth topical and proper-name guide to the collection, are available for $9.95 for both.

Helen M. Blue
Production Manager

University of Nevada, Reno
Special Collections Department

The Special Collections Department recently acquired the records of the American Federation of Musicians, Reno Local No. 368. The union was incorporated in Reno in 1917 as the Reno Musicians' Protective Union and was also known as the Reno Musicians' Association. Among the records included in this collection are minutes, financial ledgers, correspondence, subject files, grievances, collective-bargaining files, stewards' reports, and records of the Reno Musicians' Federal Credit Union. The collection is currently being processed; when complete, it will contain a collection register to aid researchers.

The architectural drawings of the late Graham Erskine have been donated to the Special Collections Department by his widow, Jeanne S. Erskine, joining an

earlier accession of architectural specifications for projects developed by Mr. Erskine and his firms, Ferris and Erskine, and Erskine and Harden Architects. Erskine was a prolific architect and was the designer of buildings such as Reno High School, Hug High School, the Nevada State Legislative Building, Nevada Bell Administration Building, Harolds Club, the Granada Theater, and many branches of the Nevada National Bank and First Interstate Bank. The Erskine collection complements a growing body of architectural records in the Special Collections Department including those of Frederic DekLongchamps, Hewitt C. Wells, Edward S. Parsons, Raymond Hellmann, Alegre and Harrison, and Ben Leon.

Jim Bryant, forest and railroad historian, recently donated his collection of records of the twentieth-century lumbering industry that centered around Susanville, California. Bryant developed his interest while researching a branch of the Southern Pacific—the Fernley and Lassen Railroad—which ran from Fernley to Westwood, near Susanville. Included in this collection are Bryant's research notes, copies of records, maps, and photographs of the Red River Lumber Company, Lassen Lumber and Box Company, Fruit Growers Supply Company, and other related sites, dating from 1909 to 1989. A collection guide is available to assist patrons.

Susan Searcy
Manuscript Curator

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COMPILED BY CAROLINE MOREL

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- **Discount** of 10% in the Nevada Historical Society Gift Shop, the gift shops of the other museums of the Department of Museums and History and on copies of NHS photos.
- **Tours** — Society sponsored tours take members to historic sites within reach of Reno. 10% discount on tour fares.
- Special notice to all Society events and activities.

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NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Founded in 1904, the Nevada Historical Society seeks to advance the study of the heritage of Nevada. The Society publishes scholarly studies, indexes, guidebooks, bibliographies, and the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly;* it collects manuscripts, rare books, artifacts, historical photographs and maps, and makes its collections available for research; it maintains a museum at its Reno facility; and it is engaged in the development and publication of educational materials for use in the public schools.