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Nevada Historical Society Quarterly

The *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* solicits contributions of scholarly or popular interest dealing with the following subjects: the general (e.g., the political, social, economic, constitutional) or the natural history of Nevada and the Great Basin; the literature, languages, anthropology, and archaeology of these areas; reprints of historic documents; reviews and essays concerning the historical literature of Nevada, the Great Basin, and the West.

Prospective authors should send their work to The Editor, *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 1650 N. Virginia St., Reno, Nevada 89503. Papers should be typed double-spaced and sent in duplicate, along with a copy on disk (in MAC© or IBM© compatible form-WordPerfect© 5.1, 6.0, or Microsoft Word©). All manuscripts, whether articles, edited documents, or essays, should conform to the most recent edition of the University of Chicago Press *Manual of Style*. Footnotes should be typed double-spaced on separate pages and numbered consecutively. Submission guidelines are available on request. Correspondence concerning articles and essays is welcomed, and should be addressed to The Editor.

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Contents

Front Cover: Women worked in a variety of jobs from entertainers to housekeepers in the casino and tourism industry. These chorus line dancers from the Sands Hotel and Casino represent a small part of the entire female workforce. This is how most see women in Las Vegas, but as this issue shows, there is much more to the story. The two men in this photo are entertainment director, Jack Entratter, and owner, Jake Friedman. (*Special Collections Department, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library)*

Errata: In the Fall 2006 issue of the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, Volume 49, No. 3, the following errors appeared in the article "The Extraordinary Career of Frederic J. DeLongchamps." Page 187: Reno's population was listed as 17,434. It was, in actuality, slightly more then 10,000. Page 208: Frank Green was born in 1904, not 1940. The author offers her apologies.

Introduction

MICHAEL GREEN

On the wall near my office at the Community College of Southern Nevada, a poster says, "When you dismiss Women's Studies as a 'Man-Bashing,' 'Left-Wing,' 'Lesbian' ideology, YOU dismiss your mother, your daughter, your sister, your grandmother, your niece, your wife, and all your female friends. That, and you have failed to understand what Women's Studies really is." We make no grandiose claim that when you have finished reading this issue of the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* you will understand women's history. But we hope that you will have an appreciation of the richness of the subject and its importance to Nevada's history.

For far too long, women's history was little more than a footnote to the wider spectrum of American history. For the most part, history was the story of rich white men, written by rich white men, taught by rich white men to rich white men. Women may have been half of the population, if not more, but when a woman showed up in history books and classes, her job was to serve as the loving wife and mother who made possible the greatness of her husband or sons (many of them named Adams and hailing from Massachusetts) or the harridan whose husband or sons overcame the problems she created and achieved greatness (when in doubt, blame Mary Lincoln). The occasional Elizabeth Cady Stanton or Susan B. Anthony popped up, but more often as a sidebar to the exciting life of Chester Arthur, even after Arthur had left the presidency in 1885.

In the 1960s, social protests affected higher education, and that meant more than student demonstrations. Students wanted—demanded—a curriculum that reflected their lives, and they had grown up in a time of intellectual and political ferment. While the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his allies had led a movement for black civil rights, the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* marked a turning point in the story of women's rights. More schools began offering courses in American social history taught by professors who wrote extensively about that history—and not just the old-fashioned kind that examined what the neighborhood was like around Mount Vernon, but the "new social history," which tried to reconstruct the lives of slaves and freed blacks, women, Chinese railroad workers, hard-rock miners, and others who had been largely lost to history. That process is continuing.

The same is true of Nevada. Much of its history remains to be written, from biographies of significant public figures to histories of mining towns and railroads. The area most in need of attention is social history, and the story of Nevada's women cries out to be told and analyzed. Many inside and outside of Nevada have been working to rectify that situation, from Anne Howard's biography of women's-rights advocate Anne Martin to the volume on Comstock women edited by Ron James and Elizabeth Raymond, with a growing supply in between. What follows are some of the results.

This issue of the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* features five articles related to the history of Nevada women. They include a leading scholar's account of developing source material for her research, an examination of what the craft of quilting has meant to Nevada women and what it tells us about them, and a series of biographical essays profiling a Reno journalist, a Las Vegas pioneer, and a daughter of the mob who grew up to write about the people who populated her past and told us a great deal about herself in the process. In the future, we hope to publish more special issues on a variety of topics—and more on the lives of important Nevadans, whatever their socioeconomic status, their part of the state, or their gender.

From the Ground Up
Building Archival Sources for the History of Women in Las Vegas

JOANNE L. GOODWIN

How do you "write women back into history" when no sources exist to do so? How do you define a gender analysis of the presumably most sexed-up city in the United States when you cannot compare the historical experiences of men and women? Those were the questions I faced a number of years ago in Las Vegas as I began to teach women's history.

I had no intention of involving myself in these problems in 1991 as a newly arrived assistant professor of women's history at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Frankly, it didn't occur to me that it would be necessary. My research interests revolved around twentieth-century social policy and a gender analysis of the formation of the United States welfare state, which had led me into the archives of some of the most distinguished libraries in the country. But as I prepared for my graduate seminar on women's history and reviewed the sources available in the UNLV library's special collection department, I found few manuscript sources, and those that were accessible were in disarray. I felt myself transported back two decades when as an undergraduate I looked for information on the history of women in the arts from my college professors. In the early 1970s, the explanations my professors gave for the absence of women in history were simple and maddening: "They produced nothing of real significance" or "we simply do not know much about them." But two decades later, our consciousness was supposed to have changed, along with library holdings.

Joanne Goodwin is associate professor of history at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Her research and teaching interests are in twentieth century United States history, with a specialization in women and gender history. Dr. Goodwin's publications include: *Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform* (University of Chicago Press, 1997) and the *Encyclopedia of Women in American History*, 3 vols. (2002). She currently directs the Las Vegas Women Oral History Project and the Women's Research Institute of Nevada, a statewide program.

Scholarship on the history of women in all regions and time periods had grown exponentially in the intervening years. Most students attending institutions of higher learning had the opportunity to learn about the women, as well as the men, who contributed to United States history. The situation seemed unacceptable for a city as exciting as Las Vegas at the end of the twentieth century. I believed I would be complicit in the invisibility of women in the history of the city if I did not do something to change the situation. Yet, I was a new faculty member with new courses to teach, research to publish, and a new culture to understand. It took a couple of years for the opportunity to arise that would allow those changes to take place.

My desire to fill the void that existed in sources on Las Vegas women came from my training as a historian of women. I have discovered more recently that the creation of archives on women has its own esteemed historical trajectory—one that accounts for the very best collections in the country. The Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at Radcliffe College and the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, owe the origins of their manuscript collections to the efforts of Mary Ritter Beard and others who wanted to preserve the records of early twentieth-century feminists and their campaigns for birth control, international peace, and women's rights. Beard's motivation for creating an archive on women's lives can be summarized by her comments to a colleague, "Without documents; no history. Without history; no memory. Without memory; no greatness. Without greatness; no progress among women."[1] The field of women's history that exploded in the 1970s would have had a lot less documentation from which to write books and articles without those collections.[2] As distinguished as they are, those two northeastern repositories had to set limits on what they collected, and made it abundantly clear that regional or topical collections also were needed. Texas Woman's University also wanted to preserve documents on the lives of women leaders. It claims the oldest archive, established in 1932, the first in Texas and the Southwest.

The women's movement of the 1970s created not only a demand for the identification of collections for research, but also an outpouring of support for funding women's collections. By the early 1990s, the Schlesinger Library had identified seventy-eight repositories with significant collections on women, and a second wave of collection building was occurring across the United States, with an additional fifteen archives identified between 1990 and 2000.[3] For example, the Duke University Women's Archives and Special Collections, the Oklahoma State University Library Women's Archives, and the Iowa Women's Archive continue to expand their specific collecting areas on women. In addition, numerous collections focus on professions, organizations, or specific groups.[4] The Nevada Women's Archives at UNLV follows the model established by the major research universities' archives; yet, the state and its population made the process and results original.

Archives hold the documentary sources from which histories of people and place are written. While this definition sounds neutral, the creation of archives reflects the sentiments and values of the societies that create them. Archives privilege some types of documentary sources over others—for example, letters and papers over oral accounts. Similarly, the value of one collection over another often is linked to the value of the public activity undertaken by the donor. Politics, law, and business have been treasured areas while homes, clubs, and familial relations have been seen as marginal. The twentieth-century movement to identify and build women's archives challenged the almost complete male exclusivity that had existed in archives and the invisibility of women as actors in history. All archives set collecting standards, and the archivists for the younger collections have had a greater opportunity to think about inclusiveness and build diversity into their collections. This certainly was the case in Las Vegas. Nevertheless, happenstance and idiosyncrasy still would determine in part the collections that were acquired.[5]

This article describes the efforts that a handful of valued colleagues and I have taken to collect and preserve women's history in Las Vegas and southern Nevada. The University of Nevada, Las Vegas, has housed a branch of the Nevada Women's Archives since 1994. In addition, working through the history department, I began the Las Vegas Women Oral History Project. Not every historian has the need or opportunity to participate in the construction of such a body of sources. Building these sources may not have proven a smart career move, since it took me away from publication of research more national in focus, but it has proven to be a remarkably interesting journey. Both entities will provide generations to come with material sources from which to study and question women's participation in society and culture.[6]

The Nevada Women's Archives

It is frequently said about Las Vegas that the city does not value its history. That all too often has been the case when one uses building preservation as evidence, but it changes when talking about the people of the city. For example, individual women rarely kept their own papers, but avidly preserved the records of their clubs and organizations. This may illustrate a tendency to minimize their individual importance while celebrating their collective efforts. In addition, they appear to have kept papers, not because they planned to donate them to archives, but because they recognized the need to carry their own institutional history forward, as if to say, "we were here, and we did these things for the people of our community."

The Nevada Women's Archives at UNLV began because two historians of women met. Jean Ford began the campaign, and I kept up the momentum. Jean Ford was a former state legislator, a self-taught instructor of Nevada

Nevada Women's Archives group on an outing at Red Rock Canyon near Las Vegas, December 1997. (L to R) Joyce Marshall Moore, Carol Corbett, Jean Ford, and Joanne Goodwin. *(Photo courtesy of the author)*

women's history and politics, and an inspiration to a generation of women who participated in the renaissance of women's civic activism during the 1970s and 1980s. She had the ability to inspire others to join with her to accomplish major reforms. She did this many times throughout her life, from helping to establish the Clark County public library in Las Vegas, to preserving Red Rock Canyon, to building the political skills of dozens, if not hundreds, of women across the state. Ford lived in Las Vegas for many years while she reared her family, worked as a volunteer in numerous organizations, and won election to the state legislature. After leaving elective politics, she moved to Reno and was respected and well known in both cities. While living in Reno and teaching at the University of Nevada, Reno, Ford conducted research in women's history and persuaded the director of UNR's special collections department to identify which of its holdings contained materials useful for writing the history of women in the state. In 1992 and subsequently, she worked with the department to add collections from individual women and organizations, calling the collection the Nevada Women's Archives (NWA).

During the late spring and summer of 1994, Ford visited UNLV to assess the prospects of building a southern branch of the NWA. If support existed, she would work with the university to build a southern collection. If it did not exist, she would encourage individuals to send their papers and collections to UNR, where she knew that they would be preserved. Two of my history colleagues, Sue Fawn Chung and Gene Moehring, brought me into the project. As I saw it, the plan was desperately needed for teaching and research. If we did not find a way for UNLV to adopt the idea, local resources would go to Reno, an eight-hour drive from Las Vegas, and the community would probably never again have the opportunity to build such a repository. If we succeeded in convincing the administration of its value, not only would UNLV gain, but the system of archives that Ford envisioned would provide a representative collection of manuscripts.

A working group of faculty from the history and anthropology departments and the library formed to discuss the particulars and develop a plan of action with Ford's leadership.[7] Similar to our forerunners at other universities, we knew that we wanted to avoid marginalizing a women's collection. In fact, our goal was quite the opposite—to build into an existing repository additional collections that focused on women's lives. We wanted to counteract the charge that women were not included in Las Vegas history because there was a lack of evidence about their lives or about their contributions. At the same time, we wanted to identify the holdings as a unique collection. In this way, we could avoid the invisibility of women's lives that can occur when sources are lost in the papers of a husband or family. We also wanted to avoid the tendency to collect only from the economic and political elite by designing a deliberate acquisition plan that was conscious of many forms of diversity. The working group set out to define the description of the collecting areas, the differences between the collections at UNLV and UNR, and the guidelines and criteria for the collections. At the end of this long process, I drafted (and many others revised) a proposal for the support of a Nevada Women's Archives at UNLV. Matt Simon, then the library dean, with the persuasion of his associate dean, Myoung-ja Lee Kwon, endorsed the idea and set in motion the necessary steps to officially begin our work.

In August 1994, the NWA at UNLV officially debuted with the following statement of its goals:

> UNLV has the potential to hold a substantial collection, in addition to existing collections, of research resources on southern Nevada women. The project is tied to a state-wide effort to coordinate repositories of sources and provide electronic access to materials. As such, it shares the mission of the UNR Archive "to collect, preserve, and provide research access to important collections of papers and records of Nevada women and women's organizations past and present on a local, regional, and state-wide level."

> This collection has specific benefits for students and faculty at UNLV, but its significance reaches beyond the university to the community and to the region. . . . This collection's focus on the lives of women in Las Vegas and southern Nevada holds tremendous value for those writing the history of southern Nevada women.[8]

The dean of libraries launched the NWA with a small library fund that would pay for a part-time archivist. Carol Corbett held that position from September 1994 through June 1997. During the first year she worked one day a week and afterward increased to three days a week. Corbett, a resident of Las Vegas since 1969, served on the Nevada State Historical Records Advisory Board and worked in the office of the Clark County Recorder. Through both positions she developed an interest in archives and attended the Western Archives Institute in 1988. Recently retired from the county, she considered the archivist job after being reassured that she would be able to consult with the archivist at UNR, Susan Searcy. Ford's funding came from grants from the Library Services and Construction Act (administered by the Nevada State Library and Archives) between January 1995 and August 1995, and from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission from July 1995 to April 1997.[9]

By August, a small office in the special collections department had been secured for Ford and Corbett. They shared one desk, a computer, and a phone. Their long-standing friendship and a division of duties made the arrangement workable. Ford used her contacts among women in the worlds of formal and informal politics to let people know about the archives and to secure their papers. Corbett had the job of assessing the existing holdings of the entire special collections department to determine which collections might provide information about women's lives. This involved the enormous task of surveying all the collections, with or without collection inventories, then creating a unique inventory for the NWA. Both Ford and Corbett worked without the assistance of a director of special collections. The prior director had retired, and the state froze the position. Corbett's tremendous experience proved invaluable since no other staff working in the department at that time had any training in collection organization. Nevertheless, her funding for just one day a week made the work slow going.

The archives of women community builders came from their storage places in garages, outdoor patios, and corners of offices. They were vulnerable to the elements of heat, insects, and the occasional desert downpour. These papers were also vulnerable to the life span of the individual archivist. If the records of a civic organization rested in the storage bins of the octogenarian historian for the group, and she died, luck rather than any plan would dictate whether those records were thrown away or moved to another member's home. In a city where attics were rare and basements almost nonexistent, it was hard to find someone willing to house and care for archives. Ford's appeal to the community to donate papers targeted two needs: that of caring for organizational materials and of building a repository.

By March 1995, the NWA was officially opened to the Las Vegas community. Ford coordinated the opening with a celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of women's suffrage, a move that brought her friends and co-workers in the nonpartisan League of Women Voters, as well as an all-star cast of elected officials, to special collections to hear the past, present, and future of the Nevada Women's Archives. Corbett produced an inventory of approximately two hundred collections with viable materials from which histories could be written.[10] Ford's influence in the community began to bring in new collections. Major organizations such as the League of Women Voters, Planned Parenthood, the Nevada Nurses Association, and Soroptimists International had either donated or were in the process of donating their papers. The working group had accomplished the first stage of its goal, with staff hired and procedures in place. Some members retired while others remained on the NWA Advisory Board to keep the process of acquisition and processing moving along.

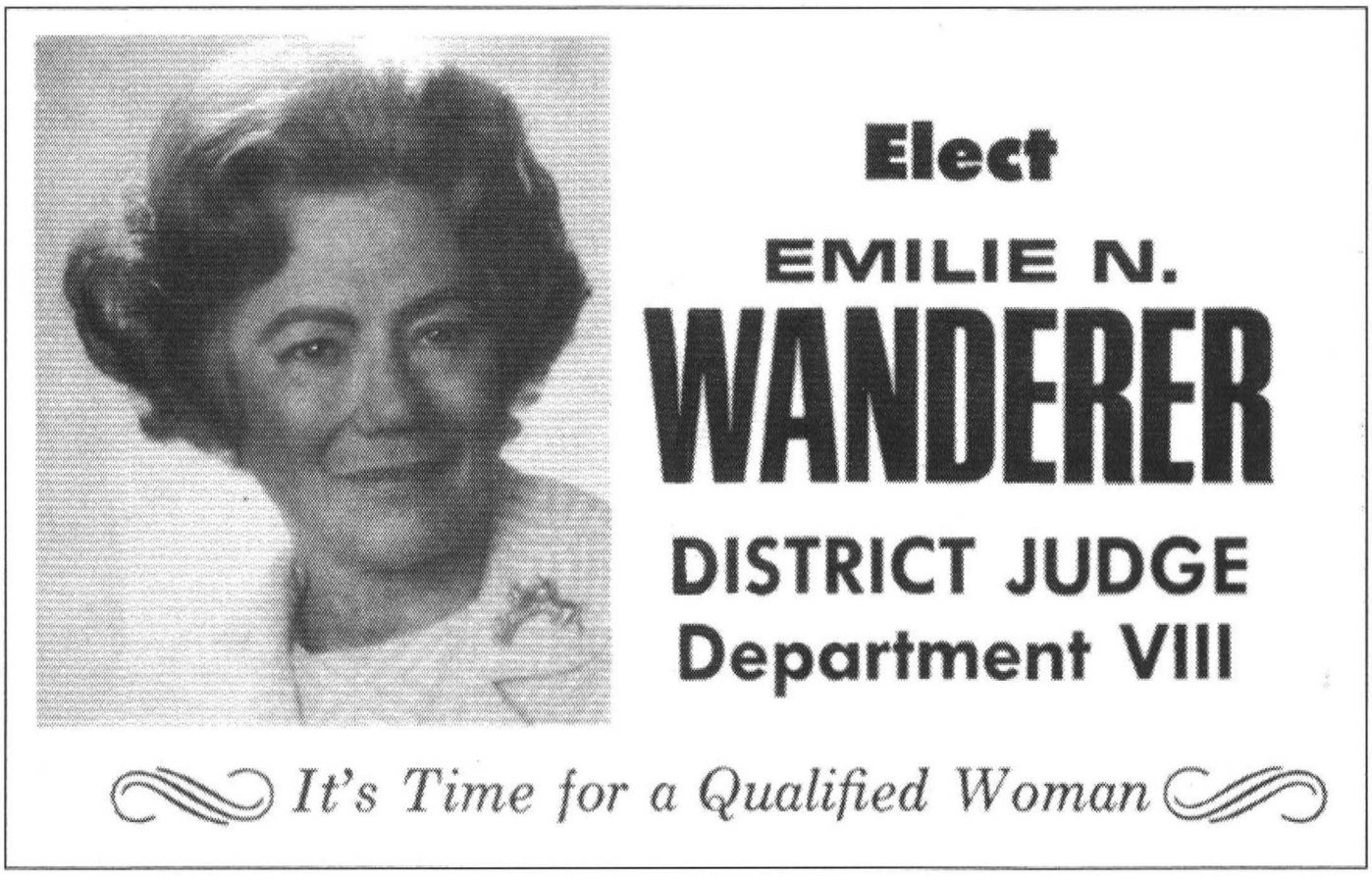
The second stage of work on the archives involved organizing collections so that they could be used for research. Corbett's work identified existing collections and gave the board the opportunity to prioritize them for processing, while Ford's efforts began to bring in new collections. At the time, the special collections department had no manuscript curator and a small staff. No library funds existed for hiring or training staff to process the enormous backlog of collections. The working group, which had become the NWA Advisory Board, set out to assist the department by finding manuscript processors.

Ingenuity and the generosity of history faculty eased this process. For several semesters, Eugene Moehring and Sue Fawn Chung lent their graduate assistants to the Nevada Women's Archives to assist in processing collections. The history department's generosity to the library continued through 1998. In addition, I supervised several students from the Women's Studies program, who took their internships at the special collections department processing NWA collections.[11] Corbett trained and supervised all the students even though she was still on a one-day schedule. Many of the collection guides in the NWA bear the names of the student processors from the history department or the women's studies program. In 1995, when the special collections department hired a new director, Peter Michel, he offered the course "Modern Archives: Theory and Methodology." This type of arrangement sustained the momentum to organize collections in the NWA; however, neither the library nor the public history program developed an internship that would provide consistent processing for any of the collections.

By 1998, Ford ended her formal relationship with the NWA and redirected her energies to create the Nevada Women's History Project. Shortly thereafter, Carol Corbett retired and Elizabeth Warren, a longtime historian of southern Nevada who had been deeply involved in historic preservation, took her place for a short while. Without a new investment by the library, the future of the NWA remained unclear.

The third stage of institutionalizing the archives came when the library hired a manuscript curator. The Nevada Women's Archives Advisory Board had tried for years to convince the library administration that a position was needed to specifically address curatorial issues. While we wanted a position entirely for the NWA, we realized that achieving that hope was unlikely. The board did succeed, however, in making the NWA's maintenance and development one of the job assignments of the curator. The Advisory Board continued to meet to plan the future growth of the archives, to facilitate the curator's transition in the job, and to meet with another new hire, the library dean.

Over the course of five years, the special collections department changed from offering a handful of identifiable collections on women to being able to provide nearly two hundred collections, some of which have finding aids. In addition, those collections uncovered by Corbett were often small, but several of the collections solicited by Ford were significant. Today, the NWA contains manuscripts, photographs, and oral histories that provide researchers substantive documentation on the townswomen and ranch families who helped to start Las Vegas at the beginning of the twentieth century; on professional women who by mid century worked as teachers, businesswomen, and journalists; and on the organizations in which women invested volunteer hours to build the community. Researchers documenting the social politics of the 1970s and 1980s will benefit tremendously from organizational papers such as those of



Emilie N. Wanderer opened the first law practice headed by a woman in Las Vegas in 1947. Her oral history is one example of the history retrieved by the Las Vegas Women Oral History Project. *(Photo courtesy of Emilie N. Wanderer)*

the League of Women Voters as well as those of individuals with membership in the organization. The League of Women Voters played an instrumental role in legal cases challenging housing and educational segregation. The NWA also houses the oral histories of members active in the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Individuals and organizations involved in the women's movement in Nevada have donated their papers, and plans are under way to acquire the papers of the first shelter for battered women, SafeNest, and the first agency to assist women who had been raped, Community Action Against Rape. The Nevada Women's Archives at UNLV continue to grow through the acquisition of manuscripts and collection of oral histories.

With the hiring of a manuscript curator responsible for the Nevada Women's Archives, the Advisory Board ended its formal relationship with the library, while individuals continued to assist with the acquisition of collections. This transition enabled me to devote a greater amount of time to an offshoot of the archives, a program that was inspired by graduate students in the history department—the Las Vegas Women Oral History Project.

The Las Vegas Women Oral History Project

Those of us who worked on the Nevada Women's Archives at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, knew that manuscript collections represented only a small part of the documentation on women's lives. In addition, many of the people who had built Las Vegas still lived in town. The statewide oral history program funded through the state legislature and located at the University of Nevada, Reno, had been unable to collect as aggressively as we had hoped in southern Nevada. We wanted to expand the collection of oral histories in the state to include more southern Nevadans in general, and women specifically because their contributions had been overlooked. One need only contemplate how knowledge is produced and the need for sources to produce that knowledge to realize the vital nature of literally preserving more voices. This understanding motivated a number of us to work harder and at a more furious pace.[12]

While Jean Ford conducted exploratory research to determine what corporate or philanthropic foundations, if any, might be prospects for an oral history project at UNLV, two initiatives by students in my women's history courses proved most helpful. In October 1994, Judy Habbeshaw, the daughter of Thalia Dondero (the first woman elected to the Clark County Board of Commissioners) took my class and worked on oral history. She began discussing the Nevada Women's Archives with her mother and encouraging her to serve on the NWA Advisory Board to assist with collection development. Together, mother and daughter created a list of potential interviewees. In the spring of 1995, two history graduate students approached me for assistance in conducting interviews with women in

the gaming industry. Kim Beach was a dealer and Joyce Marshall had worked for years in the city's casinos and hotels. The idea had great potential. It offered a unique contribution to local history, urban history, labor history, and women's history. Although I could not undertake this as a class project and consequently had to add it to my other duties, it provided a great opportunity for interaction between the community of Las Vegas and the university.

The original team consisted of three graduate students and me. My background in women's history, with a focus on employment, politics, and reform, guided us in the formation of the research design. Joyce Marshall continued with the project (although Kim Beach did not) and provided invaluable first-hand knowledge of Las Vegas and gaming as the only project member who grew up with the city's gaming and hotel industries. Marshall worked in numerous casino and hotel jobs for more than thirty years. Myoung-ja Lee Kwon, then the associate dean of the library and a doctoral student in the history department, had lived in Las Vegas since 1970. Her previous research on immigration and the development of western communities gave her a solid foundation for her work on Asian performers and the development of the Korean community in Las Vegas. She interviewed Sue Kim of the musical group the Kim Sisters. Claytee White completed her masters degree at UNLV and went on to study for her doctorate at William and Mary College. Her interviews with men and women who migrated from the Deep South to Las Vegas during the 1940s and 1950s filled a large gap in the history of migration from the South to the western states.

At the beginning of the project, none of us had oral history experience; however, each student had a solid background in historical research, and some had previous experience with interviews. I approached the University of Nevada Oral History Program to provide an initial workshop introducing the basic concepts of oral history. We opened it to anyone interested in the community and university and received a strong response. For additional training, I worked with the history department to sponsor subsequent workshops with expert practitioners. The next step was to research our subjects and practice interview techniques. We originally planned on one-hour interviews, but soon discovered how brief that was and expanded the interviews as appropriate. The history department's first doctoral candidate, Dona Gearhart, became the first project assistant. She transcribed the audiotaped interviews and produced a full-text transcript. Then we conducted the audio edit, identifying areas for clarification, and the general text editing.

The original project design called for interviews with women in gaming and entertainment who worked in the industry sometime between the 1940s and the 1980s. There was no book on the subject, let alone other resources for us to consult. We brought our own areas of expertise to the team and learned the rest on the run. Building on individual interests and research design needs, our team of four devised the original plan for the interviews.

The Kim Sisters, a popular entertainment group, with their mother (far left). The first series of the Las Vegas Women Oral History Project focused on women in gaming and entertainment from the 1940s to the 1980s. *(Photo courtesy of the Kim Sisters Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library)*

Since our original plan was to learn about the work experiences of women employed in the gaming industry, we divided our project into the four geographic areas of work. These were (1) *the back of the house* (service workers in food preparation and housekeeping), (2) *the floor* (dealers and cocktail waitresses), (3) *the showroom* (dancers, entertainers, and showgirls), and (4) *the management*. We compiled a set of core interview questions covering the world of work as well as social, familial, and cultural experiences. Because so little was known about the women who came to work in Las Vegas, we added questions about their early history—their families and education—to get a better sense of who they were and how they became a part of the city. This set of questions provided the framework for each interviewer, while allowing for flexibility and individual differences. We hoped that it would enable researchers to make comparisons between groups over time. In particular, the interviews sought to better understand the life course of women's work lives. By asking our subjects why they came to the city, how they combined work and family, what opportunities they saw for women, and how employment changed over time with the shift in ownership from families, individuals, or small groups to corporations, the interviewers began to reconstruct the narratives of women's lives.

In 1996, we received two important grants from the Nevada Humanities Committee and the UNLV Foundation. Both groups understood the urgency of the project, which was underscored in my proposal: "In a city that has looked more to the future than its past, it is time now while we still have the chance to collect people's narratives." The funding helped us get equipment and transcribe the interviews.

The selection of women to interview came about in two ways. First, we invited specific individuals whose experiences illuminated a particular aspect of the history. For example, Joyce Marshall's interview with Ffolliott (Fluff) LeCoque documented the origins of the showroom spectacular with the opening of the Lido de Paris at the Stardust in 1958. My interview with Toni Clark, widow of Wilbur Clark, founder of the Desert Inn, covered the formative years of casino properties on the strip, including the 1950 opening of Clark's Desert Inn. Claudine Williams and Nancy Houssels agreed to add their personal narratives about operating a casino and creating the first ballet theater in Las Vegas, respectively. The second method used to find subjects, commonly known as the "snowball technique," followed referrals from one subject to identify another. This method worked very successfully for Claytee White. She interviewed African Americans who came to Las Vegas from the southern states during the 1940s and 1950s and worked primarily as housekeepers. These interviews led her to investigate the role of women in the Culinary Union and the union's impact on the work experiences of her subjects. During the 1950s, work opportunities expanded as African-American women such as Anna Bailey and D. D. Cotton worked as entertainers in what was then a segregated showroom. A decade later, civil rights laws made it possible for women to enter management positions. Faye Todd, Faye Duncan Daniels, and Jackie Brantley broke the race barriers in this area of employment. In retrospect, the combination of methods to select subjects was necessary.[13]

After dozens of interviews, we began to identify some themes. The rapidly expanding tourist economy of mid-twentieth-century Las Vegas provided flexible work conditions and better incomes (often from tips) than had been available to these women back home. Regardless of their positions—African-American housekeeper, native-born Texan entertainer, or immigrant performer from Europe or Korea—narrators found in postwar Las Vegas the opportunity to work and to earn a living. The city's opportunities were mixed, however. This resort city retained segregationist practices in employment, recreation, and housing well into the 1970s. A second theme that emerged from the stories is that the sexualized context of free-wheeling Las Vegas neither corrupted nor degraded the women's perceptions of themselves. Narrators reported that the town's liberalized sexual standards, as well as the requirements for dancers and showgirls to "socialize" in the casino after the show, were insignificant aspects of their jobs that had little impact upon their personal lives. Both themes need more analysis, but raise fascinating contrasts between the ways women were

represented and how some of those women saw themselves.

Within two years, the students had finished their interviews, graduated, or moved on with their lives. I found myself having just scratched the surface of the collection process. Since ours was the only active oral history initiative in southern Nevada at the time, people constantly provided names of men and women to be interviewed. I was convinced of the value of the project and the need to complete it as soon as possible. Staff to assist with interviews and the labor-intensive processing came and went, with accompanying delays in our progress. Nevertheless, within a few years, the oral history project had produced three series: the original on gaming and entertainment, another on Las Vegas valley pioneers, and the third on women who were community builders.

To date, the project has accumulated fifty interviews, with one half completed and the remaining interviews in the process. Another dozen major interviews need to be conducted. When complete, the oral history project will provide a diverse portrait of women's activities in Las Vegas and southern Nevada. The community-builder series includes individuals who played major roles in the business and civic life of the city. The gaming and entertainment series covers women who worked in a wide range of industry jobs. The pioneer series includes both men and women whose memories of early Las Vegas provide an in-depth picture unlike any other available.

These first-hand accounts of women's experiences in the development of Las Vegas will prove an invaluable contribution to the recorded social and cultural history of the city and the state. But the importance of this project extends beyond our local interests. Collecting narratives of women's experiences in a burgeoning tourist center provides an important source of information on changes in the post-industrial economy of the United States and the resulting impact on the lives of women and men.

Conclusion

I began this article by asking how one writes a history without the material sources to do so. My answer to that question was to create (along with numerous colleagues) a collection of sources, that is, an archive and a collection of interviews. While some might argue that the perceptions of women, and thus of sex and gender, could form a sufficient basis for historical studies, the place—Las Vegas—complicated that idea for me. In Las Vegas, the only things we as a public knew about women were the perceptions, fantasies, and projections created to enhance the mid-century business enterprises of gaming and tourism. Representation overwhelmed other forms of information so completely that the act of preservation became extraordinarily important in this particular location. Collecting manuscripts and narratives became an act of resistance against accepting the commercial profile of Las Vegas women as

the sole reflection of Las Vegas women. Granted, our efforts to collect will be seen as entirely inadequate to the next generation of scholars, who, like me, will want more than what we have accumulated. When we began, I could not know the full significance of what these materials would produce; but I did know that without the collections none of us would have any chance to interpret Nevada women's lives or gender in the future. Now we will.

NOTES

[1]Quoted in Mary Trigg, "'To Work Together for Ends Larger than Self': The Feminist Struggles of Mary Beard and Doris Stevens in the 1930s," *Journal of Women's History* 7:2 (1995), 71.

[2]For more information on the origins of women's history collections, see Suzanne Hildenbrand, "Women's Collections Today," *Special Collections* 3:3-4 (1986), 2-7; Anke Voss-Hubbard, "'No Documents—No History': Mary Ritter Beard and the Early History of Women's Archives," *American Archivist* 58:1 (1995), 16-30; Trigg, "To Work Together," 52-85; Patricia Miller King, "The Power of Preservation: The Schlesinger Library at Fifty," *American Libraries* 24:7 (July-August 1993), 665-668.

[3]Karen Mason and Tanya Zanish-Belcher, "A Room of One's Own: Women's Archives in the Year 2000," *Archival Issues* 24:1 (1999), 37-54.

[4]An ongoing effort to map archival repositories with collections relating to women can be accessed through the Women's Archive Mapping Project, Women in Leadership Archives, Gannon Center, Loyola University, Chicago, http://www.luc.edu/orgs/gannon/archives/donordirectory.html

[5]While this article focuses on the steps undertaken to create an archive, scholars have been interrogating the assumed neutrality of archives, the meanings attached to their holdings, and the exclusivity of their sources. An excellent introduction to the critical assessment of archives may be found in Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

[6]UNR created the first branch of the Nevada Women's Archives. The archives' website, although outdated, provides additional information. http://www.library.unr.edu/specoll/womenarc.html

[7]Sue Fawn Chung, Eugene Moehring, and I represented history, Martha Knack represented anthropology, and Bob Ball, Alison Armstrong, and Susan Jarvis, the library. The associate dean of the library, Myoung-ja Lee Kwon, joined us later.

[8]Memo dated 17 August 1994 from committee member Alison Armstrong, instructional librarian and women's studies bibliographer, in the author's possession.

[9]I am grateful to Carol Corbett for finding this information in her personal files.

[10]By January 1995, Corbett had surveyed 486 collections and determined that 212 could be classified as women's collections. An additional 44 collections needed additional assessment to determine whether they would be included in the NWA. Personal correspondence, Carol Corbett to the author, 23 October 2005.

[11]Dona Gearhart, Marie Imus, Cathleen Dooley, and Caryll Dziedziak were some of the earliest assistants to process collections.

[12]Claytee White, one of the original members of the Las Vegas Women Oral History Project, became the first director of the Center for Oral History at UNLV.

[13]Claytee D. White, "Eight Dollars a Day and Working in the Shade": An Oral History of African American Migrant Women in the Las Vegas Gaming Industry," in *African American Women Confront the West: 1600-2000*, Quintard Taylor and Shirley Anne Wilson Moore, eds. (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003); "The Role of African American Women in the Las Vegas Gaming Industry, 1940-1980," M.A. Thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1997.

Susan Berman

Writer of Las Vegas and Murdered Mob Princess

CHERYLL GLOTFELTY

We know a lot about the men with shady pasts who transformed Las Vegas from a dusty railroad stop into a dazzling gambling mecca. But while these legendary men are well known as city fathers, their role as fathers of children is seldom discussed. What was it like to have a gangster for a dad, to grow up in Las Vegas during the 1940s and 1950s? Who are the wives and children of Las Vegas's founding fathers? Where are the women in the colorful story of Las Vegas and the mob? Susan Berman's 1981 memoir *Easy Street* offers a rare glimpse inside the home of one of Las Vegas's early mob bosses. Her father, Dave Berman, arrived in Las Vegas in 1945, and over the next dozen years became a part owner and executive at the El Cortez, the Las Vegas Club, the El Dorado (now the Horseshoe), the Flamingo, and the Riviera. When Dave Berman died in 1957 at the age of fifty-three, the whole town mourned him in what was reported as the largest funeral Las Vegas had ever seen. The presiding rabbi called Berman "one of our original pioneers, who made this city bloom. . . . Davie Berman had a vision. He saw a boom town where others had just seen desert. He was Mr. Las Vegas."[1]

This essay reviews the life and writing of Davie Berman's only child, Susan Berman, born in 1945, the same year he moved to Las Vegas. Susan Berman grew up to become a writer of magazine feature articles, a reference work, three novels, a memoir, and a popular history of Las Vegas. She made headline news when she was murdered gangland-style in her Beverly Hills home, just days before Christmas 2000, with a bullet through the back of the head, a case that remains unsolved.[2] While Susan Berman's story has become sensational-

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ized—and featured in a true-crime book, *Murder of a Mafia Daughter* (2002), by Cathy Scott—her own writing has unfortunately fallen into neglect. I would like to redress this scholarly gap by analyzing Susan Berman's life and writing, especially her work on Las Vegas—and its work on her.

Susie Berman grew up knowing that her father was a prominent hotel owner and manager, philanthropist, devoted Jew, and leading citizen of Las Vegas. That was all she knew. Mr. and Mrs. Berman carefully monitored the information that reached their daughter so that Susie would never know of her father's mob ties or of his previous life in organized crime. On one occasion Davie Berman ordered his associates to buy up and suppress all of the available issues of *The New Yorker*, whose "Talk of the Town" column said that Las Vegas was run by former bootleggers. Meanwhile, innocent and pampered, Susie Berman had the perception that Las Vegas was the center of the world and that her dad owned it. In *Easy Street*, she recalls growing up by the pool at the Flamingo, doing cannonballs that drenched hotel guests. Susie and her mother Gladys went horseback riding out into the desert from the Day Dream Ranch behind the Hotel Last Frontier. Susie's meals were either prepared by the family's black maid, Lucy, or ordered from room service at the Flamingo. She did her homework in the casino counting room and learned basic math concepts on a slot machine that her father gave her for her eighth birthday. Rather than playing with friends her own age, Susie enjoyed watching the showgirls practice, and she sometimes dolled herself up in their clothing. She recalled watching her parents dressed to the hilt, heading out for a night of partying, returning home in the morning to give Susie expensive party gifts. Lucky Susie rode the Flamingo float and waved to the crowds in the annual Helldorado Parade. A painted portrait of little Susie wearing cowboy boots and a western shirt, with hair in pigtails, hung above the Flamingo's reservation desk. Elvis Presley gave her a signed photograph, and Liberace sang "Happy Birthday" at her twelfth birthday party in the Riviera.

Behind this bright scene, however, all was not well at home. Not long after their arrival in Las Vegas, Susan's mother began suffering from depression, worried sick that their family was not safe. Before Dave Berman married her, Gladys Evans had been a stunningly beautiful teenage dancer in Minneapolis, whose dance routines with her cousin Lorelei captivated audiences throughout the Midwest. Dave Berman, sixteen years her senior, literally swept the young and innocent Gladys off her feet (he asked her to stop dancing, which she did), and married her when she was nineteen. They waited until Berman returned from World War II before having a child, and, just a few weeks after Susie's birth, they moved to Las Vegas. As a mob wife, Gladys was not free to make friends with whomever she pleased. With her husband working fourteen-hour days, Gladys spent long, isolating days at home with her baby. Bodyguards lived with the family, Davie had the bedroom windows of their house on Sixth Street raised to deter drive-by hit men, and Susan was given drills on what

Susan Berman, c. 1980. *(Easy Street,* The Dial Press, 1981*)*

to do if she should be kidnapped. Sometimes, during times of mob unrest, Dave spirited the family away to Los Angeles for a "vacation." Gladys began a downward spiral from which she never recovered. By age twenty-nine, she had had a hysterectomy, commonly prescribed for depression at that time. She spent day after day in bed in her darkened bedroom, punctuated by periodic flights to Los Angeles to see a psychiatrist. At an early age, Susan learned to associate her father with "energy and activity" and her mother with "sadness and stillness."[3]

Just months after Susan's gala twelfth birthday party, her father died suddenly of heart failure following abdominal surgery. Her mother, who lived in Los Angeles by that time, was too sick to care for Susan, and, in fact, died two years later. Susan was told that she died of a heart attack, but found out later that the

coroner had ruled the death "suicide by overdose of pills." Still later, informants told Susan that the mob may have murdered her mother for refusing to sign the stingy settlement they proffered for the disposition of Davie's estate.

After her father's death, his brother, Charles Berman, assumed responsibility for Susan. At that time, Uncle Chickie lived in Lewiston, Idaho, where he was a bookie, spending his days in silk robes, watching two television sets, and talking on the phone. Uncle Chickie sent Susan to boarding school, St. Helen's Hall in Portland, Oregon, a well-run Episcopal school, from which she graduated with honors. She informed Uncle Chickie that she wanted to be a journalist, to which he quipped, "You'll be the first Berman to break into print legitimately."[4]

After a summer tour of Israel with the United Synagogue Youth Pilgrimage Tour, Susan entered the University of California at Los Angeles; she received the disturbing news in her sophomore year that Uncle Chickie was going to be "a guest of the government for a while," the result of his involvement in a huge stock fraud.[5] Davie Berman had always stressed education, saying that Susan was going to be the first Berman to go to college, a comment that drew laughs from his friends, "college" being a gangster term for prison. At UCLA, an acquaintance told Susan to read *The Green Felt Jungle*, the 1963 exposé of Las Vegas's ties to organized crime by Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris. In it they described Berman as "an ex-con who served time in Sing Sing for kidnapping" and "a former Siegel thug" who "could kill a man with one hand."[6] Stunned by the description of her father in those pages, Berman rejected the book and repressed thoughts of it until much later. She earned her B.A. degree in 1967, going on to earn an M.A. in journalism from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1969, in the first graduating class of the new graduate program in journalism. At Berkeley in the sixties, living well on monthly trust-fund payments, Susan drove a white Mercedes sedan, surely conspicuous during those turbulent years of anti-Vietnam-war protests and student unrest.

A survey of Berman's work reveals her to be an unusually versatile writer, competitive in multiple literary genres. Her first book, *The Underground Guide to the College of Your Choice*, appeared in 1971 from New American Library, just two years after she received her journalism degree.[7] She then worked at *The San Francisco Examiner* from 1971 to 1974, writing for the women's pages, and then the city section, before finally landing a plum assignment with *California Living*, the newspaper's Sunday magazine. She followed this as a screenwriter for KPIX-TV on "The Westinghouse Hour" show, doing freelance writing on the side. Her first big success as a freelancer came in 1975, when her article "San Francisco, City of Sin, Why Can't I Get Laid?" ran as a cover story in *City of San Francisco* magazine.[8] She published profiles of Angela Davis and others, developing a reputation as an aggressive journalist who could get "impossible" interviews. She once gained access to labor leader Jimmy Hoffa by posing as a hotel maid, entering his room at the Fairmont Hotel after a speech he gave in San Francisco.

In 1973, Berman suffered her first nervous breakdown, brought on by a sense of "total rootlessness. I felt I existed with connections to no one except my uncle and my cousin."[9] After recovering, she moved to Israel for a year, perhaps to connect with her Jewish heritage. There, she wrote her first novel, *Driver, Give a Soldier a Lift*, which appeared in 1976 from Putnam's and is dedicated in part to "my shrink, Dr. Edward Alston, for all his help."[10] The story is set in Tel Aviv, Israel, in the mid 1970s, with flashbacks to the San Francisco Bay Area. It is about a young, phobia-prone Jewish journalist named Ricki Rohrman, who is fed up with the men she meets in San Francisco. Her closest friend, Carol, orders her to go to Israel to find a rich American Jewish husband. Ricki meets an Uzi-toting Israeli soldier named Albert Mordechai, a streetwise importer from a large Jewish Iraqi family. The two fall in love quickly, but it takes most of the novel for Carol to be persuaded that Albert is a suitable match for her friend. Complicating matters still further, Ricki has a panic attack in Israel, where the constant threat of war overwhelms her. Suddenly unable to cope, she hops aboard the next plane to New York. The loyal Albert follows her and faces down Carol, and the reunited couple marry. Carol is a wonderfully funny rendition of the stereotypical Jewish mother, as she bosses Ricki around, demanding that she marry for money rather than love and not return to the United States without a husband. The novel brilliantly captures the expatriate dating scene in Tel Aviv in the 1970s and lampoons the San Francisco Bay Area counterculture. In character development, dialogue, humor, and rendering of Jewish culture and of setting, the novel is extremely enjoyable and shows great promise.

Unlike Ricki, Susan Berman did not come back from Israel with a husband, but she did move to New York, where she joined the staff of *New York* magazine and, in addition, wrote eight episodes for the newly launched "People TV." In New York, as in San Francisco, Berman is remembered for writing clever and sassy personality profiles, notably a feature story on Bess Myerson, the first Jewish woman to win the Miss America pageant, who went on to become a popular television personality on the game show "I've Got a Secret," and a prominent civil-rights activist and philanthropist. Berman's story caused a stir because it was titled "Queen Bee"—and Myerson later became a controversial figure in New York City politics and society. Berman is also fondly remembered for writing about herself and her many phobias, which included crossing bridges, riding in elevators, staying above the third floor in hotels, having allergic reactions to foods, and rashly killing herself.

In all these years, Susan had no desire to return to Las Vegas. Nevertheless, events in the 1970s conspired to lead her back, this time as an investigative journalist, uncovering the true story of her parents' lives. In 1977, twenty years after she left Las Vegas, a man telephoned her to say that he was writing a book that concerned her father. When they met in a restaurant in New York, the brash journalist asked her if she knew that her father was a killer. He flashed some

FBI files that revealed Dave Berman to have been a bootlegger, murderer, ex-con, and close associate of Syndicate leaders Meyer Lansky and Frank Costello. Susan Berman paid for her tomato juice and fled the scene. Nevertheless, having suffered greatly in her life from a sense of rootlessness and disconnection, she determined to learn who her parents really were and, thus, to come to terms with who she was. Her three years of research, which she called the toughest assignment she ever picked, included visiting the places where her parents grew up, talking to people who had known their families, and obtaining boxes and boxes of FBI files on her father. Along the way, Susan acquired an FBI Wanted poster with mug shots of her father, listing his various aliases, her favorite being Dave the Jew. She cherished this poster, which was hanging in her Beverly Hills living room when she was shot. At a relative's funeral in 1979, one guest admonished Susan that "only you are left now. Maybe some day you can make the world understand that your father Davie was a good man who acted out of the most basic desire, to see his family continue and survive."[11]

Easy Street, which appeared from Dial Press in 1981, answers this call. The book's dedication—"In loving memory of my parents, Davie and Gladys Berman"—stands in ironic juxtaposition to its Library of Congress cataloging under "Crime and criminals—Nevada Biography." Berman reconstructs the story of her father's life, from his birth in Odessa, Russia, in 1903, to his family's immigration to North Dakota in 1907, she recounts their impoverished existence, and Davie's elevation to head of household when he was only nine, since his father was unable to succeed in America. Faced with a drastically limited set of options as a Jew in the Midwest at that time, Davie eventually earned enough money as a newspaper boy to move the family to Sioux City, where he was attracted to the big money in organized crime, joining a group of bootleggers and working his way up to kidnapper and bank robber, all the while bringing home money to keep his family from freezing. In New York, Berman was arrested in an FBI shoot-out and spent seven-and-a-half years in Sing Sing prison, much of it in solitary confinement. But, despite pressure and enticements by interrogators to reveal his connections, Davie never squealed, his line, "Hell, the worst I can get is life," becoming a mob favorite. After his release in 1934, Davie's bosses rewarded him by letting him run illegal gambling in Minneapolis, where he beheld, pursued, and won the hand of the beautiful and virginal Gladys Evans. Davie was determined to fight in World War II, but he was too old for the United States military and was an ex-felon besides, so he joined the Canadian Army; he fought on the front lines in Italy and distinguished himself for bravery. After the war, with a crackdown on organized crime likely in Minnesota, Berman bought into the El Cortez in Las Vegas, moved Gladys and the newborn Susan there, and began his rise to power, money, and respect, enjoying newfound legitimacy and the pursuit of the American dream. Echoing the language of Alex Haley's 1976 bestseller *Roots*, a book that may have propelled her own quest, Berman concludes,

> My odyssey has given me roots for the first time that almost cancel out an emotionally itinerant past. In investigating my father's story, the dark side of Horatio Alger in some ways, I came to know him as a man. As the rawness and the pain of my parents' story sinks into me it begins to provide a framework for who I am that is easier to accept than the frightening disorientation of all the chaos I have known. . . . [12]

> Now that I know the whole story, I am filled most of all with a sense of wonder at who my father was. I had thought I knew him so well, yet I was privy to none of his secrets, shared none of his secret agendas. Yet for me, the truth has been easier to deal with than all the years of uncertainty, I feel freed at last, no longer captive of an unknown heritage.[13]

Easy Street captures Las Vegas at a key moment in time as its early hoteliers and their families personally knew, imagined, and lived it. When Gladys and baby Susan arrived by train from Minneapolis in 1945 in the middle of a sweltering July day, Gladys looked around "at nothing but miles of sagebrush, cactus, and carcasses of prairie dogs" and asked Davie, "Where is the town?" He reassured her, "Gladys, honey, this is only the backdrop," the future of Vegas more vivid in his mind than the desert stage upon which he would build it.[14] Davie's favorite answer to "How are you?" was a cheerful, "It's eighty degrees outside, how bad can things be?"[15] Susan Berman recalls her childhood in Las Vegas with a sense of entitlement and hometown pride. She and other Jewish children celebrated Passover in the dining room of the Hotel Last Frontier. When they cleaned up from their party, Susan noticed the tourists lining up for the next floor show. She writes, "I always gave them a superior grin, they were mere tourists, we *were* Las Vegas."[16] *Easy Street* thus expresses what it is like to grow up in a tourist town, conscious of the difference between tourists and townies, smug in the knowledge that one is a privileged insider.

This sunny reminiscence of Las Vegas is gradually eclipsed by a darker view, however, as the perspective shifts away from Susan as a child to that of her mother. Gladys became terrified of Las Vegas, especially after Susan narrowly escaped a kidnap attempt when she was eight years old, and after multiple death threats to friends of the family. Berman writes, "The stress of living in a violent, unpredictable world broke her. . . . She became obsessed with getting out of Las Vegas, away from the Mob."[17] Berman draws a poignant contrast between what Las Vegas meant to her father and to her mother:

> As time went on, my father became involved more and more in civic activities. But my mother didn't see his increasing power as success. She perceived only the ominous atmosphere of the town and everything about it was frightful. My father worked all day and night; she was left alone to worry and go mad.[18]

When Susan was in fifth grade, Gladys and Susan moved to Los Angeles, with the idea that Davie would join them after he extricated himself from his Las Vegas obligations. In Los Angeles, Susan realized, in the contrast, that life in Las Vegas was somehow different:

> I had never seen my mother so happy. That terrible dread she associated with Las Vegas seemed to vanish here. I had a somewhat normal life for the first time. I went to Fairburn public school. . . , still walked back and forth by Lou [the family's bodyguard], but I was allowed to visit friends after school and sell lemonade on the corner like any other kid. I didn't understand that the life in Las Vegas had been isolating and different from most others; I just knew that this felt good.[19]

Sadly, by the end of the book, even Davie had become disillusioned with Las Vegas. After attempting to leave Las Vegas to join Gladys in Los Angeles, Davie delivered a shattering blow to his wife: "I can't leave now, Gladys, you've got to understand. I just can't do it."[20] The adult Susan concludes, "As my father pursued the American dream in Las Vegas he found a nightmare."[21] By 1955, he was depressed and moody, dragging through the days, the buoyant energy gone from his step. Of Las Vegas life, he said, "It has no substance, it's too shallow an existence for Susie to grow up in, she won't get a good start here."[22] The tragedy is that although his attitude toward Las Vegas had soured, he felt stuck there, invoking that ominous "they" as he resigned himself to the fact that "They won't ever let me leave Las Vegas."[23]

Easy Street, then, is a multifaceted but ultimately tragic portrayal of Las Vegas. After her parents' deaths, Susan came to loathe the place, saying, "I hated everything about that bad-luck town where people died."[24] When she flew to Las Vegas for a weekend break from high school to meet Uncle Chickie for a short vacation, she felt like an outsider and asked, "What had I missed about this town? Why would I ever want to come back?"[25] Revisiting Las Vegas in 1980 to do research for *Easy Street*, Berman was overwhelmed by the absence of her parents, noting, "To me Las Vegas was only them and without them it is nothing."[26] *Easy Street* concludes with a note of satisfaction as Berman states that "now both my parents are mine. I have reclaimed them forever."[27] But while she reclaimed her parents, she seemed to have no desire to reclaim Las Vegas. Instead, she distanced herself from it, returning to New York. When an East Coast friend told her that he was going to visit Las Vegas for a weekend, he asked her, "Have you ever been there?" She mumbled dismissively, "Once, when I was very young."[28] It would be fifteen years before Berman would be ready to reclaim Las Vegas.

Easy Street is an exceptionally good book and received critical praise. Susan went on a three-month book tour, was interviewed on radio shows, appeared on NBC's "Today" show, and sold the paperback and movie rights to the book.

Davie Berman's publicity photo for the opening of the Riviera Hotel, 1955.
(Easy Street, The Dial Press, 1981*)*

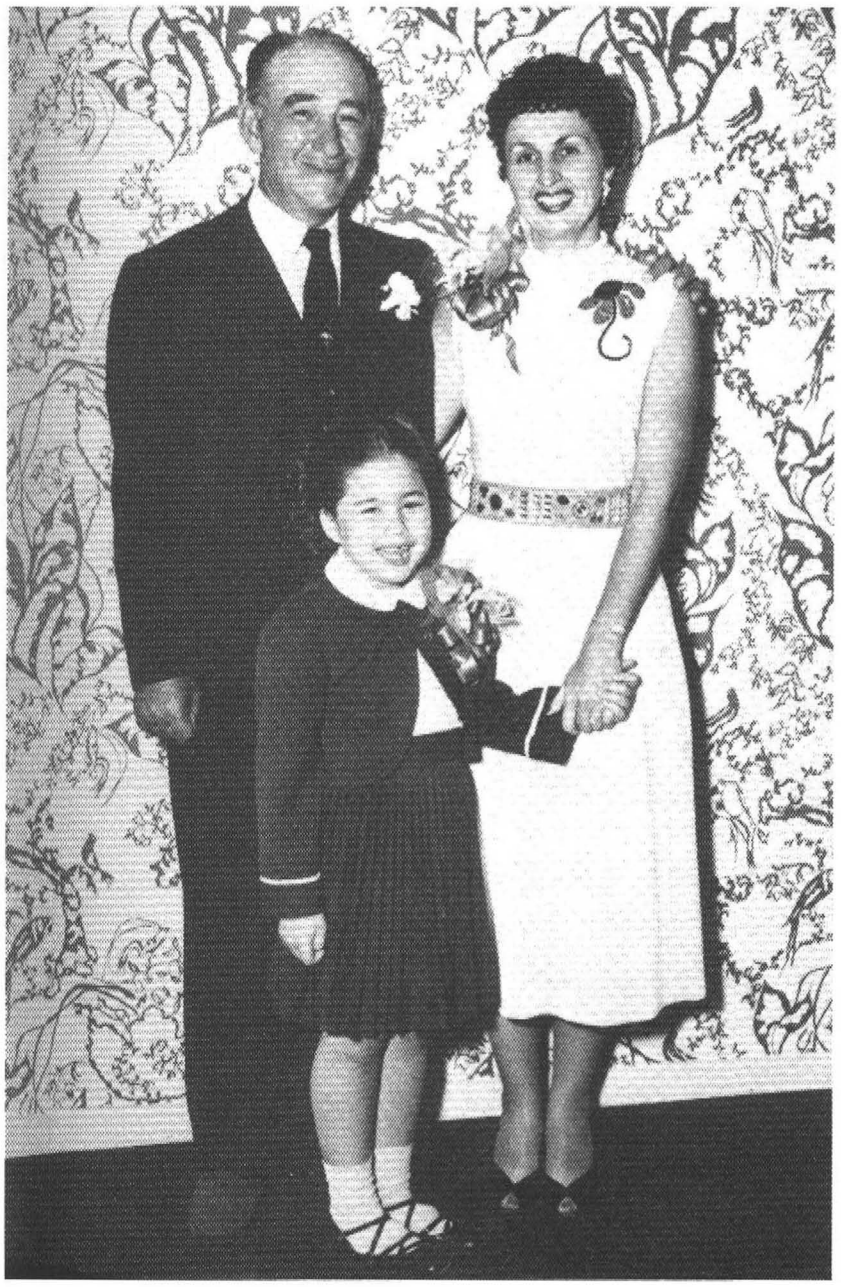
An excerpt from *Easy Street* appears in Mike Tronnes's anthology *Literary Las Vegas: The Best Writing about America's Most Fabulous City* (1995).[29] In 1983, perhaps thinking that she would collaborate on the movie (which, however, was never made), Berman moved to Los Angeles to become a screenwriter. More than a decade elapsed until her next book—an unfortunate hiatus, given her great potential. These years were important personally, however, as she met and married a fellow writer named Mister Margulies, who, like herself, was reared in Las Vegas. That relationship ended in divorce when her husband's drug addiction caused him to become abusive; he died of an overdose not long after their divorce. She apparently wrote an unpublished biography of him as a way to recover. She later became romantically involved with a financial adviser named Paul Kaufman, who had two pre-teenage children. They all lived in

Susan's house for four years, and when the relationship broke off, Kaufman's daughter Mella stayed with her. She and Mella co-authored an unpublished book entitled *Never a Mother, Never a Daughter*. So, although these works were not published, Berman remained an active writer through these silent years, and she also maintained a diary.

After her break-up with Kaufman, Berman was in financial trouble, having sunk a lot of her own money into a play they were co-producing, but which never got off the ground. She declared bankruptcy, her house was repossessed, and she and Mella lived rent-free for the next five years in a friend's condo. During this time her books appear to have been written to make money rather than to refine her literary craft or fulfill a personal quest. Consequently, from a literary perspective, they are disappointing. But compared to other works in similar mass-market genres, they are respectable products, and all of them contain enough autobiographical elements to be interesting psychologically.

Fly Away Home is a murder mystery that Avon Books published in 1996.[30] Ariane Richardson flies to Los Angeles from Portland, Oregon, to look for her missing sister, Dana. Ariane falls in love with Dana's last boyfriend, Tom Edwards, who is upset over Dana's disappearance—which proves to be a murder—but consoles himself by inviting Ariane to move in with him and become his lover. False clues point to one of Dana's co-workers, but the murderer is revealed to be none other than Tom Edwards himself, who, even more shockingly, turns out to be Ariane and Dana's brother! All three share the same butterfly-shaped birthmark on their ankles. (Incidentally, Susan Berman and her father shared the same birthmarks on their ankles.) Tom murdered Dana, and makes several attempts on Ariane's life, in order to be sole inheritor of their recently deceased father's enormous estate. The book is hard to put down, and it does a good job of rendering Los Angeles settings. To the reader, Tom becomes a leading suspect early on, but Ariane cannot see it. Thus, part of the psychological interest of the novel is Ariane's willful blindness, her complete inability to face the facts when she is under his spell or to save herself once the truth is known. Ariane was pathologically dependent on her sister Dana, who was a kind of surrogate mother, since their mother spent her time being depressed in bed in a darkened room. The echoes of Susan's own mother are obvious. With Dana's disappearance, Ariane becomes psychologically enthralled to Tom. All of Berman's literary works thus far—*Driver, Give a Soldier a Lift*; *Easy Street*; and now *Fly Away Home*—describe psychologically vulnerable women in dependent relationships. Ricki kowtows to her overbearing friend Carol, Gladys Evans falls completely in the shadow of her powerful husband Davie, and Ariane has boundary definition troubles, first with her sister Dana and then with Tom Edwards.

The same pattern of intimate relationships based on dominance holds true for Berman's 1997 mystery *Spiderweb* and provides a metaphorical anchor for her 1996 city history *Lady Las Vegas*. *Spiderweb* is dedicated to the memory of



Susan Berman with her parents, 1953. (*Easy Street*, The Dial Press, 1981)

"my beautiful mother, Gladys Berman. . . . Our time together was much too short."[31] The autobiographical elements in this mystery are apparent. The plot follows the movements of Elizabeth Manganaro, who hailed from a mob family. Her father died when Elizabeth was young, and her mother died of apparent suicide when Elizabeth was nine years old, except that Elizabeth has never believed that her mother really died, and she spends much of her life yearning for her. Elizabeth confesses, "I never took an easy breath. Memories of my mother and my father were everywhere—they tore me apart. I still missed them in a raw, searing pain. . . ."[32] Elizabeth lives in Italy and her Italian husband has recently died, leaving her a fortune. At the insistence of her closest friend Donna, Elizabeth leaves Italy and returns to Los Angeles with her ten-year-old daughter, Jane, in order to rear Jane in America and revisit the places where her own mother used to take her. One day when Elizabeth and Donna are having lunch at the Farmer's Market, Elizabeth catches sight of her mother, who acts strangely distant and tells Elizabeth that the mob is after her and will kill her unless she gives them a million dollars.

Without hesitation, Elizabeth supplies the money, only too happy to be reunited with her mother at last. Not long after, her mother is found dead, an apparent suicide. Meanwhile, there are many mysterious attempts on Elizabeth's own life, and Donna suspects Elizabeth's new boyfriend, Blue. As it turns out, the recently dead mother was an imposter who was in cahoots with Donna in order to get Elizabeth's money. It is Donna who has been trying to kill Elizabeth to gain custody of Jane and access to her trust fund. In the end, Donna is exposed, Elizabeth and Blue live together happily, and, best of all, Elizabeth finds her real mother—alive!—in a home for indigents.

Despite the implausibility of an imposter being mistaken for one's own mother, the story holds together well and, like *Fly Away Home*, is a gripping read. Notwithstanding the constraints of the mystery genre, Berman's plot is animated by a compelling desire: "I haven't stopped looking for my mother, fantasizing about her every minute. She's the phantom who haunts me constantly. Her shadow shades the bright sky every sunrise; her visage nestles in the clouds in the afternoon; her profile sleeps in the moon at night."[33] As in *Fly Away Home*, Berman effectively renders Los Angeles settings tinged with nostalgia. And once again, she creates a smothering, asymmetrical female friendship, in which Donna, more like a sister than a friend, becomes Elizabeth's crutch and personal manager. As in the other books, the psychologically unstable female protagonist must learn to function independently in order to achieve happiness. Those who do not learn this lesson—Susan's mother Gladys, for example—are doomed. Given that Susan Berman was an only child, one wonders why she kept returning to sisterly relationships that involve dominance. Susan had several close friendships both in boarding school and in college, and she witnessed the enervating effects of dominance at home, describing her mother as "very sad and very quiet. I thought of her as a beautiful painting that was becoming dimmer and dimmer as she became more and more diminished."[34]

Although the reasons for Berman's frequent creation of skewed sisterly relationships remain speculative, she persistently explored that theme, even in her 1996 history of Las Vegas, *Lady Las Vegas: The Inside Story behind America's Neon Oasis*.[35] This nonfiction book, published by TV Books, appeared as a companion to a 1996 television documentary that Berman co-wrote and co-produced for the A&E Network, entitled "The Real Las Vegas."[36] The four-part documentary received glowing reviews. Writer Cathy Scott quotes David Millman, curator of collections at the Nevada State Museum and Historical Society, as saying that it is the best documentary on Las Vegas, bar none. The Writers Guild of America nominated Berman for its outstanding achievement awards for the 1997 season for her work on the documentary. As in her journalism days, Berman's ability to use her personal cachet and family connections to get tough interviews serves the film well. It features interesting on-screen commentary and quotable quotes from a who's who of Las Vegas, including Elaine Wynn, Bob Stupak, Howard Hughes's personal representative Robert Maheu,

entertainers Kenny Rogers, Debbie Reynolds, Wayne Newton, and Rose Marie, Mayor Jan Jones, Governor Bob Miller, publisher Barbara Greenspun, author Michael Ventura, historian Hal Rothman, state archivist Guy Rocha, and Susan Berman herself. It even pins down the hyperkinetic Steve Wynn, wizard of the Mirage, Treasure Island, the Bellagio, the Wynn Las Vegas, and other megaresorts, for a rare interview, capturing for posterity his toast to Las Vegas: "Anything goes here, you know. I mean, God bless this daffy place. But it's fun. It's a party that never stops. It's a promise that's always been kept. Las Vegas is unabashedly, unsubtly itself."[37]

Berman's book *Lady Las Vegas* transcribes selections from these interviews and is generously illustrated with black-and-white archival photographs as she tells the story of the evolution of Las Vegas from prehistory to the present. Susan Berman is no historian, however, and, according to Millman, she gets many things wrong, relying primarily on a popular guidebook and essayist Michael Ventura for her data. But while she botches the historical record somewhat, she deserves recognition for bringing the city's evolution to life, portraying the city itself as a character in an unfolding life story. As the book's title suggests, Berman portrays the city as a "Lady," as, in fact, her own older sister, as a powerful rival for her father's attention. After more than forty years in deliberate exile from Las Vegas, Berman challenges herself to become reconciled to Las Vegas, reclaiming her "older sister" just as *Easy Street* had reclaimed her parents. "But," she asks, "how to approach my sisterly relationship with Las Vegas? Sibling feelings are complicated, binding yet threatening, mirroring yet alienating."[38]

At times in the book the Lady metaphor comes across as contrived. It is a gimmick that results in a kind of far-fetched literalness:

> Before Lady Las Vegas developed her permanent dark allure in the Forties, . . . she had had trouble with all of her suitors. It had caused her no end of pain—because what good is a lady who can't hold on to her man? Various peoples and economies flirted with her but never spent the night. No wonder she was so happy to see the mobsters of the Forties. They were solid men, men you could count on. They valued her for who she was, and more important, who she could be.[38]

Berman gets carried away at times with the older-sister metaphor, too, as when she writes,

> By the time I was eight, I wanted only to grow up fast so I could give her a run for her money in my dad's eyes. I began to resent her deeply. The most famous designers dressed her in beads and silk, jewelers bestowed diamonds and rhinestones on her, and her dancer's feet were encased in satin high heels. She smelled expensive; her eyes, never faded, were always neon bright, her lips a tantalizing red.[39]

As strained as these metaphors become, the older-sister conception of Las Vegas does seem psychologically cogent for Berman, helping her to define her own identity. For example, she notes that by the time she was ten, her resentment of Las Vegas had deepened to hostility:

> If she was mainstream, I would be fringe; if she was popular, I would be antisocial; if she was a people-pleaser, I would be withdrawn or strident. If she was a femme fatale, I would be a tomboy. If she was valued for her body and her sex appeal, I would be valued only for my mind.[40]

Berman's career-long fascination with the dynamics of sibling dominance is applied in this book to her relationship with her hometown:

> In the way of siblings who are raised much too closely, I was so threatened by her very existence that I had to move halfway across the nation, then the world, to escape her. And it was only from this distant vantage point, many years after I had fled from her, that her overwhelming presence did not threaten me any longer and that I finally came to appreciate her again.[41]

In retrospect, Berman is able to analyze the impact that Las Vegas had on her own development:

> I think now about how she formed me, unconsciously. There was a feeling of unlimited possibility about her—her vistas and boundaries expanded constantly—there were no limits. Every year that we drove down the strip, the 20 blocks from our house to the hotel, my dad would say, "Look at her, look at how she's growing! There's no stopping her."[42]

In view of her father's paternal pride in Las Vegas and his use of the feminine pronoun "her" to refer to the town, it is perhaps no wonder that Susan Berman tended to think of Las Vegas as her sister, an unusual psychological relationship to one's hometown, to be sure, but perhaps, for Berman, the town-as-sister idea was more than a mere writer's gimmick. Just as *Easy Street* ends by acknowledging the ways that Susan resembles her parents, *Lady Las Vegas* concludes on a note of acceptance and optimism:

> Coming back to reconcile now after half a century, older sister, I realize that you did not seduce my father. You were not my enemy. . . . No, you were never my rival, you were my ally. I just got it wrong."[43]
>
> We are both maverick desert brats, always searching for ways to make our lives work, fueled by our buoyant imaginations and sure that anything is possible. . . .

> You *can* go home again. I did. I should have. I'm glad. Lady Las Vegas, you were my parents' Brigadoon, and ever since I left you, I have been seeking you. You and I share a past and a present. And a future? The answer, which I think to be yes, will be written in the hot desert wind and on the drifting sands of Nevada.[44]

Lady Las Vegas brought Berman back to her desert roots. She wrote eloquently, "A feeling of comfort suffuses me when I am in open desert; the cities of our childhood are the cities of our heart."[45] After years of running from it, Berman found a niche in writing about Las Vegas. The historian Hal Rothman notes Berman's achievement in doing "what outside journalists never could:"

> Susie Berman succeeded in simultaneously humanizing Las Vegas and keeping its edge. She laughed at the local obsession with trying to evade the city's mob past. She also embraced the city and its idiosyncrasies, showing how and why Las Vegas, at least when she knew it, really was different than the rest of America. . . . Before it was fashionable, Susie Berman held her head up and was proud to be from Las Vegas.[46]

Lady Las Vegas, then, besides purveying Las Vegas's history to a popular audience, is an exploration of the ways in which hometowns shape our consciousness and character. That topic is especially vexed and interesting when one's hometown is Las Vegas, as Phyllis Barber also explores in *How I Got Cultured: A Nevada Memoir* (1992) and as reflected by several writers in *The Grit beneath the Glitter: Tales from the Real Las Vegas* (2002),[47] a collection edited by Rothman and Mike Davis. Berman puts the conundrum well in *Lady Las Vegas* when she notes, "My hometown is everyone's fantasy and my reality."[48]

At the time of her death, Berman was working on several Las Vegas projects: a book about high-rolling female gamblers; a television documentary about the Las Vegas underworld that focused on women; a pitch to ABC television for a movie based on her diaries, entitled *Rich Girl Poor*; and an idea for episodes in the television series "Sin City." As her close friends noted, some with pity, Berman was obsessed with Las Vegas.

Susan Berman once professed, "I was born to write."[49] She was aggressive about making contacts and getting assignments, typically introducing herself to editors and agents with the hard-sell line, "I'm the world's best writer. Am I going to write for you?"[50] One of Berman's close friends noted after her death, "She wanted recognition. Hers was a pursuit of recognition for her writing, for her talents. . . . [S]he wanted that success so badly."[51] Over the course of her career Berman mastered many literary forms, from newspaper reporting and magazine journalism to a reference work, and ultimately including novels, mass-market paperback mysteries, memoir, screenwriting, and popular history. The sheer range of her accomplishments may have had the unfortunate result that she was never known for any one form. While much of Susan Berman's writing is destined for an obscure burial in the desert, *Easy Street* deserves to endure as an outstanding American memoir and a classic of Las Vegas literature.

NOTES

[1]Susan Berman, *Easy Street* (New York: The Dial Press, 1981), 1.

[2]Although the Los Angeles Police Department regards Berman's murder as unsolved, a well-researched case pointing to Berman's close friend millionaire Robert Durst as the most likely suspect can be found in Cathy Scott, *Murder of a Mafia Daughter: The Life and Tragic Death of Susan Berman* (Fort Lee, New Jersey: Barricade Books, Inc., 2002). Besides Berman's *Easy Street*, Scott's book is the only biography of Susan Berman, and it is a major source for this essay.

[3]Berman, *Easy Street*, 8.

[4]*Ibid.*, 76.

[5]*Ibid.*, 80.

[6]Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris, *The Green Felt Jungle* (1963; reprint, London: The Quality Book Club, 1965), 30, 41.

[7]Susan Berman, *The Underground Guide to the College of Your Choice* (New York: New American Library, 1971).

[8]Susan Berman, "San Francisco, City of Sin, Why Can't I Get Laid?" *City of San Francisco* (3 August 1975), 10-13.

[9]Berman, *Easy Street*, 197.

[10]Susan Berman, *Driver, Give a Soldier a Lift* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976).

[11]Berman, *Easy Street*, 6.

[12]*Ibid.*, 207.

[13]*Ibid.*, 210.

[14]*Ibid.*, 42.

[15]*Ibid.*, 100.

[16]*Ibid.*, 15.

[17]*Ibid.*, 44, 45.

[18]*Ibid.*, 45-46.

[19]*Ibid.*, 51.

[20]*Ibid.*, 52.

[21]*Ibid.*, 187.

[22]*Ibid.*, 188.

[23]*Ibid.*

[24]*Ibid.*, 90.

[25]*Ibid.*, 16.

[26]*Ibid.*, 204.

[27]*Ibid.*

[28]*Ibid.*, 207.

[29]Mike Tronnes, ed., *Literary Las Vegas: The Best Writing about America's Most Fabulous City* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995).

[30]Susan Berman, *Fly Away Home* (New York: Avon Books, 1996).

[31]Susan Berman, *Spiderweb* (New York: Avon Books, 1997).

[32]*Ibid.*, 4.

[33]*Ibid.*, 3.

[34]Berman, *Easy Street*, 35.

[35]Susan Berman, *Lady Las Vegas: The Inside Story behind America's Neon Oasis* (New York: TV Books, 1996).

[36]"The Real Las Vegas," written by Susan Berman, Jim Milio, and Melissa Jo Peltier, (New York: A&E Home Video, 1996).

[37]Berman, *Lady Las Vegas*, 151.

[38]*Ibid.*, 32.

[39]*Ibid.*, 15.

[40]*Ibid.*, 16.

[41]*Ibid.*, 17.

[42]*Ibid.*, 22.

[43]*Ibid.*, 221.

[44]*Ibid.*, 223.

[45]*Ibid.*, 32.

[46]Hal Rothman, "In Remembrance: Ex-collaborator Recalls the Life of Susan Berman," *Las Vegas Life* (February 2001). Available online at http://www.lvlife.com/2001/02/702.html.

[47]Phyllis Barber, *How I Got Cultured: A Nevada Memoir* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992); Hal K. Rothman and Mike Davis, eds., *The Grit beneath the Glitter: Tales from the Real Las Vegas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

[48]Berman, *Lady Las Vegas*, 22.

[49]Quoted in Scott, *Murder of a Mafia Daughter*, 109.

[50]Quoted in Scott, 80.

[51]Quoted in Scott, 112.

Florence Burge
Representing Reno's Women in a Changing Time

KIMBERLY WILMOT VOSS

Researchers and historians have long recognized that a hallmark of Nevada's cultural identity is captured in the mystique of the West, with its expansive territory and independent spirit. The people of Nevada adopted these independent characteristics, valuing freedom and individual rights. Women in particular benefited from the region's ability to equalize, gaining civic and social footholds before women in other sections of the country.[1] As a case in point, Nevada legislators apparently discussed women's suffrage seriously as early as 1869 (although Nevada actually was among the last states to approve the Nineteenth Amendment, granting women the right to vote, in 1914), and Nevada has one of the nation's higher proportions of women in elected office.[2]

Before the women's movement spread in the 1960s, the roles of women—other than working-class women—were largely limited to the home. Their involvement often began in women's clubs and in the volunteer activities of their communities.[3] Women's clubs "provided a forum for women to meet for both personal and community improvement, and, for many, facilitated the transition from the private orientation of home life into the wider realm of the public sphere."[4] The stories of these women often appeared in the women's pages of newspapers—what are now called lifestyle or feature sections.[5] In fact, these sections often had club editors who covered the meetings just as reporters would cover any other beat.

Women's-page journalism has received scant historical attention. As the journalism historian Maurine Beasley has written, "Like women's history in

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general, the history of women in journalism was not deemed worthy of study for years."[6] This is especially true in the case of women's-page journalists, whose stories have often been left out of the literature of journalism history and women's history. Over the past two decades, historians have begun to look at the lives and careers of the women who shaped the women's pages—often the only place for women to work at newspapers until the late 1960s. They have found that while these sections often reinforced traditional roles for women, they also provided opportunities for women seeking to add more progressive content, most notably Dorothy Jurney and Marie Anderson at the *Miami Herald* and Vivian Castleberry at the *Dallas Times-Herald*.[7]

A few historians have begun a closer study of the content of the women's sections, which had previously been described as fluff. They are finding that the sections had more diverse content than previously understood.[8] For example, often included among the recipes and club news were stories about reproductive rights and workplace issues. As the historian Isabell Ross wrote, "Where a woman of wide newspaper experience takes hold, wonders can be done with the stepchild of the profession."[9]

As the second wave of the women's movement changed the role of women in society, the newspaper sections most often reflecting that change were the women's pages. In fact, changes in their content predated the increased public awareness of the status of women that the second wave of the movement promoted. The women's pages were inherently connected to the women's movement, which needed the media to spread its message. This was especially important because other mainstream media outlets were often hostile to the message of the movement.[10] Across the country, many women's-page editors held workshops and seminars to encourage women in their communities to get involved in public issues and make their voices heard in the media. They taught women about unwritten media rules and helped them find media access. The women journalists were building on the foundation created by the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and the national and state commissions on the status of women, which had shed light on the inequities suffered by women.[11]

It was often women's-page editors who "fought for what they knew was important for their female readers," one researcher wrote.[12] As proof, the National Newspaper Association in 1965 reported: "The modern viewpoint on women's pages is pretty generally accepted, or at least well known. That is, it has been said many times that the modern woman is interested in a wide scope of topics and that the women's pages of the modern newspaper should mirror those interests instead of serving as a mere gossip sheet or club calendar."[13] Women's-page journalism seminars at the American Press Institute and the Penney-Missouri Awards reinforced this message.

In Reno in the late 1950s and through the mid 1960s, it was *Reno Evening Gazette* women's-page editor Florence (Flo) Burge who helped to tell women's stories.

Florence Burge and her daughters with Harry Belafonte and an unidentified woman. *(Special Collections Department, University of Nevada, Reno Library)*

She oversaw the section at a time when newspapers were eliminating or transforming their sections. She became an important voice in women's-page journalism during the 1960s, helping to redefine journalism in Reno.

Florence Sanford was born in 1912 in Rochester, New York. She attended grade school at Michigan Normal School in Ypsilanti, Michigan, where her first public endeavor as a writer was a second-grade play she produced about John and Priscilla Alden, passengers on the *Mayflower*. From there, she went on to Belmont High School in Los Angeles, where she wrote for a school publication.[14] After graduating from Belmont, she attended Los Angeles City College and the University of California at Los Angeles.

According to a short autobiography that Burge wrote in 1964, she attempted a professional dancing career before coming to Nevada, and then worked in accounting and office management. Although her specific path to Reno is unclear, it is known that she arrived in Reno in 1944.[15] Florence Sanford met Lee Burge and married him that year, when she was thirty-two, which was a late marriage age for women of that era. Lee Burge spent thirty-five years with the Nevada Department of Agriculture, retiring as executive director. According to his obituary, Lee Burge gained national recognition for his work in the development of studies and control of plant and animal pests affecting the agricultural industry.[16]

The Burge marriage appeared to be a partnership: They both worked outside the home while they reared their twin daughters, Scheri and Suzzette.[17] When the girls were young, before she went into journalism, Burge managed rental properties. In a newspaper profile, Burge said that she had plenty of housework to do while working outside the home, but "I try to keep it to a minimum. I'll do anything but the ironing. I just won't do that."[18] She said that she and her husband socialized often, and after their daughters went to college, they were able to travel more frequently. She was quoted as saying, "When Lee and I get a vacation we go and stay away. That's the only way we can keep from working."[19]

In 1956, Burge began attending the University of Nevada in Reno to study journalism with Professor A. L. Higginbotham, and she began freelancing for various publications, including the *Reno Evening Gazette*.[20] During this time she wrote a series of stories about Nevada's political history. In 1959, she was promoted to women's editor of the newspaper. She remained in that position for the next seven years and gradually changed the content to reflect a changing society.

Because of her newspaper's relatively small size, Burge was the only employee for her section. Thus, she wrote the majority of the stories, including a regular column she titled "RoundAbout." Burge used her column to highlight the work and experiences of local women. For example, she often described the accomplishments of female college students, women's club members, and community volunteers. A few women in the community acted as correspondents to cover meetings and events, although they probably lacked journalistic training. Burge described one older woman "who wept real tears before the entire staff each time her copy was edited."[21] Her section also included wire stories from women writers for the Associated Press.

Burge said she had many of the professional duties of a typical news journalist, such as keeping up with the news covered by competitors and covering local events. She wrote that she was always looking for news: "I never stop, wherever I go, whatever I do, I look around and ask myself 'is there something here which would be of interest to those who read the *Gazette*?'"[22]

As a regular feature of her section profiles Burge wrote of well-known women who visited the Reno area included stories about Princess Margaret, Eleanor Powell, Indian Ambassador B. K. Nehru, his wife Madam Nehru, and Mary Stitt, who was Burge's counterpart as women's editor of England's *Manchester Guardian*. In addition to celebrities, Burge also wrote regularly about women in her community who had interesting careers and hobbies. For a short time, Burge's section included a series called "Women You'd Like to Know," which profiled "interesting as well as unusual and noteworthy women in all fields of endeavor—little-known homemakers to renowned personages."[23] When Burge wrote about these women, she focused on them as individuals, as well as their roles as wives and mothers. She fit the pattern of women journalists who concentrated "on issues affecting women's lives, personalities, and personal

views more often" than did their male counterparts.[24] Because of her location near the state's capital, Burge also profiled the wives of state officials, including Nevada's first lady, Bette Sawyer, and Margaret Koontz, who was married to longtime Secretary of State John Koontz.[25] In a story about Dorothy Baker, wife of Reno's mayor, Burge mentioned the first lady's work as a buyer and manager of housewares in a local department store. Burge also pointed out Baker's role as the family's boat pilot, "which in itself requires a good deal of finesse as well as a considerable knowledge of hundreds of safety precautions."[26]

Burge also described the career, volunteer, and social services work of women in her community. She wrote about the impact of women such as Betty O'Harra, a librarian who delivered books to children in rural areas;[27] Gloria Cline, whose book on the Great Basin was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize;[28] and Edrie Ferdun, a professor of modern dance. She quoted Ferdun as saying that in the "college and university curriculum, modern dance is one of many experiences available to students as a means of achieving the primary goal of education: the fullest possible development of the individual."[29] The premise of the story is that dance is a significant part of society, not just a hobby. Burge's approach in these stories and others validated women's activities inside and outside the home.

In addition, Burge wrote or ran stories about women with untraditional careers or hobbies. In one issue, she included an Associated Press story about a woman who was an auto mechanic. The woman had completed training on tune-ups and worked forty hours a week at her family's service station, while also rearing three children. She was quoted as saying, "I can't wait to get my hands on a car and really go to work."[30]

Several of the stories in Burge's sections were issue-based, rather than the typical human-interest model. Burge took on issues that often had a news-based hook, such as gender segregation, and told the stories in a feature style. For example, she wrote about the trend of young women and their mothers taking up billiards under the headline: "Death Knell Sounds for Last 'Men Only' Outpost."[31] Burge quoted one of the co-owners of a pool hall: "We have regular women players, as well as families, but it's kind of hard to break down the barriers of several hundred years. Once they come in and get started they sure are enthusiastic and excellent players."[32] Burge also highlighted a training program for hotel maids—a large portion of the work force in the casino city.[33] She described the professionalism the job required and the ability of women to be able to get jobs anywhere. She also addressed the issue of teen-age unemployment, writing that "an estimated forty to fifty percent of these young people are flooding the local labor market, which is unbelievably small—and sometimes reluctant."[34]

A significant point in Burge's career occurred when she gained nationwide recognition for winning a Penney-Missouri Award for best women's pages for a paper with circulation of up to twenty-five thousand.[35] It was the fifth year of the elite competition, which started in 1960. As part of the award, she attended a

workshop at the University of Missouri aimed at improving women's sections. According to the award program:

> During the last five years there has been a significant awakening in this nation to the greater need for utilizing women's power. Government, the law, medicine, economics, education, the sciences and journalism are drawing deeper from this scarcely tapped reservoir of intellect and creative skill. With each year the country's newspapers are doing a better job of reporting this big story about women. As the future discloses the magnitude of feminine aspirations and achievements, a still better job will be required of newspapers.[36]

Burge's editors and her newspaper were supportive of her success in winning honors as editor of the top women's section in its circulation size.[37] When her former professor, A. L. Higginbotham, learned that Burge had earned a national journalism award, he said, "She's shown this kind of talent ever since she started

Florence Burge, with unidentified men, accepting the Penney-Missouri award for Best Women's Pages for Newspapers up to 25,000 Circulation, 1965. *(Special Collections Department, University of Nevada, Reno Library)*

out as a summer school student in feature writing."[38] On December 28, 1964, the newspaper featured a front-page news story about the award, including a large photo of Burge, under the headline "Florence Burge, *Gazette*, Win Top U.S. Honors for Women's Pages."[39] The newspaper also ran several large in-house advertisements that congratulated Burge for winning the award.

Burge appeared to be pleased with the honor. In her January 8, 1965, column, she wrote: "Well, your columnist is beginning to catch her breath—although the air up here on cloud nine is still pretty thin!"[40] In response to the award, Burge received a telegram from Senator Alan Bible of Nevada. He wrote that winning the award was "tantamount to bringing to the *Reno Evening Gazette* and to Nevada, the Pulitzer Prize for women. I know Nevada journalists are proud of her."[41] Jud Allen, manager of the Reno Chamber of Commerce, was quoted as saying that "this type of recognition is truly earned through initiative, hard work, and creative ability."[42] Reno Mayor Hugo Quilici called Burge's award "an outstanding accomplishment deserving of a great deal of credit. She's to be congratulated for her fine work and news reporting."[43]

Burge's supervisor, Rollan Melton, was proud of her, too. Melton, a 1955 graduate of the University of Nevada, began his journalism career as a sports-writer for the *Reno Evening Gazette* in 1957. By 1966, he was the publisher of the *Gazette* and its sister paper, the *Nevada State Journal*. He later became president of Speidel Newspapers. When Gannett bought out Speidel, he became a vice-president and board member of the parent corporation. After resigning his Gannett vice-presidency in 1979, Melton returned home to Reno and wrote a popular local interest column for the *Reno Gazette-Journal*.

Melton and Burge appeared to have a warm relationship. There are notes on several of Burge's articles in the archives at the University of Nevada, Reno, that congratulated her hard work. In response to a profile penned by Burge, Melton wrote, "Written with restraint; exceptional because you did not let yourself get too long; beautiful use of quotes, letting the subject tell her story. As far as I am concerned, this wonderful piece of writing has earned you an extra day off. Just tell me when." He also provided constructive critical comment on several articles, suggesting better headlines and pointing out journalistic errors.

Burge knew that she had her supervisor's respect. In an industry publication, Burge described a time when "the militant matron marched down to see the boss" after Burge had refused to publish the woman's news item. The outraged woman warned Burge of her supposed influence with the editor: "He's a friend of mine, he'll put my story in." The threat proved to be empty: Melton backed up Burge.[44] Burge also saved personal notes from Melton in her collected papers. In one note, Melton wrote: "I am thankful I have a women's editor who has compassion and understanding."[45] In another, Melton responded to a Thanksgiving column that Burge had written: "Today has been one of the roughest—emotionally—I have ever experienced in the news business—but that after reading this work of yours, I am of faith restored."[46]

The Penney-Missouri Award recognition also led Burge to share her views with a class of female journalism students at Kansas State University. During the spring 1965 semester, the students read her newspaper section, along with the sections of other Penney-Award winners in place of a journalism textbook.[47] Burge also addressed students at Sacramento City College about the changing content of women's sections. She said that just as the interests of young people had diversified over time, so had the interests of women. She said, "There is scarcely a field today in which women are not vitally interested. So the ultimate goal on women's pages is to present as much diversified news as space permits."[48]

At this time, Burge's daughters were away at college. The letters her daughters wrote to her revealed that she did not have the same relationship with both girls. A 1965 letter from Suzzette, written from her dorm room at Yuba College, concludes, "I love ya all and be good. . . . Your loving little girl, Suzzi."[49] Much of Suzzette's correspondence with her mother reflected similar warmth and happiness. By contrast, her daughter Sherri often shared deeper feelings with her mother. For example, she wrote in 1965:

> I was just thinking about how much you have accomplished since you first took your job with the *Gazette*. You sure have come a long, long way since then. I'm so proud of you and awfully thankful that I just happen to be your daughter. A girl couldn't ask for a more loving and understanding a mother as you are to me. We have gone through a lot together, you and me, and we have managed somehow to come out of it all with our heads still held high.[50]

After her award, Burge continued to write about women's lives. In a front-page story, she profiled a local teacher, Grace Warner, who was retiring after forty years.[51] She also wrote about a woman visiting from the Philippines who was found shivering in the cold, looking for the YMCA. After a few days, the woman revealed to Burge that she held the Medal of Honor for slipping past guards to assist prisoners of war during the Japanese occupation in World War II.[52] The common theme in Burge's stories was that women's work, regardless of its form, is significant. Her tone was one of empowerment, and not merely a condescending representation of women's contributions.

Burge also was forward-thinking in her coverage of minority communities—something the journalism industry did not take seriously for at least another decade.[53] In an industry publication, she suggested that editors include diversity in their coverage, using an example from her section that included a picture page of babies of various races.[54] Burge also wrote regularly about people with disabilities, years before the American's with Disabilities Act was passed, thus gaining widespread media attention. In 1965, she wrote a story about children with hearing disabilities. She quoted an expert who said that too

few trained teachers for these children lived in the Reno area. The expert, Ita Sequeirita, asked, "Why should a child have to leave home through no fault of his own?"[55] Burge also wrote about a swimming class for children who could not walk, and related the story of a young woman who had recently gone blind. She quoted the woman: "You just haven't lived until you've been blind. It's a whole new world to do things in, of appreciating the feel of the grass, the smell of the woods, a new world filled with the love and devotion of a guide dog."[56]

Burge's Penney-Missouri win also led to an invitation from the National Newspaper Association, an industry organization, to write an article about her successes as a women's-page editor. The organization said that she would serve "as inspiration to women's page editors of small newspapers."[57] In a 1966 article in *Publishers' Auxiliary*, Burge described the challenges of redirecting her section away from one that reflected women's traditional roles toward one that was modern. She wrote that mothers of brides and club presidents were likely to resist change, but a consistent policy would help. She encouraged the coverage of hard news in her section by including quotations from local residents on each side of an issue. She suggested that this method could be used to cover topics such as birth control, medical research, and abortion legislation.[58] She had used this approach in a follow-up article that was based on some earlier coverage that had caused a dispute. In this case, a designer had made comments about women dressing for men, and she claimed that businesswomen were more stylish than housewives. Burge responded by featuring quotations from area women in response to the controversy.[59]

As Burge changed the focus of the *Reno Evening Gazette*'s women's page, it was she who had also to explain the transformation to her readers and sources. She wrote in an industry publication that "while it is difficult, the transition from 'club calendar' pages to international, national, and local news of interest to women can be made."[60] Burge said she took the time to speak with Reno women's-club leaders about space limitations and news values and found that press releases from club members "soon included information of general interest."[61] Clubwoman Mrs. H. J. Thorpe said of Burge, "She has been most cooperative in every way with all women's organizations."[62]

In a letter to a Kansas State University journalism professor, Burge wrote that the community should dictate changes in the content of the women's page. She wrote, "It is the community itself that determines material balance. How cosmopolitan is your community? How important are local women's activities to the paper's readers? Personally, I feel our *Gazette* readers want to get away from the traditional, but this should be done gradually."[63]

Burge also encouraged women's-page editors to achieve a balance of traditional and progressive stories in their sections. For example, amid more traditional fare in her section, she included an Associated Press wire story about a prominent British psychiatrist who disagreed with women's liberation.

The story included responses from American feminists, such as writer Marya Mannes.[64] In that same year, Burge wrote:

> Women of today are the most emancipated and best educated in history. They are knowing and curious about the world and nearly every facet of it. Therefore, the widest selection of material—education, science, world events (women's angles), besides the ordinary household helps, forlorn columns and locals should be considered.[65]

Burge achieved a form of journalistic emancipation in her own right. She resigned from the *Reno Evening Gazette* in 1966, barely two years removed from her Penney-Missouri award, to pursue a freelance career.[66] Instead, she spent three years as a reporter and editor at the *Sierra Sun* of North Lake Tahoe beginning in 1967.[67] She then went on to own and operate a self-named public relations and advertising agency at Incline Village, Nevada.

After leaving the *Gazette*, Burge received recognition from the National Federation of Press Women, in 1967.[68] The honorable-mention award was for her January 19, 1966, *Reno Evening Gazette* story about a plane crash that killed four. Burge spoke with witnesses who had watched the plane go down and burst into flames. The story ran on the front page of the newspaper.[69]

In addition to being a journalist, Burge became active in journalism organizations. In 1970, she helped to establish the Nevada Press Women, a chapter of the National Federation of Press Women. The professional organization focused on creating an awards competition for women journalists and on addressing industry issues. A roster of members from June 30, 1971, included reporters from the *Reno Evening Gazette*, the *Sparks Tribune*, and the *Nevada State Journal*, as well as public-relations practitioners.[70] Burge also served as a Region Two director of the national organization, which included representing Arizona, California, Hawaii, and Nevada. These organizations reflected her interest in women's issues. For example, a 1971 memo from the Nevada Press Women membership advocated the need to recognize the accomplishments of female high school and college journalism students and to crusade for equal pay for women journalists.[71]

During the early 1970s, Burge continued writing for several publications and living in Reno. In an interview in the 1970s, she said of her city, "People have the erroneous impression that everything in Reno revolves around casinos and gambling. That's for the tourists. . . . Actually, we're university-oriented, culture-conscious, and welfare-minded."[72]

What Burge did in her later years is unclear. She appears not to have published anything in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[73] Her husband retired in January 1972, and she may have been helping him with his showing and breeding of West Highland White Terriers. He produced several show champions under the name Lee Burge Westies in the early 1980s. He died on September 30, 1985, and she died nearly six months later, on March 12, 1986, in Reno.

The story of Florence Burge's career adds an important chapter to the story of the women's-page editors of the 1950s and 1960s, when many of these sections were eliminated or changed into feature sections. Burge's newspaper work showed that women's columns were not just society briefs but instead a mix of news and features about women's accomplishments and efforts in their communities. It was a sign that Reno women were crossing the line from private to public lives. Her profiles told the stories of all kinds of Reno women and thus cannot be dismissed as fluff. Burge should be honored for her stories about those who took a traditional route, such as teachers, librarians, or politicians' wives, as well as those who took a more progressive approach.

These women made a difference and are as important to Nevada's history as are the more traditionally recognized political leaders—and many of the journalists—who tend to fill history textbooks. It is also important to note that Burge's approach was progressive in that she covered disability and diversity—two areas that reporters often forget. She was ahead of her time in understanding that these are topics that should be relevant to newspapers. This may have been because she started her career later in life and thus had a variety of experiences to draw from, or because she had an understanding editor who supported her changes. Or, she might have been in the right position at the right time and believed that her Penney-Missouri Award and professional success validated her decisions. In any case, by taking an ambitious approach to journalism, Burge gave a voice to the women of Reno and may have inspired them to take a more active role in public life.

Notes

[1]Amy Caiazza and April Shaw, editors, *The Status of Women in Nevada.* (Washington, D. C.: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2004).

[2]*Ibid.*

[3]For more on the women's-club movement, see Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980) and Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1975).

[4]Anita Ernst Watson, *Into Their Own: Nevada Women Emerging into Public Life* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000), 11.

[5]For a description of women's-page content during the 1950s and 1960s, see Kay Mills, *A Place in the News: From the Women's Pages to the Front Pages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 110-126.

[6]Maurine Beasley, "Women in Journalism: Contributors to Male Experience or Voices of Feminine Expression," *American Journalism*, Vol.7 (1990), 40.

[7]These women were interviewed for the Washington Press Club Foundation's "Women in Journalism" oral history project. It is available online at http://www,npc.press.org/wpforal.

[8]Rose Ann Robertson, "From Teas and Bridal Veils to Abortion, Abuse and Feminism: How Three Women's Page Editors Changed Journalism" (paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication national convention, Anaheim, California, 1996); Rodger Streitmatter, "Transforming the Women's Pages: Strategies that Worked," *Journalism History*, Vol. 24 (1998), 72-80; Mei-ling Yang, "Women's Pages or People's Pages: The Production of News for Women in the *Washington Post* in the 1950s," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 73 (1996), 364-378.

[9]Mills, 114.

[10]For information on how the news media treated the women's movement, see Monica Morris, "Newspapers and the New Feminists: Black Out as Social Control?" *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 50 (1973): 37-42, and "The Newspaper as Social Movement's Resource," in *Hearth and Home; Image of Women in the Mass Media*, Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benét, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 186-215. For anecdotal evidence, consider how Harry Smith on ABC's "Evening News" explained the peaceful 1970 Women's Strike for Equality march in New York City: "Three things have been difficult to tame. The ocean, fools and women. We may soon be able to tame the ocean, but fools, and women will take a little longer." Cited in David Broder, *Behind the Front Page* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 127.

[11]Betty Friedan's landmark book, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: Bantam Doubleday, 1983) has been cited as an igniting force for the women's movement. Friedan, a former journalist, detailed the intellectual oppression that middle-class, college-educated women were experiencing because of limited opportunities. The book inspired thousands of women to examine their roles as homemakers. The Commission on the Status of Women, chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, issued a report in 1963 that documented discrimination against women in virtually every area of American life. States and some cities responded by establishing their own commissions for women to investigate conditions and to recommend changes. Several women's-page editors sat on these commissions, including Anderson and Castleberry.

[12]Robertson, "From Teas to Bridal Veils," 4.

[13]Mia McTanney (National Newspaper Association) to Florence Burge (9 December 1965), Florence Burge Papers 82-36/I/7, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno (hereafter cited as Burge Papers).

[14]Florence Burge, "Judge Richard Nash Held Esteem of Entire Town," *Nevada Historical Miscellany* (Sparks: Western Promoting and Publishing Company, 1976), 61-68.

[15]*Ibid.* Attempts to search for and reach Burge's two daughters have proved unsuccessful.

[16]Lee M. Burge obituary, *Reno Evening Gazette* (1 October 1985).

[17]It should be noted that Burge's daughters were listed as "Scheri" and "Suzzette" on their high school graduation announcements found in Burge's University of Nevada Special Collections, although the twins are later listed as "Sharon" and "Susan" in their parents' obituaries.

[18]"Like to Be Women's Editor for a Day?" *Reno Evening Gazette* (2 January 1965), Burge Papers (82-36/IV/15).

[19]*Ibid.*

[20]Florence Burge, editor's note in "Nevada's Part in GOP Convention History is Outlined," *Reno Evening Gazette* (16 August 1956), Burge Papers (82-36/IV/5).

[21]Florence Burge, "Women's Pages Come Alive," *Publishers' Auxiliary*, National Newspaper Association (29 January 1966), Burge Papers (82-36/IV/17).

[22]"Like to Be Women's Editor for a Day?"

[23]Florence Burge, editor's note in "Women You'd Like to Know," *Reno Evening Gazette* (18 August 1959), Burge Papers (82-36/III/23).

[24]Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 6.

[25]Florence Burge, "The Wives of State Officials Speak," *Reno Evening Gazette* (12 January 1963).

[26]Florence Burge, "Meet Reno's First Lady," *Reno Evening Gazette* (18 August 1959).

[27]Florence Burge, "Betty and the Book Bus," *Reno Evening Gazette* (8 April 1960).

[28]Florence Burge, "Pulitzer Prize Award Nominee 'Amazed' At Wide Interest in Great Basin Book," *Reno Evening Gazette* (18 October 1963).

[29]Florence Burge, "Modern Dance in Education Engenders Individuals' Growth," *Reno Evening Gazette* (26 October 1963).

[30]Associated Press, "This Homemaker Can't Wait to Get Under Hood," *Reno Evening Gazette*, (21 August 1965), Burge Papers (82-36/IV/16).

[31]Florence Burge, "Death Knell Sounds for Last 'Men Only' Outpost," *Reno Evening Gazette* (5 April 1963).

[32]*Ibid.*

[33]Florence Burge, "Training, Retraining Program Proves It Pays to Be Professional in Work," *Reno Evening Gazette* (17 September 1963).

[34]Florence Burge, "What's Being Done About Teen-age Employment?" *Reno Evening Gazette* (17 September 1963).

[35]An explanation of the awards program can be found in Kimberly Voss, "The Penney-Missouri Awards: Honoring the Best in Women's News," *Journalism History* (Spring 2006), 43-50.

[36]Earl English, in Penney-Missouri Award program, March 1965, Burge Papers (82-36/IV/5).

[37]Paul Myhre, "14 Win $10,000 Cash Awards in 5th Penney-Missouri University Newspaper Competition" (press release, 28 December 1964), Burge Papers (82-36/II/2).

[38]"Women's Editor Florence Burge, *Gazette* Praised for Winning Top Journalism Prize," *Reno Evening Gazette* (28 December 1964). University of Nevada, Special Collections, Florence Burge Papers (82-36/IV/14).

[39]"Florence Burge, *Gazette*, Win Top U.S. Honors for Women's Pages," *Reno Evening Gazette* (28 December 1964).

[40]Florence Burge, "RoundAbout," *Reno Evening Gazette* (8 January 1965).

[41]Senator Alan Bible to Florence Burge (26 February 1965), Burge Papers (82-36/IV/14).

[42]"Women's Editor Florence Burge, *Gazette* Praised," Burge Papers (82-36/IV/14).

[43]*Ibid.*

[44]Burge, "Women's Pages Come Alive."

[45]Rollan Melton to Florence Burge (1966), Burge Papers (82-36/IV/4).

[46]*Ibid.*

[47]In a 26 January 1965 letter, Kansas State University professor Roberta Applegate explained that the students in "Home Page" class read the winning sections of the J. C. Penney awards competition rather than a textbook. Burge Papers (82-36/I/7).

[48]"Women's Editor of Gazette," *Reno Evening Gazette* (20 May 1966), Burge Papers (82-36/IV/17).

[49]Suzzette Burge to her parents (15 February 1965) Burge Papers (82-36/I/6).

[50]Sherri Burge to her mother (no date other than "Sunday night"), Burge Papers (82-36/I/6).

[51]Burge, "Grace Warner Tells of 40 Years With Her 'Children,'" *Reno Evening Gazette* (4 March 1965).

[52]Florence Burge, "Women's Pages Come Alive."

[53]Gannett's policy on diversity coverage (March 2002), http://www.gannett.com/go/newswatch/2002/march/nw0308-2.htm

[54]Burge, "Women's Pages Come Alive."

[55]Burge, "Katie Discovers World of Sound," *Reno Evening Gazette* (24 August 1965), Burge Papers (82-36/IV/16).

[56]Burge, "Women's Pages Come Alive."

[57]McTanney to Burge (9 December 1965).

[58]Burge, "Women's Pages Come Alive."

[59]Florence Burge, "Business Women 'Best Dressed,' and Housewives Voice Reactions," *Reno Evening Gazette* (January-May 1964), Burge Papers (82-36/IV/17).

[60]Burge. "Women's Pages Come Alive."

[61]*Ibid.*

[62]"Women's Editor Florence Burge, *Gazette* Praised," Burge Papers (82-36/IV/14).

[63]Florence Burge to Roberta Applegate (16 March 1965), Burge Papers (82-36/I/7).

[64]Joy Miller, "Women Are Root of Trouble," *Reno Evening Gazette* (23 April 1966).

[65]Florence Burge, "Women's Pages Come Alive."

[66]Millie Robbins, "Another Side to Reno," *Women's World* (1970), Burge Papers (82-36/IV/17).

[67]She still managed to work in some freelancing on the side while with the *Sierra Sun*, contributing to *View* magazine in Reno in 1967.

[68]The panel of judges for the state competition was made up of professionals and professors from other states so as to be impartial. Winners of state competitions were often sent on to the national competition. Details of the process were listed in a letter to Madlen Mendice, chairman of the Nevada Press Women contest to Larry Allison, a potential judge (2 January 1974), Nevada Press Women (93-47/I/7), Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno (cited hereafter as Nevada Press Women).

[69]"Ex-*Gazette* Women's Editor Honored," *Reno Evening Gazette* (19 June 1967), Burge Papers (82-36/IV/2).

[70]Nevada Press Women roster, 30 June 1971, attached to minutes of the NFPW board meeting. 6 December 1971, Nevada Press Women (93-47/I/1).

[71]Memo, 1971, Nevada Press Women, (93-47/I/1).

[72]Robbins, "Another Side to Reno."

[73]Lee M. Burge obituary.

[74]There was a brief revival of these sections in the 1990s, led by the *Chicago Tribune*, but most were eliminated by 2002.

Letters to Tiza

Helen Stewart Tells of Early Las Vegas

FRAN CAMPBELL

Long before its actual existence, the town of Las Vegas was envisioned many times over by Helen Stewart, wife and widow of Pioche entrepreneur Archibald Stewart. From the front porch of her ranch, located in the parched Las Vegas Valley, Helen spent many an hour scanning the immediate horizon and mentally constructing a vibrant town located exactly where the ranch stood. Luck, coincidence, and shrewd negotiation eventually realized Helen Stewart's dream when, in 1905, the town of Las Vegas was placed onto the national map.

Born in Pennsylvania, Helen Jane Wiser grew up in California's Sacramento Valley from the time she was nine years old. She was gregarious by nature and thrived on socials, service activities, and church services. In 1873, when she was nineteen, she married Archie Stewart, and she left the verdant and active Sacramento Valley and traveled with her new husband to his home in the Pioche valley of southern Nevada, where he operated a freighting business and a cattle ranch. Helen did her best to adapt to rough, lonely ranch life. Here she gave birth to three children, Will, Hiram, and Tiza. As soon as she and Archie moved to the town of Pioche, Helen made certain that her young children learned the ways of civilization. She surrounded them and herself, as well, with townspeople and travelers who brought news from the outside world. Helen immersed herself in any social activity possible. There, in the isolated Pioche valley, Helen understood one thing about herself: She needed people around her.[1]

This knowledge signaled a personal crisis for Helen when, in 1882, her husband announced that he was relocating the family to the Las Vegas Valley, which was even more isolated than Pioche. Mormons had arrived in Las Vegas

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Helen Stewart, possibly c. 1863. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

to build a fort-mission in 1855, but soon left. Octavius Decatur Gass, a would-be entrepreneur, had taken over the site in 1865 and tried to turn it into a lucrative ranch and trading post. But Gass was in debt and involved in litigation in California. Needing money, he turned to the successful Pioche businessman, and Stewart lent him money against the ownership of the ranch. When Gass defaulted and relinquished the quitclaim deed, Stewart planned to send a partner to operate the ranch until the land proved profitable. That plan proved short lived when his partner refused to remain in the Las Vegas Valley because of its isolation, its harsh climate, and the violent Kiel family, whose land bordered that of Stewart's Las Vegas Ranch.

The announced move alarmed Helen. She protested long and loud that it would be devastating for her. More critical, she argued, it would further isolate their children removing them from what connection they had with civilization and education in Pioche. Archie explained to Helen that the plan was to live on the ranch and operate it for five years, and then sell it for investment monies. That was the deal to which Helen agreed: five years. She could endure five years.

As she packed up the family household, she clung to the number five. Like a prisoner, she set her sights on the day she and her family would return to the town they had not yet left. Nevertheless, with much trepidation, Helen hoisted herself onto the wagon that early April morning when she, Archie, and the three children headed southwest out of Pioche toward the Las Vegas Valley. What was she going to do, she wondered silently to herself, when the baby came? Helen was pregnant with their fourth child and here she was on her way to a harsh and unforgiving place inhabited by renegades, Indians, and lawless ranchers. Who would be there to help her with the delivery? How would she keep her children from growing up wild and uneducated? Five years—it might as well be twenty-five, she mused. But like pioneer women before her, Helen squared her jaw, looked the future in the eye, and did what had to be done.

A few months after their arrival at the ranch, Helen delivered a healthy baby girl, Evaline. She had little time to dote on the newest family member as she set herself to turning the mud house into a home and the hardscrabble acreage into a vegetable garden and orchard. If anything, Helen was a determined woman. When she made an agreement, she honored her part of it. Before long, her drive and Archie's own entrepreneurial motivation had made the ranch productive, and travelers flagged it as the place to stop for provisions and a hot meal. Helen coaxed travelers to stay for a few hours, even a few days. She filled the table with steaming food and fresh produce from the ranch, then sat down to hear the news the travelers brought with them. In a matter of a couple years, neighboring ranchers, miners, and travelers designated the Stewart ranch as a communication and business hub. Many left money on deposit, which Helen put in flour cans and sacks, and hid them in the wall. She held and delivered personal mail and business documents, making the ranch into a frontier post office of sorts. Stage companies whose stages traveled through the Las Vegas Valley used the Stewart ranch as a stop for provisions and a change of horses.

In her own way, Helen had surrounded herself with people, but they were transient. She had managed to turn the ranch into a way station with at least one guest at the table each night. She had befriended the local Paiute Indians, employing several on the ranch. She wanted rooted friends. She wanted a town. The years came and went slowly, with Helen counting the days and the months. She looked forward to the day when her time in the desert valley was up and she and her family would return to Pioche.

It was near the beginning of the third year when Helen's waiting was suddenly ended. Her life, and that of her four children, changed irrevocably when, in the summer of 1884, her husband, Archie, was shot to death at the neighboring Kiel ranch, where he had gone to defend her honor.

Stewart had taken the horse and the Henry rifle soon after Helen had told him of an incident that happened while he had been away on a business trip. During his absence, a renegade Kiel ranch hand had threatened Helen. When she refused to give him the money he demanded, he spread rumors that he

Archibald Stewart. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

had "had his way with Stewart's woman." Helen worried when Archie rode off into the early evening sun. She shuddered when, not long after, a lone rider arrived at full gallop with a terse message: "Old Man Kiel says to come for your husband. He's dead."

Helen took a Paiute with her and retrieved her husband's body from the other ranch. Later that evening she studied the gunshot wounds, then buried her husband the following day. She had built the coffin herself and prayed over her husband one final time. Then she turned toward the house, wondering what would happen now. She had nowhere to go. She was surrounded by her husband's enemies, by renegades, thieves, and murderers. And she was pregnant with their fifth child.

The next day, Helen wrote a letter to her husband's legal counsel in Pioche, Grant Sawyer. In the letter, she told of the shootout at the Kiel ranch and of her husband's tragic death. She asked for justice, and she asked for help. To Sawyer she expressed her fear that if her husband had not made a will, she, being a woman, would be vulnerable. She underscored this situation with the

The Stewart Ranch/Las Vegas Rancho, c. 1905. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

words, "I am alone among a gang of cutthroats and murder[er]s." She then instructed Sawyer to take any legal action necessary to ensure her retention of the property and her appointment to administer the estate. She closed the letter with the plea that Sawyer act quickly because, after three days, the murderer was still nearby. She felt it dangerous to "say or do anything as we are overpowered by numbers and still threatened." Helen was later declared beneficiary of half of the Stewart estate. The other half was divided equally among the five children, with Helen appointed their legal guardian and executrix of their part of the estate.

It was then that Helen began to dream of a town. If she could not go back to Pioche, then a town would simply have to come to her. Or so she told her children as they sat on the porch together. They listened while she painted verbal pictures for them of tree-lined streets, school buildings, theaters, churches with steeples, and hotels, banks, and stores with goods of every kind. She worked harder than ever, turning the ranch into more than a travel stop. She increased the family's land holdings by several hundred acres. And she put her land up for sale. While she found interested buyers, none could meet her selling price of $55,000. So, Helen put her energies into increasing the Las Vegas Ranch's productivity. By 1889, her two older sons, Will and Hiram, ran the ranch, which produced vegetables, fruit, grain, grasses, and beef. And in 1893, she had the

ranch designated an official United States Post Office, with herself as the government-appointed postmaster.

Helen also emphasized education. She hired a tutor for the children, and in 1894, she sent the four youngest children to Los Angeles to board and go to school. It was then that she began what would prove to be three decades of extensive letter writing. Initially she wrote to her children, encouraging them to do well in school, mix with the right people, and stay out of trouble. In the same letters, she also told them about the ranch and what was happening in the Las Vegas Valley. She reported a rumor that a railroad would be built through the desert and run straight through the valley. In 1901, Helen hoped to sell her land to a railroad company. To her great disappointment, the original deal fell through when the rail company would not meet her asking price of $59,500.

Then, in 1902, Senator William Andrews Clark, the builder of the San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake Railroad, took up negotiations with Stewart when he heard that she was willing to sell her land. Within months, a contract was signed in which Helen sold most of the ranch for $60,000. She retained the family burial plot, known as Four Acres, and acreage surrounding it, where she made her home until her death in 1926.

By early 1905, five hundred buildings were either completed or under construction. Helen had bought up more than twelve hundred acres of prime land, which she developed, sold, or bequeathed to her children over the years. The Las Vegas town site was laid out and advertised in Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Francisco, and Salt Lake City. Soon, more than five thousand applications had poured in for twelve hundred lots. Clark's executives agreed to auction off the lots in May of that year. Thus, on May 15, 1905, the rail town of Las Vegas was placed on the national map, and one of its principal streets was named Stewart—presumably after its First Family and its First Lady, Helen Stewart.[2]

Soon after Helen took up residence in her new home near Four Acres, she immediately involved herself in the many activities of a new and developing town. She was delighted. Her dream had come true. She had brought a town to the ranch. Her only sadness was that her oldest daughter, Tiza, had left the valley. Tiza had fled an acrimonious divorce and the vicious slander that ensued. Although Tiza never returned to Las Vegas, except for brief visits, Helen never gave up hope that her daughter would remarry and, then, perhaps return to Las Vegas to take her place among the extended family.

For two decades Helen Stewart tried to lure Tiza back to Las Vegas and to "set her cap" for a suitable Las Vegas bachelor. She urged Tiza to come back and join her mother in lucrative business developments in town. Her letters speak often about the price of property, interest rates, investments, banking, and future income potential. For instance, in April 1909, Helen wrote:

> I have four lots in town. For the first one I bought three years ago and paid $375. The second one I bought two years ago and paid $500. In December

this year, 1913, I traded 23 1/2 acres in the opposite of Tonopah track for two more adjoining. The last two I got off W. R. Thomas. I could sell the four lots for $4000. I had a house on one of them I was renting for $10 a month and another for $15; but a fire burned one and I am now getting only $15. They now have a fire limit and all buildings in that limit must be fireproof and my lots are inside the fire limit so hereafter I will be obliged to put up adobe buildings or cement and as they are more expensive than lumber buildings I will have to go slow.

The values of property have risen considerably here. I think money invested in lots and then put houses costing about $700 or $500 on them would pay good interest. . . . Good night with much love. Your affectionate Mamma. [April 15, 1909][3]

Later that year, Helen made Tiza a business offer: "Tiza, come home and we will go into something here to make a good living and be happy with each other once in a while. . . . And if you don't want to stay here any longer than a month or so, we will go somewhere for a while." [August 21, 1909][4]

By 1914, Helen was proud of the town she had helped to create. In a letter to Tiza, she emphasized Las Vegas's value as a rail town when compared to nearby towns that depended on the mining industry:

They have been working the zinc under a new process and making money. But for some reason within the last few weeks lead has taken a downward price and there is talk of shutting down for a while. Searchlight seems quiet; El Dorado is not doing much now. Las Vegas, as a railroad town is a howling success and progressing. It is increasing in population and values. They have 50 flowing artesian wells in the valley and several fine farms besides the old Las Vegas rancho. We have two artesian wells on the piece of land we are living on here. It is a good country to live in and a good country to invest in. [January 12, 1914]

Five years later, in 1919, Helen wrote to Tiza about an offer that was made for her land:

There was a man here this morning to buy Fair View: the place where the reservoir is and where we were going to put the fish. He and Will are out now to look at the place. They are also going to look at my land below or south of the old ranch. Of course, I realize that land is a safe investment and time does not decrease its values. But youth is impatient and will not wait for increase in values. They must dig up the germ [seed] that age provides for the future every once in a while to see if it is growing, thereby retarding its growth, or sometimes altogether stopping it.

> There is a boom here and real estate in town too. Tiza, bring the rest of your goods and come here and you and I will start a real estate office. We will build a coy little office next to the Post Office or rent a desirable location. I will be ready as soon as Eva gets her present from the stork. . . . [August 3, 1919]

It is apparent from Helen's invitation to Tiza that, from its beginnings, Las Vegas was just the place for unique ventures and good fortune. At least Helen Stewart thought so, because in the same letter she urged Tiza to transfer all of her bank accounts to Las Vegas, where her money would gain 10 percent interest. Helen never lost her firm support of the positive financial prospects that could be found in "her" town, Las Vegas.

Helen Stewart was equally optimistic about the social and cultural developments of Las Vegas. She was delighted to participate in the various women's clubs that formed early in the life of the town. Helen served as an elected member of the Board of Education. She wrote to Tiza:

> This year I was elected a member of the School Board of Education and am Clerk for the Board. We have had this year under construction the Clark County High School Building which has cost with equipment and all about Fifty-five Thousand Dollars. The pupils moved into it December 1917. . . . The school Board work keeps me busy guessing what will happen next. [January 29, 1918]

A year and half later, she wrote excitedly, "Just received a letter from our Principal of Las Vegas High School in which he tells me our school will begin the 1st of September." [August 8, 1919]

For Helen, this was a great achievement because the schools meant that the children did not have to board in Pioche or Los Angeles. She served on the Cemetery Association, whose pride was the planting of cypress trees around the perimeter of Woodlawn Cemetery, north of the original railroad townsite. Beautification of the cemetery enabled Las Vegans to bury their loved ones there instead of having the body transported to California. In 1918, Helen wrote to Tiza about the Cemetery Association:

> I am also a member of the Word Lawn [sic] Cemetery Association. We have ten acres just a quarter of a mile north of the Old Las Vegas Ranch on which we have an artesian well and the whole ten acres with a row of colossal trees all the way around and ornamental trees all around the inside walks. It was a kind of surprise to the grand Old Desert to have such a cemetery." [January 29, 1918]

But Helen took particular pride in the key role she played in the founding of

the Mesquite Club, a women's service club. She served as its president and as its state representative. In 1914, Helen wrote to Tiza:

> I was elected to the Mesquite Club of the Federation of Women's Clubs to be held in Carson City, Nevada first week of October. Eva was taken sick and I could not go. It was too bad I could not go as Delegates were to be entertained at the Governor's and many nice things were planned for them. We were to be given a banquet at Goldfield. Tasker Oddie, the man Demmie planned for you to meet at her house in Berkeley is now Governor of the State of Nevada and our meek friend Frank Williams is now State Regent and is quietly preparing to run for Congress. When Senator Newlands was here some time ago, the Clark County Democrats had a Love Feast, among them our friend Frank. He is getting to be [a] recognized power among men of honor and principle. Better come home and set your cap for him. [January 12, 1914]

The following year, the Mesquite Club sent Helen to the Federation as state representative. From the Goldfield Hotel, she penned a hasty yet excited note to Tiza: "Here I am on my way to speech making as a Delegate from Las Vegas to Yerrington, [sic] Nevada to the Federation of Women's Clubs. Will send you papers. Lovingly, Mamma. [October 27, 1915]

And the next year, Helen served as president of the club.

> I have been elected president of the Mesquite Club. Also nominated on the republican ticket as one of the Board of Education. Endorsed by the Democrats and elected by all my friends. I have just received a commission from Governor Emmet Boyle as one of the Delegates to the 12th Annual Convention of the American Civic Association to be held in Washington, DC at the New Willard Hotel December 13th and 14th and 15th 1916. It is quite an honor. [December 2, 1916]

In 1918, Helen wrote to Tiza, "Last year I was president of the Mesquite Club here with a membership of 45 women. This year I am only on the general committee and I am quite relieved. This year I was elected a member of the Board of Education." [January 29, 1918]

Helen's role as representative took her not only to the nation's capital, but also to the cities and towns within Nevada, where she was a featured speaker. Her topic nearly always was about some aspect of southern Nevada history. Helen was regarded as the leading historian of the area, and was well known beyond Nevada for her collection of Nevada Indian baskets. She hoped the collection would somehow benefit future generations of Nevadans. To Tiza she wrote in 1919:

> This afternoon a Mr Irving and wife and a Mr Crozier from El Dorado Canyon and a teacher from Columbia College were here to spend the afternoon. I found the woman teacher very interesting. She was very interested in my baskets. My other people went to Salt Lake with no word from them yet. I wrote to our Governor but fear he will not get it as I see by the paper he goes to Salt Lake to the Meeting of Governors. [August 8, 1919]

And in 1920, she reported on an important visitor and old friend, "Tiza: Ex Senator Clark said of my baskets they were a wonderful collection of Indian baskets and they were undoubtedly the most interesting and valuable he had ever seen. He might want to buy them, shall I sell them? I am wondering how much to ask if anyone should ask me 'How much?' [August 31, 1920]

Jeanne Weir, a professor at the University of Nevada in Reno and founder of the Nevada Historical Society, was particularly interested in the basket collection. She visited Helen often to view the baskets and negotiate a way for the state to purchase the collection. However, she was unable to finalize the deal before Helen Stewart died, in 1926. The collection was later included in the Helen Stewart Estate sale, selling for $12,000.[5]

For all of her positive involvements within the burgeoning town of Las Vegas, Helen Stewart did not cast a blind eye to the negative aspects. In 1914, she penned the following to Tiza: "We have had a divorce cyclone strike our loved city. There were or are to be 9 cases in the next meeting of the Court. Liquor seems to be most of the trouble. [January 12, 1914]

Helen also told Tiza about "marriages of mixed religion" that were becoming more frequent in Las Vegas.

> Geneva has a Mormon beau and Leslie has a Mormon girl. But the new Mormon girl and boy are educated people. So let the world rage on; we can't help the choice of any one. They can't be anymore unhappy than the rest of us. So "Amen" says the congregation, "Let her go to Gahleylee [*sic*]". . . . Tiza, try and get all the good and happy moments you can—they are going fast. If you have a good beaux [*sic*] or have selected a good man hold on to him because they are not the majority. Keep well and be happy. Mamma [February 21, 1919]

In first month of 1918, Helen lamented to Tiza about the World War that was raging in Europe:

> At best it seems to me that life is quite a struggle. And in these dreadful war times it seems to me the chances are great for a Herculean struggle. The Germans are so thoroughly prepared for war and we are just like a hornet's nest. . . . [There is] Red Cross work everywhere. Bed socks, sweaters and comforters, and night shirts and bed pillows and little sacks of clipped

pieces left from the culling out of garments. Have you got it so bad out there? Oh here I am sometimes so tired of the great confusion of existence. [January 29, 1918]

Yet, ever the consummate business woman, Helen was compelled in May of the same year to relate to Tiza how the war in Europe was affecting property values in Las Vegas:

The war's bearing on all values of real estate are in "status quo" that is, at a stand still. I sold Town Camp about Christmas time at $2400 Dollars in payments of 4 of $125 and the rest in monthly payments of $75 with a mortgage. The property and interest at the rate of 10%. It is slow. I have 4 lots in town that are quite valuable but the buildings on them now are bringing me $20 a month. All acreage at this present war time is of little advance in value. Your 40 in township 20 range south in the southwest quarter of the southwest quarter of 31 is quite a valuable piece of land. The land in township 20 range 62 in section 15 is not so valuable now but may become so later. . . . Of my lots in town I have been planning one apiece for you children and one for myself. An apartment house built on one of them that close in would be a very good investment now. Of course the war is making changeful conditions every day. [May 12, 1918]

When the war in Europe was over and the nation was trying, as presidential candidate Warren Harding later urged, to return to normalcy, Helen described to Tiza a typical Sunday afternoon in Las Vegas:

We have not been to Church yet today. Minna has just returned from Mrs Doolittle's. Helen has gone home and Eva is taking young Clarence through a course of sprouts and Daddy as usual is out in the garage petting and humoring his auto so it will perform its duty. And Eva is talking to the coal oil stove and the baby at the same time. Yesterday we picked figs in the forenoon and in the afternoon Eva preserved them and put them in jars. . . [the children] have a movie show under the arbor between the two townhouses. Eva has a big can of ice cream so we will all go to assist her in a few minutes. [August 3, 1919]

Indeed, as far as Helen Stewart was concerned, Las Vegas in 1920 was a mecca of plentitude and promise. To Tiza she wrote:

We have planted and growing in our valley now 400 acres of cotton and some capitalists here now are talking of rice and tobacco. Wait until they have the Colorado River harnessed to a big dam which they are now surveying. In fact, men are there now working and soon the project will materialize and we will

be supplied with sufficient water to all the pumping plants we can. This power has been running to waste since the days of father Juana-AP-Peri [Junipero] had his great dreams of the advancement of humanity—his southern Nevada has the promise of a wonderful future. I hear the Airioplane [*sic*] buzzing over the house now. It looks poised high in the air like an immense big bird. It makes a loud noise like a blubbering flutter. . . . I have been reading in the manner in which the banks are trying to control the high cost of living by not giving the Proffiters [*sic*] the cash to buy up and dispense at an exorbitant price. . . . I hear the airioplane buzzing again; they are charging ten dollars from Las Vegas to the Park's Ranch land and back to town. . . . I believe I will take the desert any day for mine, and again we are just about as much up to date as any place in the good old U.S. Yesterday passengers were going to and from Keil [*sic*] Ranch all day in a flying machine. Isn't that some class. And none of them spilled out. [June 8, 1920]

By the next year, Helen urged Tiza to come to Las Vegas and take advantage of the financial opportunities to be had in Las Vegas:

The noise of passing autos is something to be reckoned with. There is about 100 passing every day and at the little spring above the old ranch house the trees are full of campers and their tents. Come out and we will start a supply station on the side of the four acres. It is a chance to make some money with close attention to business and no matter where we are we have to stay close to the situation if we are to make money. [September 21, 1921]

The Stewart Ranch as a resort. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

Helen Stewart in her later years. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

The letters to Tiza reveal a mother's natural concern for an unmarried daughter on her own and far from home and family. Helen Stewart labored to keep Tiza caught up with family news, as well as apprised of the rapidly growing town of Las Vegas. Because the letters are by Las Vegas's founding mother, the body of correspondence provides a unique chronicle of Las Vegas's economic, political, cultural, and social development during its first two decades.

The Las Vegas of 1905 to 1921 as described by Helen Stewart is similar to the Las Vegas we know today. Were Helen Stewart to traverse the streets of Las Vegas in the present, and then go home to take up pen and paper to tell her daughter what she had seen and done that day, those letters probably would be filled with much the same kind of news: planes bringing tourists into town for a reasonable fare, traffic a thing to be reckoned with, land investments and construction the ticket to profit, unique financial ventures in which money can be made if you pay close attention, mining ventures, fools who hope to get rich quick, and people active in the beautification of the city. In closing, Helen no doubt would urge Tiza to come home to Las Vegas because it is a town where you can rear a family and enjoy a comfortable Sunday afternoon. It became the town of which she had dreamed, and more. Perhaps those five years were worth the wait after all.

Notes

[1]Information on Helen Stewart's early life in Pioche, her years alone on the Las Vegas Ranch and the sale of the ranch are taken from the following series by Carrie Miller Townley: "Helen J. Stewart: First Lady of Las Vegas, Part 1," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 4; (Winter 1973), 215-244; "Helen J. Stewart: First Lady of Las Vegas, Part 2" *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 1, (Spring 1974), 3-32; and "Helen Stewart, 1888-1926: Widow, Proprietor, and Civic Leader," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*.

[2]See "Helen Stewart" in *The First 100: Portraits of the Men and Women Who Shaped Las Vegas*, A. D. Hopkins, K. J. Evans, eds. (Las Vegas: Huntington Press, 1999).

[3]All quotations from Helen Stewart's letters to her daughter, Tiza, are taken from the Helen Stewart Collection, T87 H Stewart, Boxes 1 and 2, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Special Collections Library (hereafter cited as Helen Stewart Collection).

[4]Helen Stewart Collection, Box 1, file 2.

[5]*Ibid.*, box 2, folder 12

Quilting in Nevada 1940-1970
The Nevada Heritage Quilt Project

COLLEEN HALL-PATTON

Textile production has been an area dominated by women in much of the world for most of documented history—hence Elizabeth Barber's 1994 book titled *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years*.[1] Beyond being a major form of work seen as compatible with child rearing because it is "repetitive, easy to pick up at any point, reasonably child-safe, and easily done at home,"[2] textiles have also been a primary social indicator through clothing, furnishings, upholstery, rugs, tapestries, banners, and flags.[3] Because textiles are so commonly produced by women, they are an excellent research source for learning more about women's lives.

Quilts demonstrate community and family ties, and women's roles in fund-raising and church groups. Quilting was an acceptable creative outlet when more traditional high art forms were not open to women. Quilt researchers have found links between domestic and commercial production, women's involvement in and comment on the political process through such patterns as Whig Rose, Coxey's Army, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and, during the Civil War, the quilt patterns produced by the women volunteers of the U. S. Sanitary Commission. While women's public voices were muted, they stitched their views into quilts. Quilt enterprises organized by VISTA volunteers in Appalachia and Alabama were part of the 1960s War on Poverty. Women such as Marie Webster, Anne Orr, and Ruby McKim created commercial enterprises around quilt designs, quilt kits, and quilts since early in the twentieth century. Examples from most of these are documented in the Nevada Heritage Quilt Project (NHQP).

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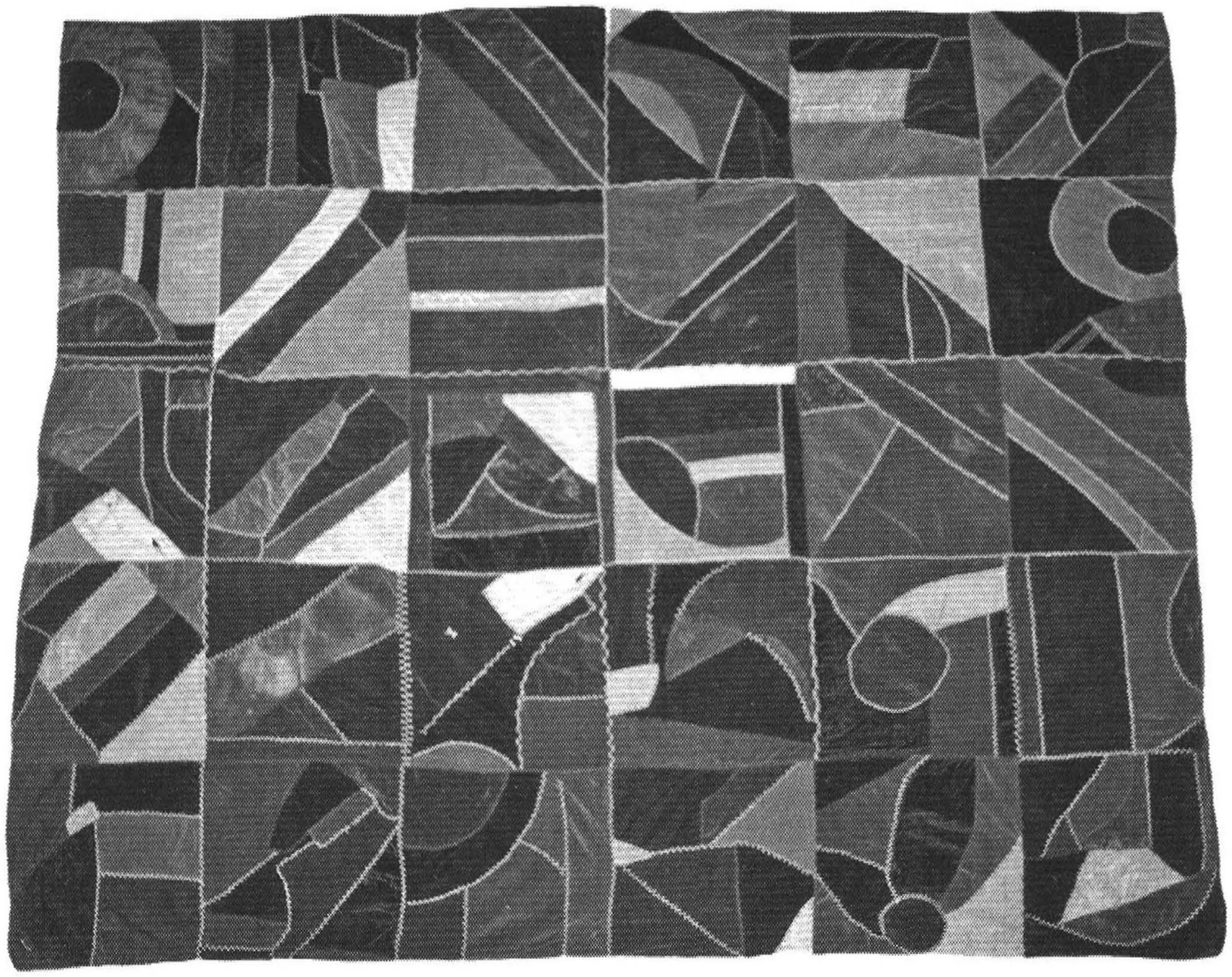


Velvet and silk crazy quilt by Leva Beckley, c. 1900-1915 *(Clark County Museum)*

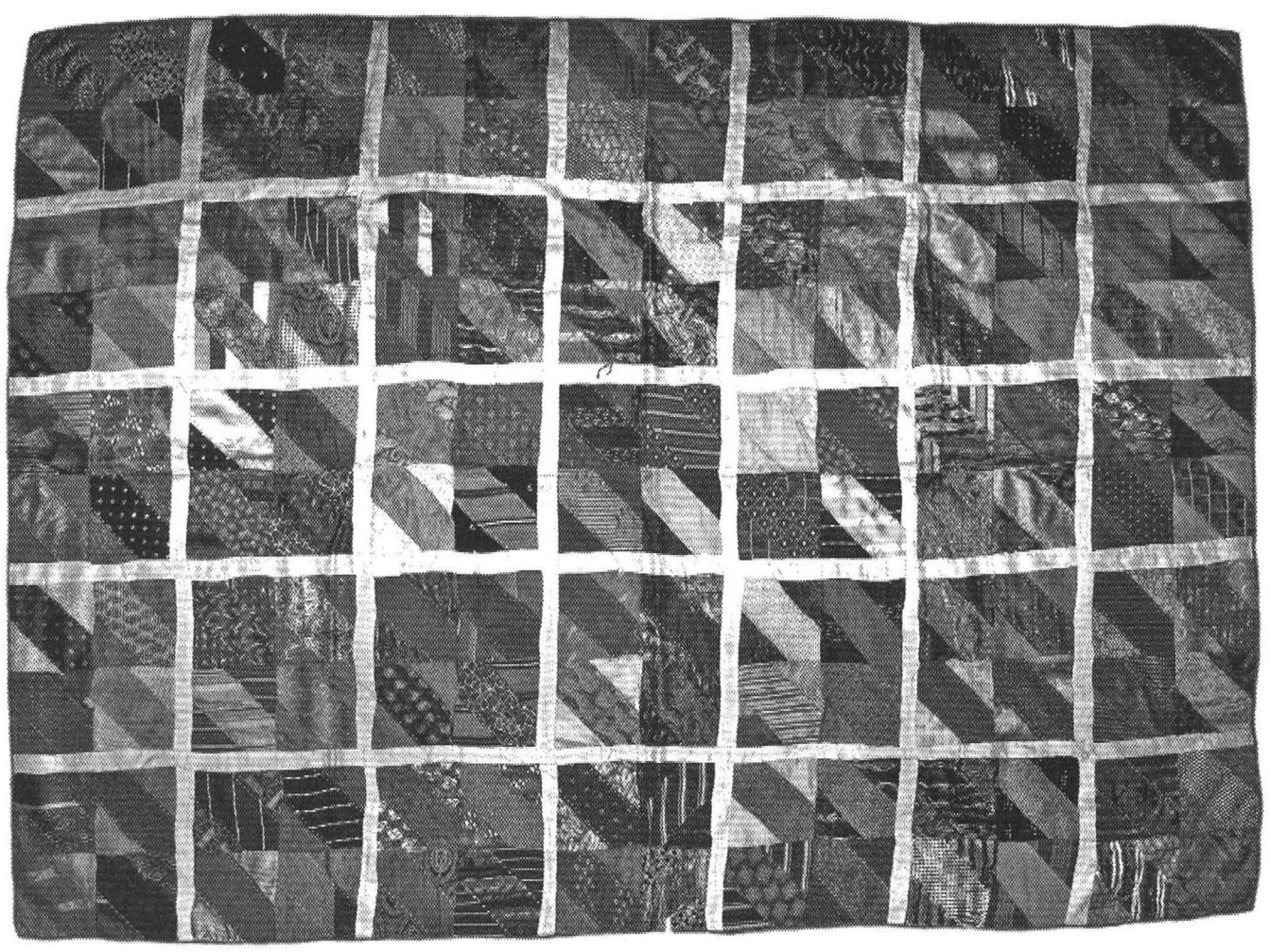
State quilt projects are based in material-culture studies, a method used primarily in the fields of archeology, history, folklore, and museology. The intent is to interpret cultures through the objects they produce. *Material culture* refers to these artifacts, produced by every culture, or, as Melville Herskovits puts it, "the vast universe of objects used by humankind to cope with the physical world, to facilitate social intercourse, to delight our fancy, and to create symbols of meaning."[4]

The first state project took place in Kentucky in 1980. It began with three basic ideas, which have been foremost in all of the projects since then. The first was as "salvage" documentation. In Kentucky, this was born out of fear that many quilts were being sold out of state, but the project has been transformed into one of documenting quilts before they become disconnected from their families of origin. The second idea has been to promote an increase in quilt owners' appreciation of quilts. The third has been to use quilts to learn about women's lives when little other documentation exists.

The Nevada Heritage Quilt Project is one of forty-five state projects conducted since 1980 throughout the United States. As of 1994, about 157,000 quilts had been documented through these projects.[5] The documentation includes a wealth

of information not only about the quilts themselves, but also about their provenance, and production context, including considerable demographic evidence. The quilts constitute a resource that we are still learning how to use.

I focused on quilts made between 1940 and 1975. By concentrating on one area of cultural production such as quilting, my research contributes to a broader understanding of one portion of women's lives so that we can see the realities beyond the stereotypes. Current views of women's lives during the 1950s emphasize domesticity, conformity, and consumerism, while protest and massive social change characterized the 1960s. After the Great Depression and World War II, American industrial production turned to consumer goods, while young men and women formed new families at a greater rate than anywhere else in the world at that time. While the return to domesticity and its accompanying shift for women from producers to consumers is associated with the 1950s, it continued well into the 1960s. The women's movement began in the mid 1960s, but resulting changes were not apparent for most American women until the 1970s. Although the exploration of quilting reflected the ongoing emphasis on homemaking and maintaining ties to family, it was also emerging as a form of personal expression as women defined themselves as individuals beyond their roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers.



Indian hatchet patterns made of silk neckties in the 1920s by Leva Beckley. Her husband Will owned a prominent clothing store in downtown Las Vegas. *(Clark County Museum)*

My research uses a multiple-method approach of combining the quilt-project data with content analysis of about 190 articles culled from *The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* and the *Art Index*, plus interviews with quilters. The methods complement each other by providing different views of quilting during the same time period. Content analysis of magazine articles provides a national overview of how quilts were used and interpreted during the period, and their place in American culture.

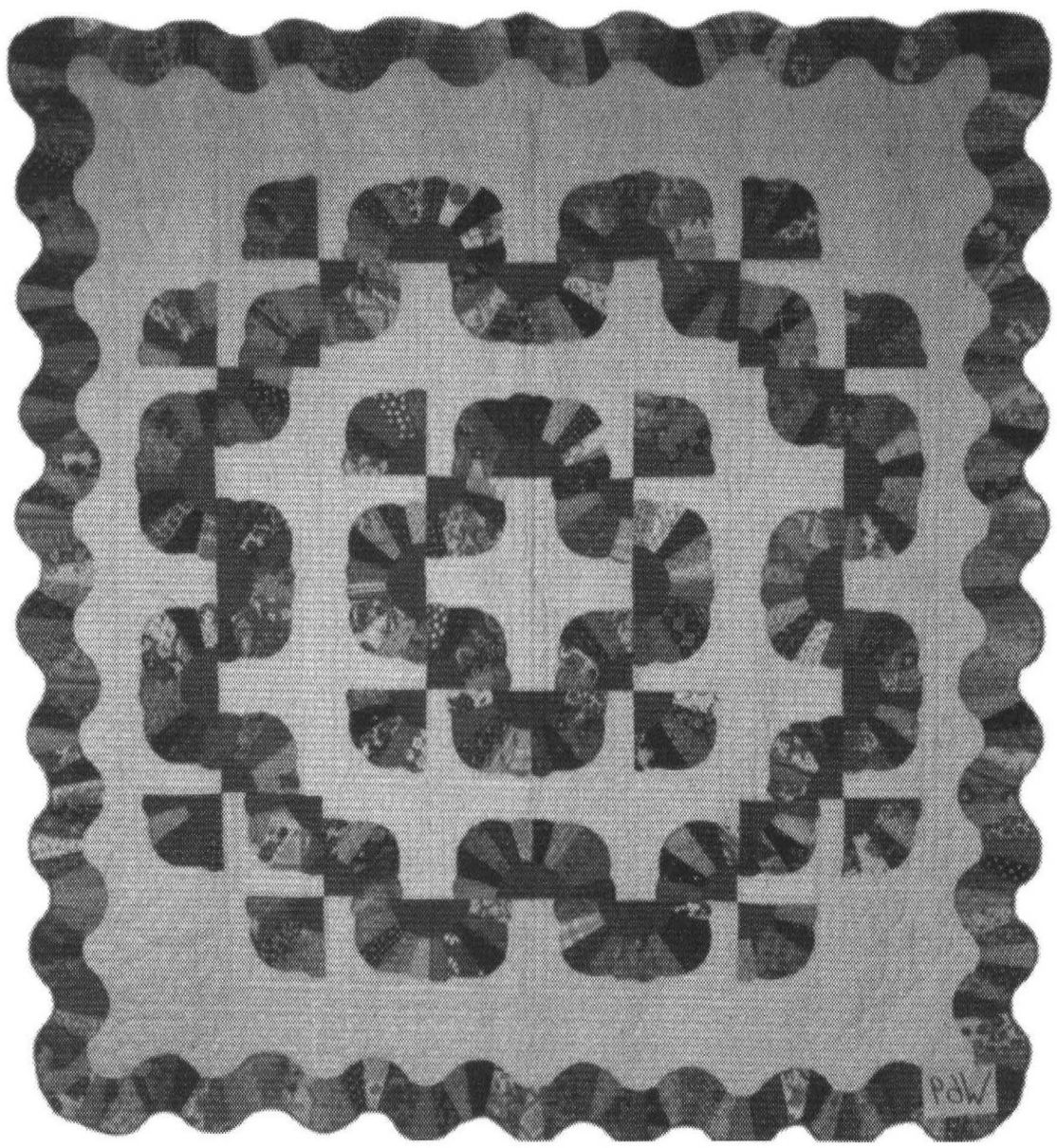
The interviews give a perspective on how quilting fit into the everyday lives of real people, on their motivations, and on how they integrated quilting into their multiple roles. Since I covered a time period stretching back more than sixty-five years, it was important to record oral traditions and recollections while they were still available. Any quilter who was forty in 1960, which is younger than the average age of quilters then, would be eighty-five today. This is the time to interview them; we cannot wait ten years.

The Nevada Heritage Quilt Project archives are stored at the Nevada Historical Society in Reno. Of the forty-five states where volunteer groups have surveyed the quilts in their states, Nevada is one of only sixteen that accepted quilts made from 1940 to 1975. Of the more than three thousand quilts made between 1830 and 1990 that were documented in Nevada, more than five hundred fit into the 1940-1975 time frame. Fifteen "quilt days" were conducted throughout the state. Each quilt was photographed and its materials, construction methods, and date recorded; in addition, information about its maker(s) and why and where it was made was documented. This information was coded into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for analysis, which allowed more ways of correlating data. The use of SPSS enables a range of comparisons virtually impossible to obtain with manual analysis alone.

Statistical analysis lets us see changing trends through time, and the interrelationship between demographic variables and the kinds of quilts produced. The kinds of questions that can be asked let us look at variations across time and region and the effects of demographics on quilt production. The data analyzed for this article included (1) associations between group quilting and the region where groups were active, (2) patterns in the reasons quilts were made, (3) effects of time, place, religion, etcetera, and (4) identification of the quilters, by age, religion, etcetera.

The kinds of information available frame the questions that can be asked. For instance, I would have liked to know when the quilter began quilting, but that question went unasked, and any answers could be inferred from the data for only 26 of the 511 quilts. No quilts were identified as the work of Hispanic or African-American quilters, so analysis by ethnicity is also not possible with this data.

Another example of questions I would have liked to ask concerns the impact of technology, such as the changes caused by the use of polyester batting, which was introduced in the late 1950s. However, because batting cannot be seen, its



Fan quilt set in unusual Mohawk trail pattern, begun in the 1940s and finished in the 1970s by Doris Sheppard of Winnemucca, Nevada,and quilted in Baltic, Ohio by Malinda Miller. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

use can only be inferred from the quilt's appearance. Too many 1940s quilts were listed as having polyester batting for this to be reliable data, and I had to eliminate it as a data category. The data also reflect the varying amount of training of volunteer recorders, as well as the effort to coordinate their results with the information provided by quilt owners, who may know little or nothing about quilting or about the women who made their family quilts.

A demonstration of how material-culture studies and content analysis of magazine articles can be combined to provide new understandings can be seen through an example of ten quilts from the Nevada Heritage Quilt Project. These are all attributed to Doris Sheppard, a native Nevadan living in Winnemucca, in north-central Nevada, with a population of about 6,100 in 2000. Sheppard began collecting patterns and making quilt blocks while in high school in the 1940s. She made her first quilts for her daughters. She began these two

quilts—a Sunbonnet Sue and one of pieced triangles—when she was twenty-nine years old, in 1957 and finished them twelve and thirteen years later, in 1969 and 1970. As the notes say, the quilts "began small when her daughters were small. They kept growing, so the quilts did too."

The same quilter completed all ten of Doris Sheppard's quilts: Malinda Miller of Baltic, Ohio. There is no indication as to how a woman in Winnemucca, Nevada, got in contact with a woman in Ohio. There may be an unknown relationship through friends or family, or this may be the result of contacts through batting companies. Stearns and Foster, one of the primary batting manufacturers, is in Ohio, and the batting companies advertised that they had lists of quilters who would finish quilts. Baltic, Ohio, is in Coshocton County, immediately south of Holmes County, which is Amish country. There is no mention of Malinda Miller in the Ohio state quilt book, but the archives of the Ohio Quilt Research Project might have more information.

Two of the quilts were "ordered made by Doris Sheppard." Myrtle Raymore made them in San Diego in the early 1970s, and, again, Malinda Miller quilted them in Ohio. These quilts demonstrate an interstate network of quilt makers, quilt professionals providing services, and possible interconnections with the textile industry.

The 1950s and 1960s have been assumed to be a time of declining interest and skill in quilting. Several of Doris Sheppard's quilts show the variety of skills acquired or maintained through that time. One quilt is a copy of a Florence Peto appliqué quilt, which she enlarged from a graphed pattern in *Woman's Day* magazine. Another quilt's documentation includes the pattern for a fan cut from a newspaper. These are the squares begun in the 1940s. Rather than following the suggested layout of individual squares set on point, she created undulating, nested paths called Mohawk Trail. These demonstrate an adventurous, multiskilled quilter willing to make unusual designs from standard patterns and tackle replicas of intricate appliqué from the 1930s. She took the patterns and made them her own.

While this example shows one way of using the archive data, the remainder of this article will summarize the abstracted statistical data from the SPSS analysis, focusing on four general questions about quilting during the period between the revival of the 1920s and 1930s and the current revival, which began in the late 1960s or early 1970s. These are: Who was quilting? Were there regional, rural, or urban differences? Were there differences by religion and the activities of quilt groups? How did construction methods, materials, and patterns change over time?

WHO WAS QUILTING

Did quilt production decline between 1940 and 1975, as most quilt histories indicate? The NHQP shows that quilts were consistently being produced during the time period of the study. In fact, more quilts were made in the 1950s and 1960s than in the 1940s (Table 1).

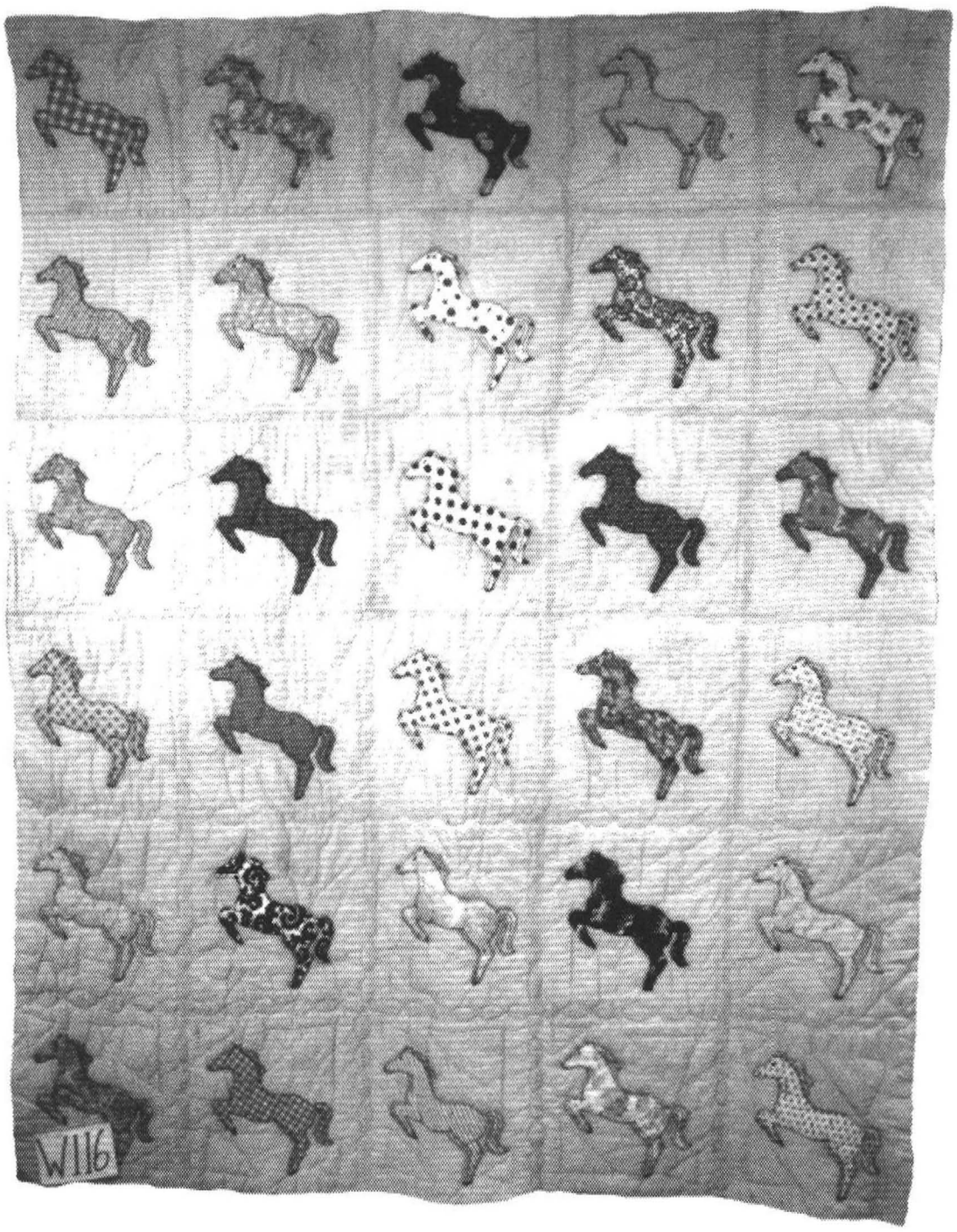
TABLE 1
Number of Quilts Completed by Decade

Decade	*Number of Quilts*	*Percentage of Total*
1940-1949	102	20 percent
1950-1959	145	28 percent
1960-1969	141	28 percent
1970-1979	96	19 percent
1980-1989	27	5 percent
	511	100 percent

Note: All quilts that contained work done between 1940 and 1970 were included. This includes quilts started before 1940 but completed between 1940 and 1975 and quilts begun between those dates but completed between 1975 and 1990.

Quilt production from 1950 to 1970 was relatively constant at 140 quilts every 10 years. Significantly fewer quilts were produced in the 1940s.[6] My research shows an increase in the number of quilts produced during each decade from 1940 to 1970 in the NHQP. This indicates only a slight decline from previous decades. The counts by Shelley Feazell, author of the only previous scholarly work on this subject using the NHQP archives, used different dating criteria.[7] Drawing from Feazell's previous study of the NHQP it is clear that production from 1940 to 1970 was 75 percent of what it had been between 1910 and 1940.[8] Even at those rates, the number of quilts produced 1940-1970 is higher than expected, given existing quilt research.

Much current research sees the years 1940 to 1970 as a time when interest in quilting waned or at least stagnated.[9] One of the reasons posited is that few women began quilting at this time, and most examples of the craft were the work of women who began quilting during the 1930s revival.[10] If that were so, the average age of NHQP quilters would increase proportionately from 1940 to 1970 (i.e., in thirty years, the average age would increase thirty years). But the NHQP data only partially support this view. The average age at the completion of NHQP quilts increased from 48.6 years in 1940 to 59.0 years in 1970, a 10.4-year increase in thirty years (see Table 2). This could be because it was the older women who became quilters or fewer young women began quilting. However,



"Branded Horses," made from scraps of western shirts by Dale DeLong in the early 1960s. One such quilt was made for each of her grandchildren with their individual brands quilted in the squares. This quilt was made as Mrs. DeLong "followed buckaroos around the country." It was a national finalist in the 1978 Good Housekeeping quilt contest, which included almost 10,000 quilts. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

the average increased only 1.7 years per 5-year period, which means either that new women began quilting or that the age increased less because older women ceased quilting.

The timing of the increases also is noteworthy. The average age jumped from 48.6 years in 1940 to 55.5 years in 1950 and stayed the same during the 1950s, jumped again to 59.0 years in 1960, then remained the same through the 1960s. These jumps may indicate periods when few women began quilting, while those when the ages stayed the same indicate an influx of new quilters mid decade in the 1950s and 1960s.

TABLE 2
Average Age At Quilt Completion, By Five-Year Period

Year	*Age*
1940-1944	48.6
1945-1949	53.0
1950-1954	55.5
1955-1959	55.5
1960-1964	58.8
1965-1969	59.0
1970-1974	54.7
1975-1979	63.2
1980+	51.6

The average age of quilters from the 1960s to the early 1970s significantly decreased—by almost four years. This seemed to occur because the number of new quilters increased as the current quilt revival got into full swing. Quilts from 1975 on included only those begun between 1940 and 1970, so inconsistent average ages after 1975 may be the result of quilts being started by one person and finished by another.

Regional variations can be seen in the average age of quilters. Quilts made in the Midwest had the oldest quilters (58.6 years), while quilts made in multiple regions had the youngest (50.7 years). The average age for Nevada quilters was 52.5, four years younger than all other regions and six years below the average for surrounding western states. Nevada's relatively young average indicates that the introduction of women to the art of quilting was ongoing throughout the time period. To provide a sense of the current average age for quilters, an unofficial average for Las Vegas can be seen from a show of hands at a local quilt-guild retreat in September 2001: Only 4 of the 110 quilters there were younger than age 50. Attendence at this retreat seemed representative of quarterly quilt-guild meetings, although not necessarily representative of the national average, as I had been quilting for almost fifteen years when I joined my first guild at age 30. This is, however, consistent with ages from NHQP when only one five-year period had an average age younger than 50 years.

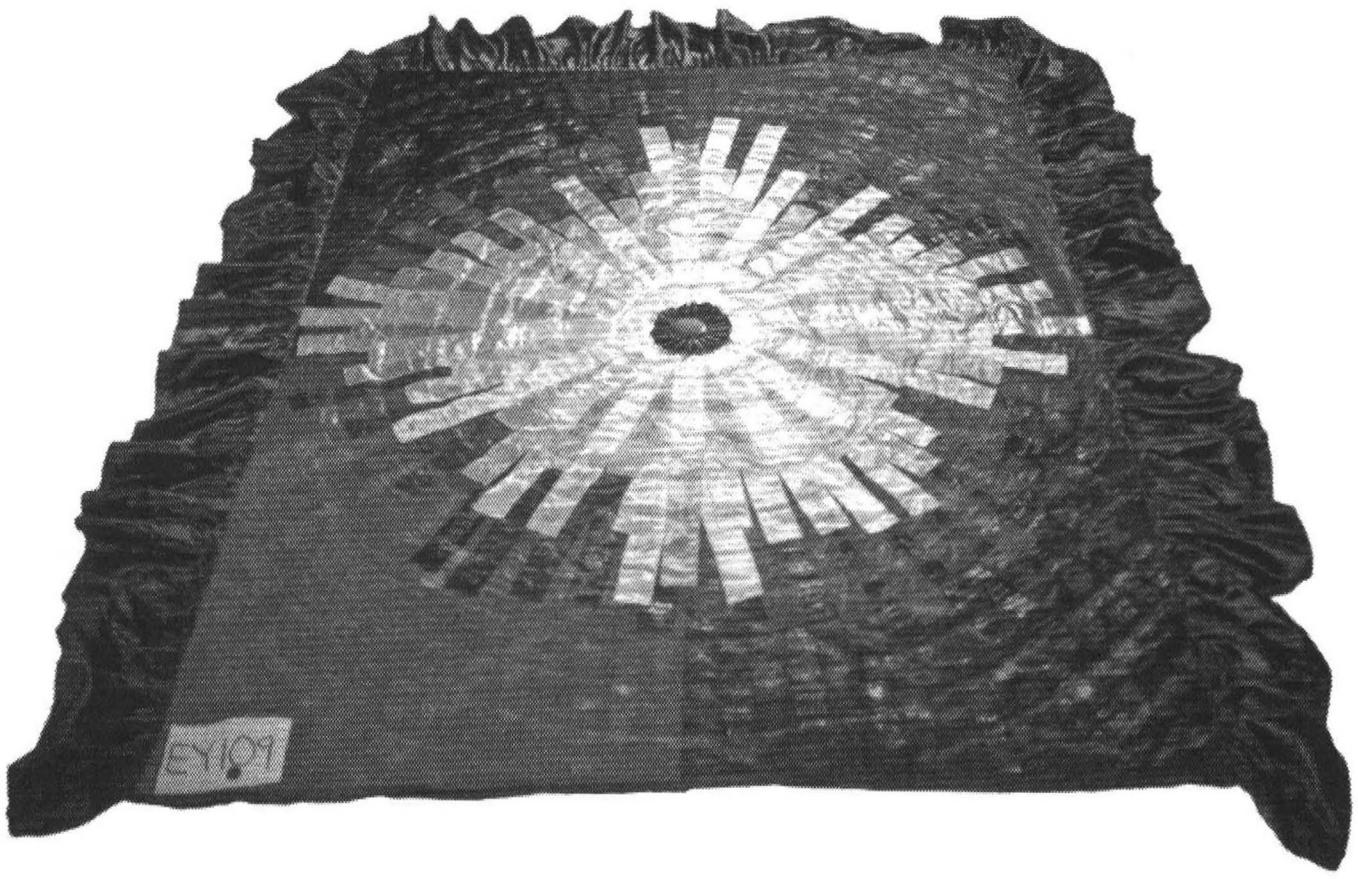
REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

Previous research has assumed that regional differences in quilting largely ended during the twentieth century through the impact of national pattern companies, advertising, and magazines.[11] State quilt projects such as Ohio's have found regional patterns within the state and differences by religious group,

which stemmed from nineteenth-century practices. I divided the quilts into six general regions of the United States (East, South, Midwest, Nevada, other West, and multiple, which includes tops made in one area and quilted in another). For Nevada and the West, I found regional practices, but not regional patterns. Some practices are found primarily in the West, and others are unique to Nevada and continued to appear during this time period.

As an example, for the fifty-three tied quilts, the region where the quilts were made was known for fifty. The vast majority (64 percent) were made in the West, more than half of which (seventeen quilts) were made in Nevada alone. The Nevada quilts constitute 34 percent of the total, more than any other region. Why this occurred is uncertain, although it seems to be part of the over-all "make do spirit" of Nevada quilts. A quarter of the tied quilts were made in the Midwest, while no tied quilts came from the South and only three from the East.

The majority of quilts (60 percent) made or begun between 1940 and 1975 used cotton fabric. Quilts with any woven poly-cotton fabric in their tops were included in the poly-cotton category. Other categories include silk-like fabrics, wool, combinations of these four categories, and other (i.e., denim, double knit, fair ribbons, Bull Durham pouches, etcetera). The inclusion of poly-cotton fabrics steadily decreased over time, with the biggest increase occurring during the 1960s. By the 1970s, more than 40 percent of quilts included poly-cotton fabric in their tops. More than twice as many poly-cotton quilts were made



Ribbon quilt by Antonia Haslam, Hunter, Utah, 1965. The quilt is made from Mrs. Haslam's husband's Utah State Fair ribbons won for his fancy chickens.
(Nevada Historical Society)

in Nevada as in any other region. Explaining why, Alice Godwin, one of the women I interviewed, noted both the relative unavailability of all-cotton fabric, and the lack of an overriding idea that quilts should be only be made with 100 percent cotton fabric.

A. G.: And this was the one I told you I had trouble finding a print, so I just used polyester—60 or 80 percent polyester. It's held up great, better than the cotton! (laughing) I don't know why we're so against polyester.

C. H.-P.: At what point did it become important to have all-cotton fabrics?

A. G.: I don't know. I've never thought it was that important. Just some people think.

C. H.-P.: So the fabrics you got were mixed cottons and poly-cottons.

A. G.: The cottons have a nice feel to them. The poly-cottons hold up well, the colors [do].

Regionally, silky quilts are primarily a product of the West (thirteen of sixteen quilts), with one from the South and two from the Midwest. Poly-cotton, unusual fabrics or combinations of fabrics, and silky quilts show a pattern of predominance in the West, and in particular in Nevada. Nevada's relatively sparse population and rural conditions seem to have encouraged a maverick and make-do spirit that created nontraditional quilts with even greater frequency than that found in the West in general and is in stark contrast to other parts of the United States.

When divided by region where quilts were made, friendship quilts were overwhelmingly made in the West (94 percent), and in particular in Nevada. The vast majority of western friendship quilts (eleven of seventeen) were made in Nevada, with five others in the West and one from the East. This is the only significant pattern of regional differences in the reasons why quilts were made, though it may be a reflection of the types of quilts chosen by owners for NHQP participation.

Between 1940 and 1970, Nevada was transformed from a rural to an urban state. In 1940, rural Nevadans made up 61 percent of the state's population; by 1970 they represented only 19 percent.[12] For the purposes of this study, I defined *urban* as a city having a population of forty thousand or more as of 1990. For the NHQP, this included Reno, Las Vegas, Henderson, and Carson City. No quilt days were held in North Las Vegas or Sparks, though they exceed that cutoff point.

One hypothesis was that rural quilt owners would have more knowledge about their quilts than urban owners because fewer of the rural quilts were purchased items, and because quilting traditions remained stronger there. The differences between rural and urban areas are inconsistent. The percentage of known birthdates of quilt makers is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. There were estimated dates for 47 percent of rural quilts, while 48 percent of urban quilts had estimated dates, but more urban quilts have makers with unknown birthdates than do rural quilts (47.6 percent versus. 31.7 percent).

Through the years, there were obvious differences in urban and rural areas with regard to how the current owner obtained the quilt. While only twenty-seven quilts in NHQP were purchased, 78 percent of those are owned by urban dwellers. Urban owners might have more access to antique stores, and proportionately fewer family quilts. And only in an urban area is one likely to find quilts by dumpster diving, like one example in NHQP!

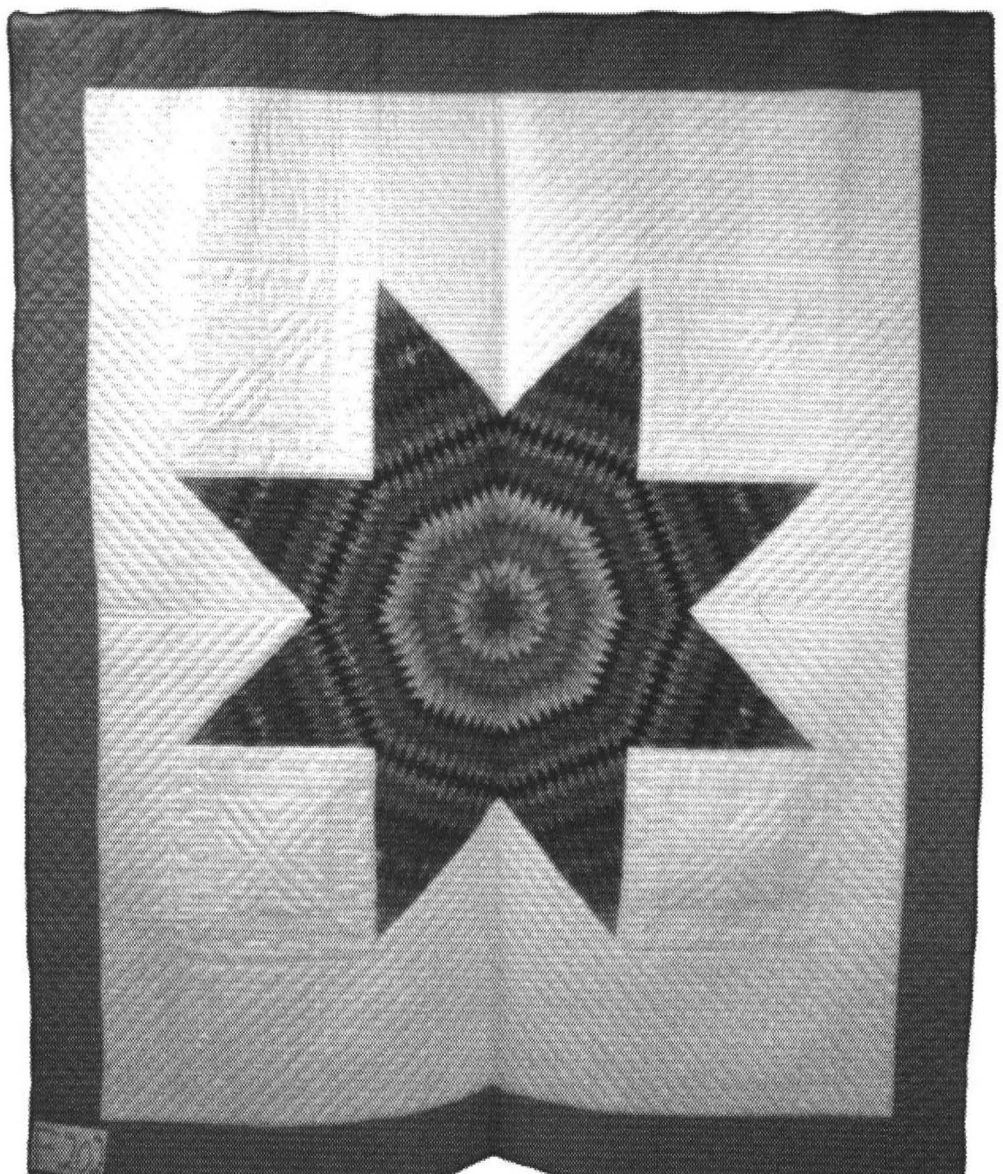
The maker's family owned the vast majority (85 percent) of quilts, with slightly more in rural areas than urban areas. The next most common owner (8 percent) was the receiver's family, where a gift was given outside the family and then passed down through the new family. Such quilts are found more frequently in rural areas than in urban areas.

Religion And Group Quilting

For the 315 quilts where the religion of the quilt maker was known, some differences by religion appear. Latter-Day Saint (Mormon) quilters made 34 percent of the quilts, Catholic quilters 25 percent, and Protestant quilters 41 percent. Statewide religious affiliation statistics for the mid twentieth century could not be found, so I averaged 1890 and 1990 statistics to estimate comparable percentages.[13] Statewide, 16 percent of the population was Mormon, 54 percent Catholic, 27 percent Protestant, and 2.7 percent Jewish. Thus, Mormon and Protestant quilts are disproportionately represented in the state quilt survey, while quilts made by Catholic quilters are underrepresented. The difference for Catholic quilts likely results from the underrepresentation of minority populations in the quilt survey, which includes no Latino or African-American quilters, figures based on a NHQP request that participants list the quilter's ethnic background.

There are significant differences in the religious distribution of quilt makers in the fifteen quilt-day locations. In several small communities (Bunkerville, Logandale, and Panaca/Caliente/Pioche), 57 percent to 86 percent of quilts are of Mormon origin. These are all early Mormon settlements along the eastern border with Utah. Carson City, Tonopah, and Lake Tahoe all show 50 percent or more of their quilts to be made by Catholic quilters, while Reno, Hawthorne, Lovelock, and Henderson have 48 to 53 percent of their quilts made by Protestant quilters.

Mormonism first grew largely in the West, and all but two Mormon quilts were made in the West. The importance of quilting within the Mormon church is reflected both in Nevada, where 63 percent of all quilts whose maker's religion was known are of Mormon origin, and in the West, where Mormon quilters made 46 percent of such quilts. The largest percentage of Catholic quilts (29 percent) and Protestant quilts (31 percent) came from the Midwest. Few quilts came from the East, but 38 percent of them were from Catholic quilters. From



"Star of Bethlehem" by Mamie Dunn, 1966 and quilted by the Harmony Social Club in Fallon, Nevada. Mamie Dunn was also a member of this womens' club that quilted dozens of quilts for its members and others of the community.
(Nevada Historical Society)

the South, 56 percent of quilts came from Protestant quilters. The percentage of quilts whose maker's religion was unknown was consistently around 36 percent across all regions.

When looking at the reasons for quilting divided by religion, several different patterns emerge. Fewer Mormon quilts were made for unknown reasons (7 percent versus 15 percent for Protestants, and 24 percent for Catholics). Friendship or commemorative quilts are primarily a Mormon phenomenon, eight of eleven being made by them. Other Mormon quilts are evenly divided among those made for a wedding or an anniversary, a baby or child, and as a gift. The pattern for quilts made by Catholics and Protestants are similar to one another. Baby/child quilts and gift quilts are made in similar proportions, while wedding/anniversary quilts are made less frequently (18 percent of Catholic, 25 percent of Protestant quilts).

Group Work

I defined a group quilt as one on which more than one person worked on the top or the quilting, though it does not include quilts where the top was made by one person and quilted by another. The "group" may be two people, including the quilt-top maker, a group of friends or family, or a social or church group. In the NHQP, ninety-five quilts were made by groups, including fifty-three made by named groups. These latter divide into three types: homemaker/social/neighborhood clubs (twenty-six), senior centers (two), and church groups (twenty-five).

Of all group quilts, the religion of the maker is known for sixty-four of ninety-five quilts (68 percent). Of those, 30 percent were Mormon, 19 percent Catholic, and 45 percent Protestant. These proportions are close to the over-all ratio of Nevada quilts by religion. Nevada had an unusually high percentage of group quilts in comparison to quilts in the NHQP survey from other regions of the United States. Of those Nevada group quilts, an unusually high percentage was Mormon-made. This is another indication of the significance of Mormon women in contributing to Nevada's quilting tradition.

Two social clubs, the Harmony Social Club of Fallon and the Homemakers Club of Rule, Arkansas, were each responsible for nine of the twenty-six group quilts. In both cases, the top makers were members of the groups and thus contributed to the quilting of their own tops. That relationship is less clear in other groups, which also may have "taken in" quilt tops as a fundraising effort.

Given the small number of quilts from the East whose makers and quilters were known (eleven), finding no group-quilted quilts is not greatly outside the average expectation of one or two quilts (see Table 3). However, the distinction between Nevada and the rest of the West (31.9 percent versus 15.0 percent), where more than twice the number of quilts was group quilted, indicates a reliance on group quilting not found elsewhere. The production from one social club in each area skewed the totals for both Nevada and the South. By removing them from the calculations, less than 10 percent of southern quilts were group quilted, which brings that area into line with all of the other regions. Even with that adjustment, however, group quilting accounted for more than 25 percent of Nevada quilts. The state difference remains.

TABLE 3
Group Quilts, By Region

Region	*Number of Group Quilts*	*Percentage of Group Quilts*
Nevada	45	32
West	16	15
Midwest	11	12
South	14	26
East	0	0
Multiple	8	21

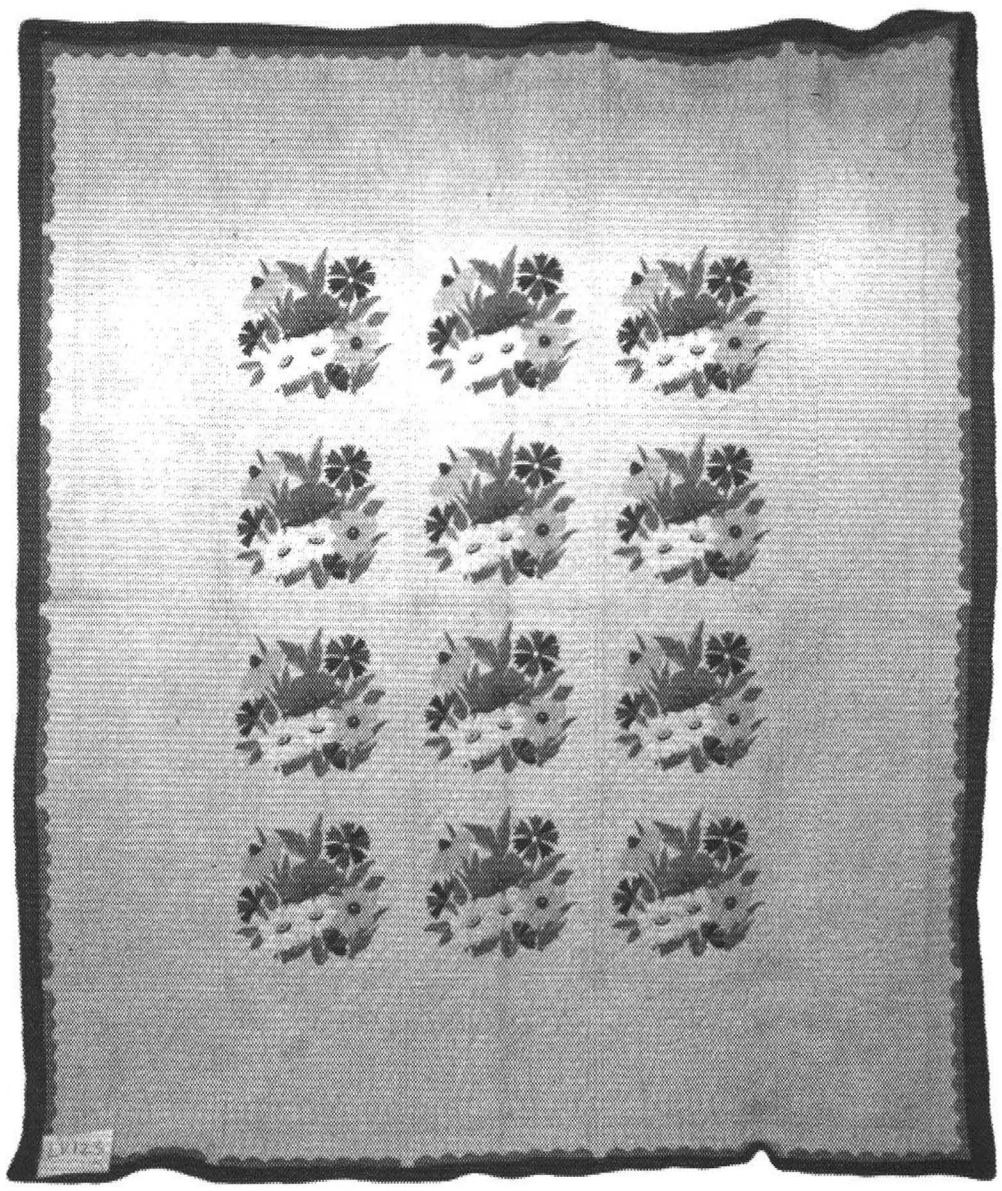
METHODS, MATERIALS, AND KIT USAGE

The primary methods for constructing tops were by hand (42.5 percent), by machine (30.8 percent), and by hand and machine combined (9.0 percent). The use of machine construction and combination hand-and-machine construction kept growing until 1970. From 1955 through 1970, less than 50 percent of quilts were hand pieced. The low point for hand construction was between 1965 and 1969 when 38 percent of quilts were hand sewn and 50 percent were machine sewn. This highlights the dramatic reversal from 1970 to 1975, when 52 percent were hand sewn and 39 percent were machine made. Combination construction did not change dramatically during that time. Women in the 1970s returned to traditional hand construction, reversing an increasing trend toward machine construction, though machine use hovers around 50 percent from then on.

While machine construction clearly increased, hand quilting remained the norm. Quilting is visible, and expectations of hand quilting appear to have remained the same during this time. In contrast, top construction is largely invisible. An increasing emphasis on production and time constraints instead of process could have accompanied the increase in machine construction. From 1956 to 1960, the titles of 9 percent of magazine articles contained the words "easy," "quick," or "speedy," and for the years 1961-1965, the figure was 8 percent. Before and after this time, fewer than 5 percent of the articles used such terminology. The beginning of the current revival placed an emphasis on traditional construction and the process of quilting, so that women were more willing to spend the extra time on hand piecing and appliqué.

Hand quilting remained the expected norm throughout the time period. The vast majority of quilts continued to be made by hand (83 percent). From 1965 on, machine quilting and tying became more popular, dropping the percentage of hand-quilted quilts below 80 percent, yet never less than 77 percent of all quilts. While the frequency of machine quilting changed during this time period, from a single one of fifty-four quilts from 1945 to 1949 (2 percent), to 9 percent from 1940 to 1944 and after 1975, the total number of quilts is so small that no over-all pattern through time is discernable. Aesthetic and use considerations appear to be the dominant concerns in determining the type of quilting method used. Technological changes such as walking feet and long-arm sewing machines were not available until the 1980s and 1990s, restricting the type of machine quilting that could be done.

Of the 511 quilts in NHQP, 53 were tied. Most of the tied quilts were made between 1960 and 1975 (31 of 53 quilts) with an average of 10 quilts per five-year period. Before and after, 7 or fewer tied quilts were made per five-year period. This coincides with the increasing average age of quilters, though the average age of quilters who tied quilts is 59.6 years, older than any of the averages by five-year time period. Tying seems to be more related to the age of the quilter than to the time period when the quilt was made.



"Keene's Quilt" by Mary Dinard. This quilt was quilted with the help of friends and family, then given as a wedding present. It was from a 1940s quilt kit, rediscovered about 1960, and worked on for fifteen years. It won an honorary mention at a Las Vegas fair c. 1977. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

Quilts made from kits accounted for 11.5 percent of the total NHQP sample. Kit usage is highest from 1955 to 1964 and 1970 to 1974, but is found throughout the entire time period studied. While only ten of almost two hundred articles written from 1940 to 1970 mention quilt kits, seven of them were published between 1958 and 1964, which is reflected in the peak time for kit quilts found in the NHQP. Over-all, the most popular style of kit quilt was the embroidery-only quilt (30 percent), followed by quilts that combined piecing, appliqué, and/or embroidery (29 percent) and appliqué quilts (22 percent) (see Table 4). Only one whole-cloth kit quilt and five pieced kit quilts could be found, though pieced kits are hard to identify without documentation from the time period. Appliqué and embroidered quilts were found throughout the thirty-five-year period, though the popularity of embroidered quilts peaked after 1965, while appliqué kit quilts were spread evenly throughout the period.

TABLE 4
Kit-made Quilts by Top Type

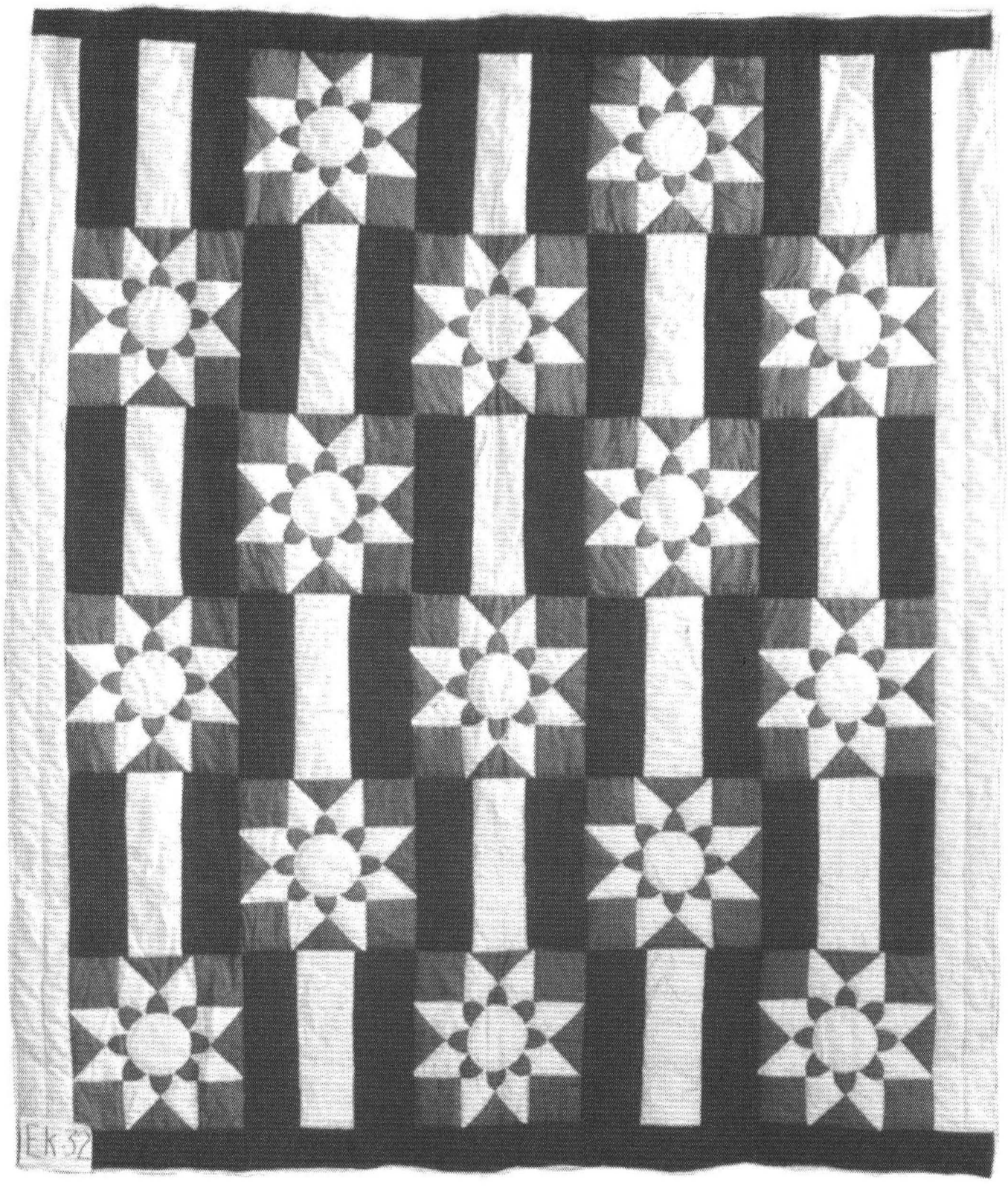
Top Type	*Percentage*
Embroidered	35.6
Combination	28.8
Appliqué	22.0
Pieced	8.5
Other	3.4
Whole cloth	1.7

What cannot be known from the quilts themselves without more extensive information is the level of modification made to suit individual tastes. Looking at slides of the quilts, I was struck by the differences among individual quilts, even as they followed a pattern. In one example from interviews, Delores Vervey addressed this question:

> I used to always use Mountain Mist quilt batting. And one of the patterns—oh, this was one of my very best quilts. I think it's called Morning Glory. It's appliquéd. And I think it was a kit I sent away for. I got pink, blue, and lavender, and those were the flowers. It seems to me there were a lot of vines that I embroidered. And then, because I like the insects, I went in with different fabrics and I sat and stitched several grasshoppers on there. And I embroidered butterflies. The patterns for the butterflies were off of wrapping paper. They looked like satin-stitch butterflies, and so I satin-stitched butterflies around in there. And I put in ladybugs that I embroidered. And then I quilted butterflies in there, and I said "these are spirits of butterflies lost." And that's one of my very, very best quilts. It's actually wonderful, quite gorgeous. And it got a grand champion in the Nevada State Fair. It was one of my very, very early ones.

State quilt projects offer a vast amount of potential information about women's lives, and they document the artistic production of many women for whom we have very little other information. Quilts reflect a growing acceptance of machine construction techniques and the use of the new synthetic fabrics—a sign that quilters, engaged in an age-old art, relished the postwar consumer boom. Although the average age of quilters increased between 1940 and 1975, there were also women who had only recently discovered quilting. Few quilts were identified as being first quilts, so why and how these women became interested in quilting is unclear. In my interviews, several women said they made quilts for their new babies in the 1950s and 1960s, although these might have been the quilts they took forty years to make. Mormon quilters were an

intrinsic part of maintaining the quilting tradition in Nevada. The Nevada Heritage Quilt Project offers a new way to view the changes in technology and social organization that affected women's lives after World War II, as well as documenting the ways in which migrants from other states changed the face of Nevada quilting.



Flower star quilt made in 1964 by Alma Murphy and quilted by the Relief Society of Elko, Nevada. The quilt was made to honor Nevada's centennial.
(Nevada Historical Society)

NOTES

[1]Elizabeth Barber, *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1994).

[2]*Ibid.*, 30.

[3]*Ibid.*, 128.

[4]Thomas Schlereth, *Material Culture Studies in America* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1982), 2.

[5]Kathlyn Sullivan, *Gatherings: America's Quilt Heritage* (Paducah: American Quilter's Society, 1995), 174.

[6]Any quilts identified as "made in the 1970s" were also excluded from my study as being past the time period. They would have been given an averaged 1975 date, and thus the 1970s count would probably have been higher. To see how this dating affected over-all decade counts, I averaged the differences between the first and second halves of each decade for the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. The projected count for 1975 to 1979 would have been 162 quilts and 258 for the entire decade, reflecting the growth in quilting as the revival took off.

[7]Shelley Feazell, *Nevada Quilts: A Material History Perspective* (Reno: M.A. thesis, University of Nevada Reno, 1995), 115.

[8]It seemed reasonable to assume that more information might exist about more recently completed quilts. Using known versus estimated dates, a more recently completed quilt was more likely to have a known date than an earlier quilt. The later a quilt was made, the more knowledge exists about its date, a pattern that is clearly established, except for the 1950s (see Table 5 below). Using the estimated completion date as an indicator, information on quilts is often lost over time. While family quilts are valued and passed down, the stories that accompany them often are lost.

TABLE 5
Estimated and Known Dates By Decade
(In Percentage)

Date	*Known*	*Estimated*
1940-1949	47.6	52.4
1950-1959	39.0	60.9
1960-1969	55.5	44.2
1970-1979	70.2	29.7
1980+	69.2	30.8

[9]Susan Bernick, "A Quilt Is an Art Object When It Stands Up Like a Man," in Cheryl Torsney and Judy Elsley, eds., *Quilt Culture* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994); Barbara Brackman, *Clues in the Calico: A Guide to Identifying and Dating Antique Quilts* (New York: EPM Publications, Inc., 1989); Mary Jane Furgason and Patricia Cox Crews, "Prizes from the Plains: Nebraska State Fair Award-Winning Quilts and Quiltmakers," in *Uncoverings 1993*, Laurel Horton, ed. (San Francisco: American Quilt Study Group, 1994); Eileen Trestain, *Dating Fabrics: A Color Guide (1800-1960)*, (Paducah: American Quilter's Society, 1998); Charlotte Williams, *Florida Quilts* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992).

[10]Kathlyn Sullivan, "Introduction," in *North Carolina Quilts*, Ellen Fickling Eames, et al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 6.

[11]Merikay Waldvogel, *Soft Covers for Hard Times: Quiltmaking and the Great Depression* (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1990), xiii.

[12]United States Census Bureau, "Urban and Rural Population: 1900 to 1990" (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 1995), retrieved 21 February 2004, www.census.gov/population/censusdata/urpop0090.txt.

[13]Edwin Gaustad and Philip Barlow, *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 370-372.

Notes & Documents

New Acquisitions at the Nevada Historical Society

Nevada Historical Society Staff

Library

The Nevada Historical Society recently received a donation of Sanborn fire insurance maps of Nevada towns: Austin 1907, revised to 1941; Battle Mountain 1927, revised to 1952; Carson City 1907, revised to 1952; Dayton 1907, revised to 1930; Elko 1927, revised to 1952; Ely (including East Ely) 1923, revised to 1952; Eureka 1907, revised to 1941; Fallon 1923, revised to 1943; Gardnerville 1923, revised to 1943; and Hawthorne 1942, revised to 1943. Sanborn maps are created for insurance companies for underwriting purposes. Researchers find them very useful for charting the development and growth of cities, towns, and neighborhoods. They provide a visual representation of residential, industrial, and commercial development over time. The maps show property boundary lines, what types of structures are on a piece of property and what they are made of, as well as showing street names and their locations.

The Sanborn Map Company was founded in 1866 to provide detailed information of potential fire risks to residential, commercial, and industrial buildings. The company has produced maps for more than twelve thousand towns and cities across the United States. To see a list of Sanborn maps for all the states and their locations, go to http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/EART/sanbul.html.

Michael Maher
Librarian

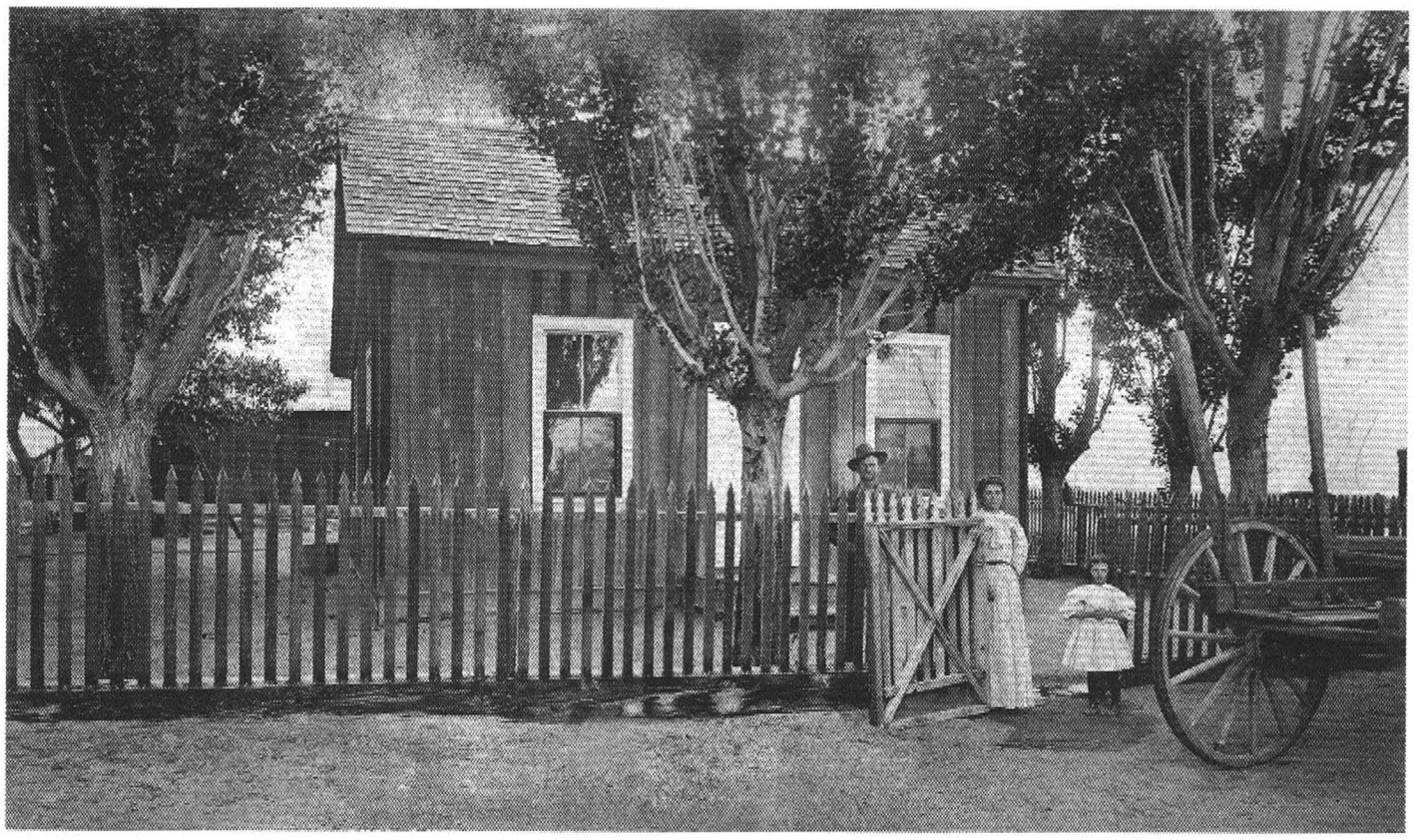
PHOTOGRAPHY

The Anna Box Collection is an important new donation at the Nevada Historical Society. The collection includes two albums, two copies of mounted photographs, and copies or originals of fourteen significant postcards, all dating from the turn of the last century to the 1930s. The most important single item is Anna Box's personal photo album depicting her life growing up in Hawthorne during this period when Hawthorne was a ranching and mining center. Hawthorne became host to one of the West Coast's major military-ordinance depots.

Anna's father, George Box, who emigrated from Canada in 1870, was a stagecoach owner. George had previously worked on the Denver-Greeley Railroad, and used his savings to secure a wool contract from the War Department. In 1896, George married Wilhelmina Striker of Bodie, California. They had two children, Anna and George, Jr. During the rich 1906 gold strike at the Lucky Boy Mine, west of town, George staked several claims. Perhaps more important, Mr. Box also controlled the transportation business from the railroad to this camp. George, Jr. worked as a driver and later became a contractor. Anna married Thompson I. Nixon of Reno.

One early (1880s) photograph shows George, his wife, Minnie (Wilhelmina), and Anna in front of their first pioneer-style ranch house near Hawthorne. Another mounted photograph shows George shoeing a horse in front of his stables. Anna's album contains photographs of her father's stagecoaches and freight teams; scenes of Hawthorne, such as the Lucky Boy Café; horse-riding outings with friends and family; and their later automobile trips throughout the area, including ones to Walker Lake and Walley's Hot Springs. Anna, by then known as Nannie Ann, was the mother of Lois Midgley (who married Denver Dickerson, the son of Nevada governor Denver Dickerson), and the grandmother of Diane and Delcey Dickerson. Another album in the collection dates from the 1950s and consists of photographs taken by a Chinese-American woman, Ming Lee Wang, on hunting and fishing trips with Nixon and Box family members.

Lee Brumbaugh
Curator of Photography



The Box family ranch, Hawthorne, Nevada, 1889. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

Anna Box in Hawthorne, Nevada, c. 1908. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

Mineral specimens from the Con-Virginia Mine, Virginia City, Nevada.
(Nevada Historical Society)

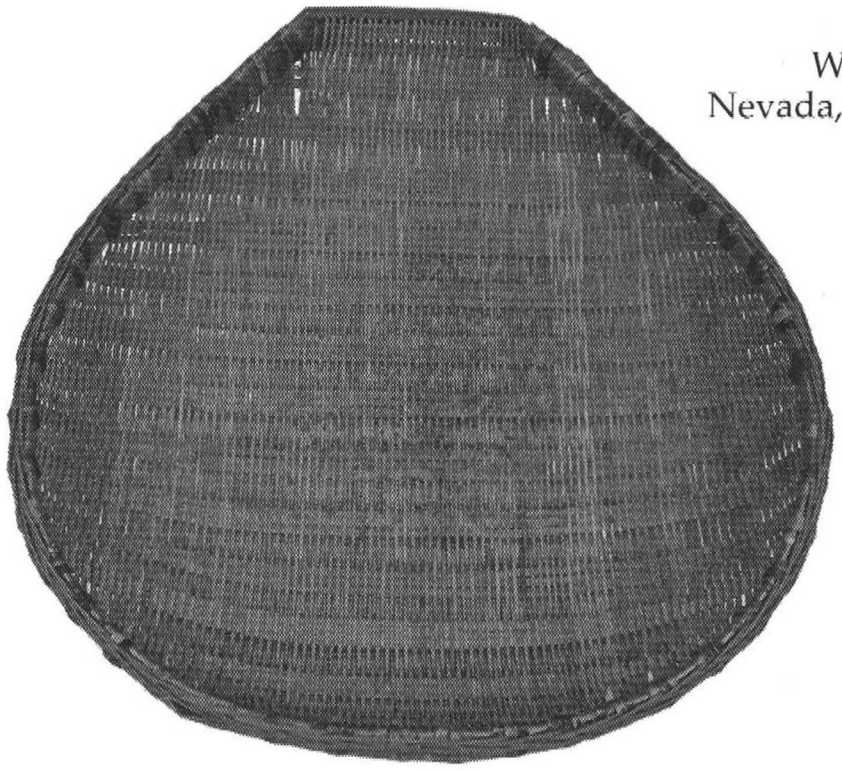
MUSEUM

In recent months, the Nevada Historical Society has acquired a number of important artifacts through generous donations. Without funds to purchase artifacts, the historical society must rely on the generosity of the public. Obtaining artifacts from historic Nevada families and businesses is a crucial part of the society's collecting mission. These items represent important aspects of Nevada's history that might be lost to future generations.

The Read family donated a utilitarian basket. Dr. Read, who was a practicing physician during the 1950s, and his family lived in the Elko area. Dr. Read received a Nevada winnowing basket as payment for services rendered to one of his patients at the time. The weaving and over-all condition of the basket are excellent, with only slight discoloration on the surface of the basket from possible use.

Fred Holabird, owner of Holabird Americana, facilitated the donation of six Comstock mineral specimens originally collected by the late James Quirk, a miner and sheriff in Virginia City, Nevada, circa 1890-1900. These historically valuable specimens are from the original Ophir or Con-Virginia mines. This quality of high-grade ore specimens of the bonanza period would have been valued at about $400 per ton at the time of discovery.

The donation of a railroad toolbox is a carpenter's dream. The toolbox includes all of the original tools used by a carpenter/mechanic who worked at the Southern Pacific Depot, stationed in Fallon, Nevada. Several of the



Winnowing basket from Elko, Nevada, at least forty-five years old.
(Nevada Historical Society)

Little red chair from the kindergarten at Veterans Memorial Elementary School, Reno, Nevada.
(Nevada Historical Society)

tools include the original S. P. identification mark stamped onto the surface. The historical society was fortunate to receive such a complete donation.

Another generous donation came from Grace and Bud Fujii: a World War II WAC uniform and insignia belonging to the late Major Sylvia Ernest of Reno. Mrs. Fujii had created an exhibit on Ms. Ernest several years ago for the Reno Alumni Museum, and the family recently asked her to forward this wonderful garment to the society. Mrs. Fujii also donated a wooden desk from Northside Elementary School and a small, red wooden chair that was used in the kindergarten at Veterans Memorial School. Bud Fujii has for many years collected and displayed cameras and accessories from World War I through the 1970s. Through his donation, the society acquired thirty-seven working cameras and accessories.

Sheryln Hayes-Zorn
Registrar/Curator

Give the Gift of the Past!

A membership in the Nevada Historical Society makes the perfect gift for the friend or family member who shares your fascination with Nevada's heritage. A year's gift membership brings all the benefits you enjoy: four issues of the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, free admission to all seven museums in the Nevada Division of Museums and History, a 15% discount in all the museums' stores, invitations to exhibition openings, programs and events, the *Nevada Department of Cultural Affairs Newsletter*. Plus, any amount over $18 that is paid in membership fees is tax deductible and supports the educational programming of the Nevada Historical Society.

Membership Categories

___ Yes, I want to give a gift of membership in the Nevada Historical Society at the following level:

___	Individual	$35
___	Family	$50
___	Sustaining	$100
___	Contributing	$250
___	Patron	$500
___	Benefactor	$1,000
___	Senior*	$20

**For those seniors who would simply like free admission, the 15% museum store discounts, and the divisional newsletter, and not the Nevada Historical Quarterly, we have created a special senior membership category. For those seniors who would also like to receive the Nevada Historical Quarterly, membership at the higher levels, beginning at $35, is available.*

Member Information

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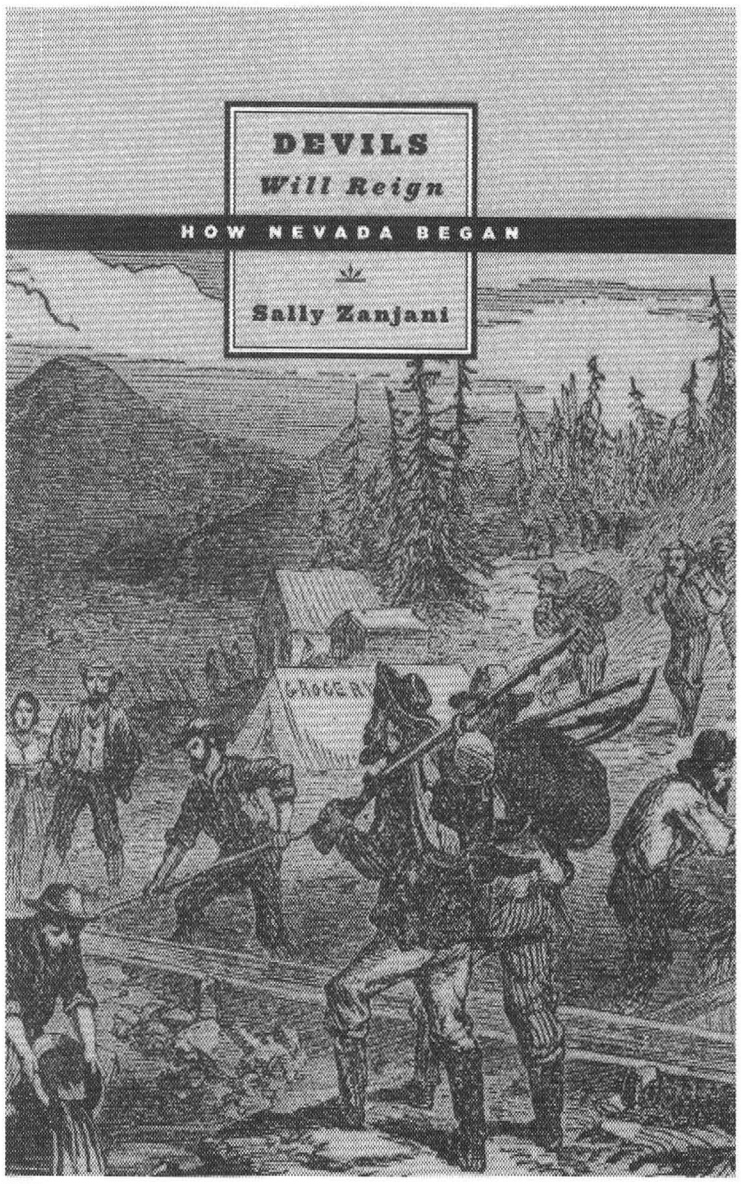

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In *Devils Will Reign*, acclaimed historian Sally Zanjani recounts the momentous early history of the territory that is now known as Nevada. Dr. Zanjani is a faculty member of the Department of Political Science at the University of Nevada, Reno, and the author of eight books on the history of Nevada and the West.

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