

Mint Edition

Newsletter of the Nevada State Museum, Carson City
Nevada Department of Tourism & Cultural Affairs

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An Interview with Curator of History, Bob Nylen

by Deborah Stevenson, Curator of Education

When people think of the Nevada State Museum, I'll bet they picture Bob Nylen, guardian of the museum's history and heritage. We know he's the one to ask if we have a question about Nevada history. But do we really know the man behind the curator's hat? In order to answer this question, I enjoyed a nice, heart-to-heart chat with Bob Nylen:

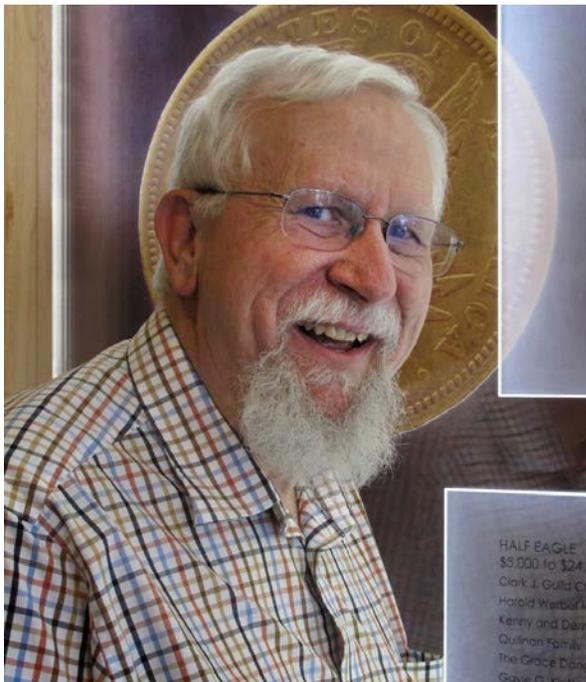


Photo: Jeanette McGregor

What exactly does a curator of history do?

Much of my time is spent answering questions, helping the public, and providing information for scholars. I try to be as supportive and helpful as possible. If I can't help them, I direct them to other sources. I research and write exhibit text for labels and serve as a resource for community projects involving history. For example, I did research and confirmed facts for the Carson City Blue Line (Kit Carson) walking tour. I determine if a donation is appropriate for our collection, and if it's not, I help the donor find an appropriate museum or historical society.

Tell us about your vision.

I embrace the history of this institution. We are a part of the on-going story and contribute to the mission/vision that Judge Guild started. We touch people by what we do. When I observe visitors in the history gallery, I am aware that it's a multi-generational experience. The continuation of history is important. Think of the impact of the mine exhibit! Even older exhibits have their value. I am fortunate to work with talented people. I've formed a close relationship with many families. I strive to show a genuine interest in their lives and share their stories through the displays.

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When did you first get interested in history? What motivated you to move out West from Chicago? Describe how you got the job here.

My former brother-in-law, William (Bill) Douglass, is a native Nevadan. Frankly, I wasn't sure if I was "college material." Bill, who was a professor at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), convinced me to try UNR in 1970. It was the best decision I ever made! I had wonderful mentors and professors: Hulse, Shepperson, Elliott, Rowley, etc. They made me realize that history was my passion. After earning my master's degree, I got a part-time job as a research assistant at the Nevada Historical Society (NHS) in 1976, and worked as their registrar (part-time, no benefits) in the 1980s. It was very exciting, because at this time I made two month-long trips to do research at the Library of Congress and National Archives in Washington, D.C. I was athletic then, and used to run on the Mall and up to the Lincoln Memorial.

When I got married, I needed a better job to support a family. On February 15, 1984, I was hired as registrar at NSM. Then, because of my background as historian, I became NSM's first Curator of History in 1989. It was long overdue, since the museum had curatorial positions in anthropology and natural history since the 1950s.

How has your role at the museum changed over the years?

The biggest change was taking on the coin press operation, 14 years ago. When Ken Hopple came on board, it became a great partnership. There were many great projects including the State Quarter, four medallion designs for NV 150, Nevada Legislature, V & T Reconstruction, plus dozens of anniversaries: Las Vegas, Gardnerville, Reno, Minden, Carson City, Wendover, etc. The museum enjoys a strong connection to communities, and the coin press



Bob and his wife Dorothy presently have four adopted horses, all pure Spanish mustangs from the Utah/Nevada border. Though they are too small (about 13 hands) for Bob to even consider riding, he loves animals and spends many hours with them.

helped us raise funds for critical staff positions during the recession. Since I know the history, I play a role in helping these communities plan their birthday celebrations.

What's the most challenging situation you have encountered in your career? Was there also one project that was especially memorable or gratifying?

Raising community awareness of the value of the museum has been challenging. This museum has been a supporter of museums throughout the state. We are a beacon for others here and outside the state. Yet, locals often overlook us. Once they come inside, they are amazed at the quality of the exhibits and the scope of the collections.

The project I remember fondly is *Silver in the Golden State*, a major traveling exhibition developed by the Oakland Museum in partnership with NSM and several other

museums. I had the thrill of holding the ceremonial Nevada Silver Spike from the Transcontinental Railroad! The exhibit opened in Oakland and was later on display in both the Senate and Assembly Chambers in the Nevada State Capitol. Before that time, people who visited the Capitol were disappointed by the lack of historical displays. So, when the exhibit ended, we could not bear to throw it away. We decided to repurpose the walls and cases we had built—to consolidate the display to fit into the Senate. It opened in 1989, the 125th anniversary of the state. Now the exhibits need updating, but they served a good purpose for many years.

You're very devoted to the museum. What hobbies do you enjoy outside of work?

I guess you could say that history is my life, but as a younger man, I enjoyed coaching youth sports, especially baseball and basketball. Now my son is 33. Our hobby for the last five years is saving wild horses, although I've only been on a horse for ten minutes in my whole life! We adopted four from Palomino Valley.

What advice would you give to a young person thinking about a career as a museum curator or historian?

It's one of the greatest careers you could have. I feel blessed. Try every avenue you can. There are not many jobs, but if you have the passion and hold out (maybe not marry too young), you can make it. I would recommend a graduate program in museum studies and it is very important to volunteer.

Anything else?

Maybe there's a future historian out there. How can we inspire them? I used to go to the Field Museum in Chicago every year with my school. When I see school groups here, I remember that experience. History makes you humble. I realize how little we really know.

Message from the Director



by Jim Barmore

I wish I could share with others the museum's magical moments – how much the museum makes a difference in the lives of students, residents, families, and tourists, and how these benefits contribute to the wellbeing of our communities and state. Staff and volunteers witness these special moments every day. If only I had a way to record and rate them. If only I had a Magical Moment Meter.

We enhance people's lives through heritage education. Staff and volunteers pursue this mission with dedication and passion. We work hard to maximize public benefit. While doing this, we need to know if we're succeeding. Are we making a difference? Are visitors, communities, and the state better off because of what we do? We need to know. State officials, members, donors, and other constituents need to know. But, how do we measure the enhancement of people's lives? So

much of what we do is hard to quantify. We resort to simplistic methods – counting the number of visitors, students, tourists, and researchers. We assume the higher the number the more benefit achieved. Or, we look at revenues, which is important for accountability, but isn't much use for evaluating educational outcomes. Sometimes we do surveys, which are more meaningful. Less formal approaches are even more revealing – observing reactions of students during a demonstration, interactions of a family as they tour an exhibit, the response of the audience during a lecture. You see insight in people's eyes – moments of wonder and new understanding. These are what we strive for. These are what we're all about. They happen on a regular basis, all the time, every day. But, we have no way of capturing these most important indicators of success.

Clearly we need a measuring tool, a gauge. We need a Magical Moment Meter. It could track the number of moments and intensity. It could create graphs for reporting to state officials. It could rank the museum overall. I'm sure the museum would rise to the highest category of magical moments. Certainly in this age of astounding technological advance someone could invent such a device. Finally I'd have an indisputable way to prove our true worth.



Editor's Note

by Deborah Stevenson

In this season of gratitude and joyous celebration, I would like to thank all those who have made my career at the Nevada State Museum fulfilling and fun: the talented volunteers and staff, curious and eager school children, the wonderful people who attend the lectures and family programs, and all of you who enjoy the newsletter. My co-editor, Jeanette McGregor, has been an endless source of inspiration and support, and Jim Barmore, our fearless leader, has always believed in me. With a mixture of expectation and sadness, I am taking this opportunity to announce my upcoming retirement. My last day will be March 1, 2016, so this will be my last newsletter. It's been a great twelve years. I look forward to devoting more time to art, outdoor adventures, and community service. Be well and happy and keep supporting this great museum!

It's hard to leave something you love. As NSM's first Curator of Education, I had the privilege of building the program from scratch. The most gratifying part has been working with superbly talented and dedicated volunteers. They helped me transform my dreams into reality.

I love all the tours, but the science projects have been the most fun. From Funky Fungi to Wild and Wonderful Wetlands, Flowers, and Desert Adaptation, these interdisciplinary programs help kids go wild over nature. By incorporating both art and science, and adding a little social studies, creative writing, math, and movement, we teach the whole child. This makes the museum a "happening" place, which is what I always wanted. It can be noisy and messy at times, but in a good way. We've created a total of 19 programs that use our classroom and Discovery Lab. None of this was here 12 years ago.

I really enjoy creating programs that complement the changing exhibits. Perhaps because I love art, my favorites have been Art and the Animal (2005) and the Art of Nature (2009), plus

I knew it was coming, but I still wasn't prepared when Deborah Stevenson gave me the good news about her retirement. I will sorely miss my fellow "Comma Queen" and the fun of producing this newsletter with an exceptional editor and partner. I am so pleased she will be able to explore her artistic passions as well as more Nevada peaks!

Up to the highest heights!

Jeanette McGregor

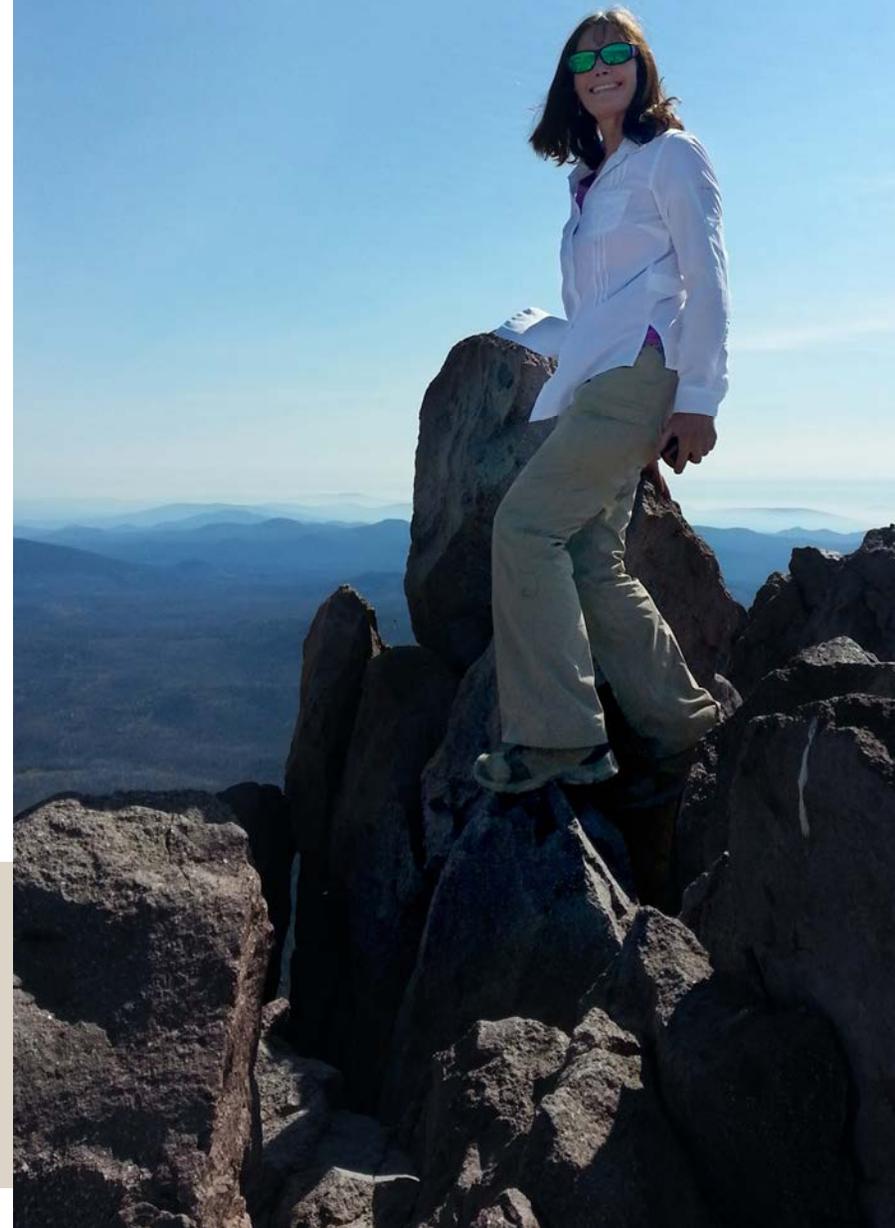
Interwoven: Visions of the Great Basin Basketmakers (2006 & 2010). It's really fun to work with creative people and to watch them demonstrate their skills. I am also an anthropologist, so it was fulfilling to work in partnership with Folklife Program of the Nevada Arts Council to bring American Indian artists to the museum.

Finally, I had a vision of this museum being bilingual (Spanish/English). Even though the bilingual tours were not successful, we did host several bilingual exhibits and cultivated a relationship with the Latino community, leading to ten years of successful Day of the Dead celebrations. We also embraced the Basque community and hosted lectures on the Chinese and other ethnic groups important to Nevada's history. I meet lots of interesting people at the lectures.

I decided to retire early for several reasons. I look forward to being in nature and exploring my creativity. I will probably do some teaching. Mostly I look forward to slowing down. Life is too precious to rush through. I want to savor every minute.

Celebrating 12 Years of Museum Education

by Deborah Stevenson, Curator of Education



Frances Humphrey Lecture Series
Thursday, January 28, 2016

Sliding Bones

of Smith Creek Valley Playa, NV and
their Similarity to Racing Rocks in
Death Valley, CA

In July 2013, George Baumgardner, NSM Curator of Natural History, found evidence indicating a unique type of movement of bones across the surface of Smith Creek Valley Playa, in central Nevada, USA. Five skeletal elements or bone groups were observed resting at the ends of furrow-like trails inscribed in the playa surface. These trails, with their bones, appear similar to the phenomenon described as “racing” or “sailing rocks” that is best documented from Racetrack Playa in Death Valley, California, USA. Recently favored explanations for such movement involve combinations of water, low temperature, microbial mats, and wind. Dr. Baumgardner will discuss these options and the significance of such movement by skeletal material in the next Frances Humphrey Lecture Series, 6:30 pm, Thursday, January 28, 2016; doors open at 6:00 pm.

George Baumgardner attended Texas A&M University, where he received degrees in Zoology and Wildlife Science, and Memphis State University, where he graduated with a Doctor of Philosophy in Biology. He has studied vertebrates, primarily small and medium sized mammals, for over 40 years.

Dr. Baumgardner has curated wildlife collections at the University of Texas, Memphis State University, and Texas A&M University, and has been a Curator of Natural History at the Nevada State Museum, Carson City, since 1998. In his current position, he has become increasingly involved in interpretation, sharing the wonders of Nevada’s animals and habitat with the public.

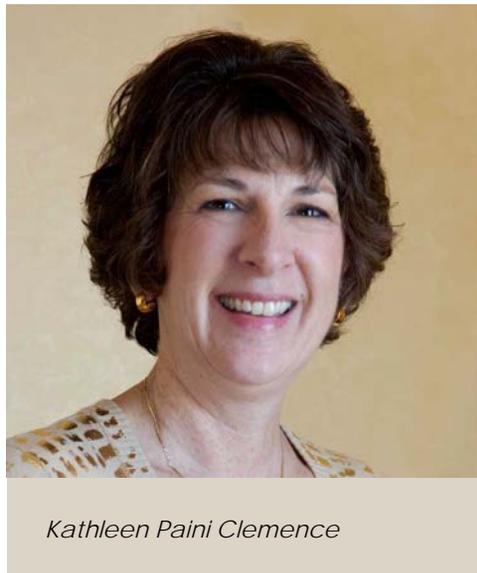


Photo: Scott Klette

Frances Humphrey Lecture Series
Thursday, February 25, 2016

JW and Annie Davis: Their Riveting Lives

As the well-known inventor of riveted work pants, much has been written about Jacob William "JW" Davis; some fact and some fiction. Having followed numerous paper trails, genealogist Kathleen Clemence will present the true story of Davis, and his family, based on documented evidence at the Frances Humphrey Lecture Series, 6:30 pm, Thursday, February 25, 2016; doors open at 6:00 pm.



Kathleen Paini Clemence

Weaving the intricate threads of Davis' compelling life story, Clemence will discuss his journey from Russia through the Canadian wilderness and on to the American West, as well as his many business ventures along the way. Details will include his intriguing family history, including his marriage to Annie Packscher, who may be the missing link in this story that changed the future of the fashion industry. This, of course, begs the question: Who really wore the pants in the Davis family?

After retiring in 1994 as an Air Force officer, Kathleen made Reno her home. She then worked in the travel industry and served as a volunteer at the local, state, and national levels. Fully retiring in 2007, Kathleen now devotes her time to genealogy.

Distantly related to the Packscher family, which includes Jacob William Davis' wife, Clemence conducted extensive research into the family, eventually leading to her interest and research on JW Davis.





Volunteers Flock to Tour Guide Training for Birding Adventures, Birthday Celebrations, and Beastly Encounters!

One of the best parts about being a volunteer tour guide at the Nevada State Museum is the training. Four full days of dynamic presentations, hands-on activities, and practice tours make learning fun and exciting. It's a great way to meet new friends and the potlucks are always wonderful. This year's winter training is set for February 16-17 and 23-24. No experience necessary. Required skills include flexibility, a love for Nevada's diversity, and an ability to relate to children. Volunteers should be willing to donate a few hours per week as needed. Program topics include: Nevada history, mining, and the Carson City Mint; Washoe, Northern Paiute, and Western Shoshone culture; rocks, minerals and fossils; and plants and animals of Nevada. Topics of special interest include wetland birds, Dayton history, and the 100th anniversary of the *USS Nevada*. To register, contact Deborah Stevenson: dstevenson@nevadaculture.org or 775-687-4810, ext. 237.

Coin Press No. 1 Demonstrations Suspended for Repairs

Coin Press No. 1 minted coins for the Carson City Mint from 1870 to 1893. The press is now under the protection and care of the Nevada State Museum. The museum has demonstrated the press the last Friday of the month for many years to engage visitors in learning about the history of the mint and mining. Medallions produced on the press commemorate historical events and provide funds for the museum's collections, exhibits, and education programs.

While operating the press, the museum gives priority to the long-term preservation of the artifact. To assure preservation, the museum suspended demonstrations in September 2015 to allow inspection by museum staff and restoration experts. Worn components were found. Plans are underway to make repairs. The museum hopes to resume demonstrations the first part of 2016.

For updates, please refer to the museum's website museums.nevadaculture.org/nsmcc or call 775-687-4810.

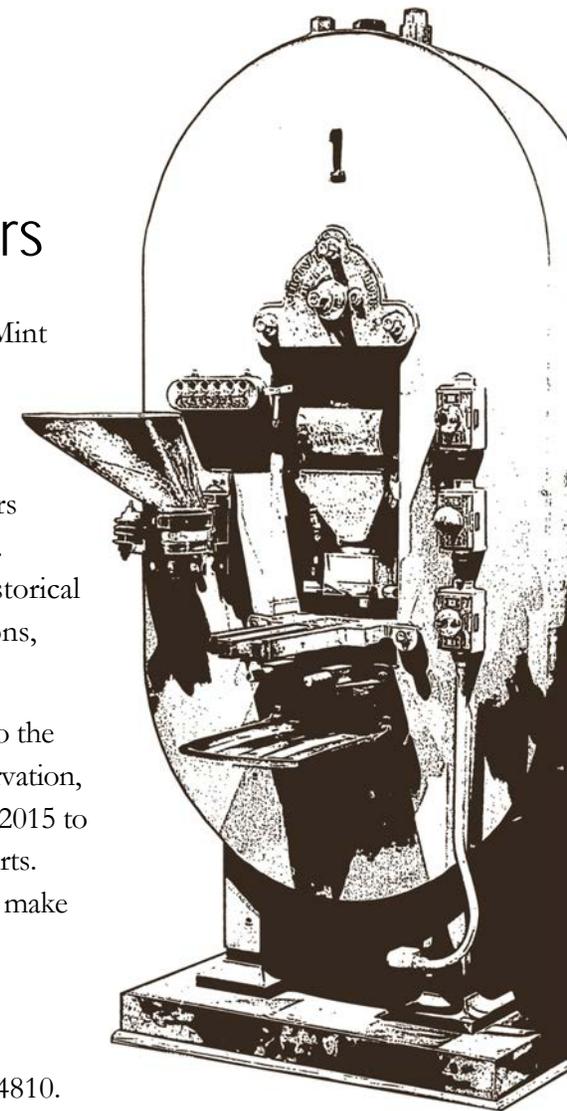


Photo: Jerri Biddle, Friends of the Nevada State Museum

Murder Mystery Event Benefits Museum

Friends of the Nevada State Museum hosted *Murder at the Mine or Who Got the Shaft*, September 19, 2015. This successful fundraising event yielded a net profit of \$2,116.85, benefitting the museum. Dave and Kathy Pierson wrote the script, along with a few contributions by the cast. Can you identify these mysterious characters?



Winter Tour Guide Training Schedule

Day 1: Tuesday, February 16, 2016

- 9:00 am: Welcome by Peter Barton, Administrator, Division of Museums & History, and Jim Barmore, Museum Director
- 9:30 am: Introductions and Education Mission by Deborah Stevenson
- 10:00 am: Break
- 10:30 am: *USS Nevada: 100th Birthday* by Bob Nysten, Curator of History
- 11:30 am: *Carson City Mint* tours, including *Grandma's Trunk*
- 12:00 pm: Potluck lunch; *Safety orientation* by George Baumgardner, Safety Officer
- 1:00 pm: *USS Nevada BB-36: A Legacy of Heroism*, KNPB documentary (eyewitness accounts)
- 2:00 pm: Break
- 2:30 pm: *History tours: practice with mentors*
- 3:30 pm: Training ends for the day

Day 2: Wednesday, February 17, 2016

- 9:00 am: *Dayton* by Laura Tennant and Jack Folmar, includes book signing
- 10:00am: Break
- 10:30 am: *JW and Annie Davis: Their Riveting Lives* by Kathleen P. Clemence, Genealogist
- 11:30 am: Lunch on your own
- 1:00 pm: *Under One Sky: Nevada's Native American Heritage*
- 2:00 pm: *Prehistoric Sandals* by Pat Barker, retired BLM archaeologist
- 3:00 pm: Training ends for the day

Day 3: Tuesday, February 23, 2016

- 9:00 am: *Wild and Wonderful Wetlands* by Dian Teigler, Pat King, and Margee McCafferty
- 10:00 am: Break
- 10:30 am: *Wetland Birds* by Alan Gubanich, Education Chair, Lahontan Audubon Society
- 12:00 pm: Potluck
- 1:00 pm: *Field trip to Washoe Lake or Carson River*, weather permitting
- 3:00 pm: Training ends for the day

Day 4: Wednesday, February 24, 2016

- 9:00 am: *Logistics for new volunteers*; transition updates for experienced guides
- 10:15 am: Break
- 10:30 am: *Beastly Encounters* by Dian Teigler, Pat King, Joyce Gebo, and Margee McCafferty
- 12:00 pm: Lunch on your own
- 1:30 pm: *Water in Nevada* by Joyce Gebo and science team
- 3:00 pm: Congratulations! You have completed 21 hours of training.

For more information, contact
Deborah Stevenson:
dstevenson@nevadaculture.org
or 775/687-4810, ext. 237



Photo: Jeanette McGregor

Find hundreds of unique gifts for everyone on your holiday shopping list!

Store Spotlight: Volunteer Betty Young

For over 17 years, Betty has helped make the museum store shine with her sparkling personality. She likes talking to the patrons who visit from all over the world and enjoys learning about Nevada's history.

Contact Store Manager Charmain Phillips to volunteer for half-day shifts: 775-687-4810 ext. 244

775/687-4810
Fax 775/687-4168
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Natural History Resource Center
775/687-4810, ext. 236

CONTACT THE MUSEUM...

Visit the Museum

600 North Carson Street
Carson City, Nevada 89701-4004

Open 8:30 am to 4:30 pm Tuesday through Sunday
Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years

Members	Free	Memberships:	\$20 senior
Children (17 & under)	Free		\$35 individual
Adults	\$ 8.00		\$60 family



www.museums.nevadaculture.org

The Nevada State Museum in Carson City is an agency of the Division of Museums and History within the Nevada Department of Tourism & Cultural Affairs. The museum engages diverse audiences in understanding and celebrating Nevada's natural and cultural heritage.

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Governor

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Tourism & Cultural Affairs
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Department Director

Division of Museums and History
Peter Barton
Division Administrator

Nevada State Museum
Jim Barmore
Museum Director

The Friends of the Nevada State Museum, a 501(c)(3) private nonprofit organization, supports the museum through volunteer assistance, fundraising, and advocacy. For information contact Cora Johnson, Chair at cora28_99@yahoo.com.

The Nevada State Museum publishes the *Mint Edition* newsletter for the purpose of highlighting museum exhibits, education programs, special events, and collection activities.

The publication is available online at www.nevadaculture.org.

Museum members receive the *Mint Edition* as a benefit of membership if they provide an email address.

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