
THE HISTORY OF WASHOE COUNTY

Lying in the northwest portion of the State of Nevada, named for a tribe of American Indians and containing a land area of 6,251 square miles, Washoe County today encompasses the area of two of the nine original counties—Washoe and Lake (later renamed Roop) —into which the Territory of Nevada was divided by the first territorial legislature in 1861. The county, “a land of contrasts, extremes, and apparent contradictions; of mingled barrenness and fertility, beauty and desolation, aridity and storm,” was claimed by the Spanish Empire until 1822 when it became a part of Mexican territory resulting from Mexico’s successful war of independence from Spain. Mexico ceded the area to the United States in 1848 following the Mexican War, and the ceded lands remained part of the “unorganized territory” of the United States until 1850.

On January 17, 1854, Carson County was created by the Utah territorial legislative assembly. The County, an area of 20,000 square miles, included what is now Washoe, Douglas, Storey and Lyon counties, Carson City (formerly Ormsby County), and portions of Esmeralda, Churchill and Humboldt counties.

In 1855 Brigham Young sent Orson Hyde out from Utah to bring some governmental structure to the area. Hyde settled in Washoe Valley and the town of Franktown became his headquarters.

Some early settlers in the Truckee Meadows included John S. Stone and Charles C. Gates. The Stone and Gates crossing at the Truckee River were near what became Glendale and then Sparks. Also settling early in the area were Peleg Brown and Granville W. Huffaker.

Brigham Young recalled the Mormon colonists including Orson Hyde in 1857 to help with what he thought was an upcoming battle with United States government troops. Many of the colonists left Washoe Valley and the land was opened up to the new settlers coming in who were providing supplies and timber to the growing mining industry. The 1850’s ended with discovery of the Comstock Lode in 1859 and the rush to Washoe began, followed shortly by a new territory of Nevada.

With the coming of the Comstock Lode, the ranchers and farmers of Washoe County supplied the burgeoning population, also more settlers came to the area because the County was on the transportation route to the mining areas. The 1860 Utah Territorial census showed 6,857 people in the Nevada part of

Utah Territory with 543 in what is now Washoe County.

In 1860 Charles Fuller established a station on the Truckee River on the road from Honey Lake to Carson Valley. When Fuller sold out to Myron Lake in 1861, Lake installed a toll bridge and station. This station became the Riverside Hotel and the bridge, the Virginia Street bridge.

On March 2, 1861, Congress created the Territory of Nevada and in July 1861, Governor James W. Nye proclaimed that the territory was organized. Washoe was among the counties created (with a then estimated population of 1,613) and the following county officers date from that first territorial legislature—clerk, recorder, assessor, treasurer, surveyor, superintendent of schools, justice of the peace, sheriff, district attorney and board of equalization. Governor Nye appointed the first three Washoe County Commissioners on December 10, 1861, and the next month an election was held for three new commissioners.

Washoe City was named county seat and the county offices and the court met at the Davis building and then at the Rice and McLaughlin building. The County also leased space in the Masonic building. In July of 1862 the County Commission advertised for a two-story courthouse and the next year it was erected on land donated by the Washoe Mining and Manufacturing Company. The courthouse was constructed for \$15,000. A contract was let out for a separate county jail for \$3,740.

Nevada entered the Union in the midst of the Civil War in 1864, and a state constitution was written and approved by the citizens that year. This constitution established the office of county public administrator. In that same year Washoe County also built a county hospital in Washoe City.

The Comstock mining area declined in the latter part of the 1860’s as ore was getting harder to extract. More money was needed to go further down the mountain. Washoe City depended on the Comstock for its living. The lumber around the community fed the insatiable desire for wood. The wood disappeared and the lumbermen had to climb the Sierra in search for lumber farther away from Washoe City. Population was on the decline.

In January of 1866 a Washoe Zephyr blew off a portion of the courthouse. A grand jury inspected the

building and reported, "We find it in as good a state of presentation as could be expected in a building so faulty in construction." In 1867 the county hospital was bankrupt and was auctioned for \$300.

As Washoe City declined a new community in Washoe County was about to emerge. In 1868 the Transcontinental Railroad made its way through northern Nevada. The Central Pacific railroad created towns all along the construction of this enormous project. Along the California-Nevada border the Central Pacific established the town of Verdi, which became an important lumber town for its operations.

East of Verdi another town was created, this time in the Truckee Meadows. Myron Lake still ran his toll bridge and toll station over the Truckee River. Lake sold land north of the river to Charles Crocker of the Central Pacific. This land was surveyed and lots created. On May 9, 1868 these lots were auctioned and the community of Reno, as it was named, founded.

As the 1860's ended there was a clamoring to move the county seat from the declining Washoe City to the booming town of Reno. The movement to change the county seat succeeded early in the 1870's. A special election was held June 14, 1870 and by a vote of 544 to 321, Washoe County voters approved the move from Washoe City to Reno. The next year the Nevada Legislature formally approved this election and on June 21, 1871 the county offices came to Reno.

The population for Washoe County in 1870 was 3,091 with Reno having a population of 1,035. A newspaper, the Reno Crescent, had started operation in 1868. Although it failed in 1875, another newspaper had more of a lasting importance. The Nevada State Journal began publishing in 1870.

There was controversy over the location of the county courthouse in Reno. Myron Lake offered land south of the river, but it was not in the city limits and access was across his toll bridge. After legal battles the County Commission accepted Lake's offer and the courthouse had its ground breaking on April 20, 1872, and was formally accepted on January 24, 1873.

During the decade of the 1870's, an important transportation link was built from Reno to Carson City and Virginia City. This was the construction of the Virginia and Truckee railroad. It became not only an important passenger route, but also a freighting route.

In 1874 the State of Nevada, concerned over land title issues, began to build a state prison east of Reno on the Truckee River. After much controversy and with the land title settled in Carson City, the site was abandoned. It would later become the Nevada Insane Asylum in 1882.

Some of the improvements which came to Reno in the 1870's included the opening of the road connecting Reno and Loyaltown; the founding of the community's first fire department; the installation of a gas street lamp system; and the building of an iron bridge across the Truckee to replace Myron Lake's old toll bridge in 1877.

1876 saw the start of the Reno Evening Gazette and also the opening of a school for girls by Bishop Ozi William Whittaker of the Episcopal Church. This school was on six acres of what is now Whittaker Park at Washington Street and University Terrace.

A couple of fires ended the decade for Washoe County. In 1878 Chinatown in Reno burned (part of an anti-Chinese movement throughout the West during this period), and on March 2, 1879, Reno's most devastating fire occurred starting in an alley south of Commercial Row. Five people lost their lives and over fifty acres of the business district were destroyed. Of the area bounded by Center, Sierra, Second and Plaza Streets, only the grocery stores of John Larecombe and Messer's Hagerman and Schooling were spared.

The decade of the 1880's saw the passing of the Comstock Lode and the prosperity that it brought to the State of Nevada. Reno passed Virginia City as the pre-eminent city in the State. Between 1870 and 1900 while the rest of Nevada had its population plummet, Washoe County had its population increase 300 percent. The population in 1880 for Washoe County was 5,664; for Reno, 1,302.

Transportation remained important for Washoe County early in the decade. In 1880 the Nevada and Oregon railroad company was incorporated, in the next year the railroad would become the Nevada-California-Oregon railway and begin construction of the line north out of Reno. Also in 1880 the Sierra Nevada Wood and Lumber company began building its railroad at Lake Tahoe. Two years later a company town was established. The railway transported lumber on a steeply inclined track of 1,600 feet. The town became known as Incline.

In the 1880's changes were made in county offices. The State of Nevada tried to find a way to cut down on governmental expenses. This was done by

eliminating some positions and combining others. Also they wanted the counties to keep track of public money more efficiently. A county board of examiners was created, the treasurer became ex-officio assessor, and the county clerk became ex-officio county superintendent of schools.

The clerk was superintendent of schools from 1883 to 1885; in 1887 the position was given to the district attorney who would hold this position until 1907. Also in 1887 the county recorder began to keep birth and death records.

Technology and what would later become public utilities came to Washoe County during the 1880's. The Sunset Telephone and Telegraph company was organized, as was the Reno Water, Land and Lights company. The first electric street lamps also appeared in Reno.

In 1885 an important event in Washoe County history happened when the Legislature moved the University of Nevada from Elko to Reno. The campus was established up the hill north of downtown and would give Reno its identity for the next thirty-five years as a college town. The first university building, Morrill Hall, was completed and the first students began instruction in 1886.

The Nevada State Fair, which had used a building downtown, moved to its fairgrounds in 1888 off east Fourth Street. The fairgrounds are used for the same purpose today. The decade ends throughout the western United States with some of the harshest winters ever seen, people and livestock both suffered great hardships.

The 1890's continued the economic depression throughout Nevada, but Washoe County continued to grow because of its function as a transportation hub and the presence of the state university. The population of Washoe County in 1890 was 6,437, with Reno being at 3,563.

The important political issue for Nevada was silver. The demonetization of silver was perceived as keeping capital out of Nevada. The thought was that if the United States became bi-metallic, the price of silver would rise and it would become profitable again to mine in Nevada. Politicians ran for office on this one issue. Before they had been Democrats and Republicans, these politicians now became members of the Silver Party in order to gain office.

Washoe County became more civic minded during this decade. In 1894 the Twentieth Century Club was formed in Reno. It would become the major social

club in the town as monthly meetings led to discussion of important civic issues of the day. In 1895 Susan B. Anthony came to Reno, which led to the formation of the Nevada Equal Suffrage League. In that same year the Nevada Legislature authorized the first public library in the state to be built in Reno. Immediately a fund raising campaign is inaugurated which was eventually successful.

True crime dramas dominate the decade in Washoe County. In 1891 Luis Ortiz and a part time police officer named Dick Nash are involved in a scuffle. Nash is shot by Ortiz and the latter is arrested and put in the county jail located at the courthouse just south of the Iron bridge on Virginia Street. The Reno Evening Gazette tells its readers that Ortiz should be hanged to the first lamppost. On September 19, 1891, a crowd of approximately one hundred men came to the jail and got Ortiz out of his cell. The crowd lynched Ortiz from the Virginia Street bridge. Nash eventually recovered from his injuries.

Three years later the County is transfixed by the trial of Alice Hartley. She shot State Senator and bank president Murray D. Foley. Hartley was an artist and a widow who rented rooms in the bank building owned by Foley. Foley, who was married, made unwelcome amorous advances on Hartley. She eventually became pregnant by Foley and tried to have him financially acknowledge his paternity. He offered to set her up in a new studio in Salt Lake City, but would not admit publicly that he was the father to their child. On the day of her departure for Salt Lake City, Hartley said Foley tried again to make advances and she shot and killed Foley. She was convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to eleven years in prison. Hartley had her baby with her in prison and was pardoned after serving eighteen months.

The beginning of the 1900's started with a mining boom in southern Nevada, which lifted the state out of its twenty year depression. Washoe County continued to grow throughout the decade as its economy was invigorated by the success of Tonopah and Goldfield. The population of Washoe County in 1900 was 9,141 with Reno having a population of 4,500.

In 1901 another railroad came to Verdi as the Verdi Lumber Company built a line. In that same year the state legislature created, by statute, a county fish and game warden.

A number of important institutions received their start during this decade. In 1902 the Farmers and Merchants bank opened its doors, which would

eventually become the most important bank in the state when its name was changed to the First National Bank of Nevada. Two hospitals in the County made important strides, the Washoe County Hospital built a two story brick building and St. Mary's Hospital was established by the Catholic Church.

In 1904 a professor of history at the University of Nevada, Jeanne Wier, saw a pressing need for the State of Nevada. She saw that the historical papers of the state were disappearing and the stories of the pioneers were slowly being lost. She founded the Nevada Historical Society and would continue to head the society for almost fifty years.

After many decades of struggle, a public library was built in Reno with the help of the Andrew Carnegie foundation. It was located on the south bank of the Truckee River, the current home of the United States Post Office.

County offices were created during the decade, a county board of health was established in 1905, and a juvenile department of the district court established in 1909. The executive officer was designated a probation officer.

Reno had been incorporated and dis-incorporated during the nineteenth century. The incorporation finally stuck in 1903. This was done just in time to welcome a new neighbor. The Southern Pacific Railroad decided to move its repair shops from Wadsworth to a new town east of Reno. It became Sparks, named for then governor of Nevada. Sparks was incorporated in 1905.

An event that shaped the destiny of Washoe County for the next half century happened in 1906. Laura Corey, the wife of U.S. Steel president William E. Corey, came to Reno for a divorce. This was a much-publicized event and this notoriety made Reno the place to go for what became known as "Reno-vation."

The population of Washoe County continued to increase; in 1910 it was 17,434, with Reno at 10,687 and Sparks at 2,500. This decade was the era of reform which went by the name of progressivism. The Governor of Nevada from 1915 to 1923 was very much a progressive. Emmet Boyle was the first native-born governor of the state along with having the distinction of the first graduate of the state university to become the chief executive.

An important beginning to settling the water rights of the Truckee River occurred when the Orr Ditch case

went to federal court in 1913. The case would not be decided until 1944.

Also in 1913 a county liquor license board was established, and in 1917 twenty acres were set aside for the Reno-Sparks Indian colony.

World War I meant that many Washoe County citizens left the area to go off to war. Not many made it overseas, but many young men saw the country for the first time in their lives. A side effect of all this traveling was an influenza epidemic that spread around the world in 1918 and 1919. In fact people who came to downtown Reno to watch the election results in November of 1918 were told to wear masks in order not to spread germs.

The decade of the 1920's was truly when Reno and Washoe County became known as the place to come, not only for divorce but also for marriage. The population in Washoe County in 1920 was 18,627, while in Reno it was 12,016 and in Sparks 3,238. This population welcomed air service to Washoe County. In 1920 Blanchfield was built on the site of what is now the Washoe County Golf Course. Pilots Bert Acosta and Eddie Rickenbacker brought airmail service to the area.

Also during this decade land was donated by benefactors for future parks in Washoe County. George Wingfield, noted local banker and industrialist, deeded Belle Isle, an island in the Truckee River near downtown Reno. This land would become Wingfield Park. James Newlands, the nephew of former Congressman and Senator Francis Newlands, sold 49 acres along the Truckee west of Reno. There would be a contest held to name this new park land and the winning name was Idlewild Park.

In 1927 the State Highway Department completed the grading and gravelling of the Victory Highway as it crossed the state from east to west. This road became Highway 40 and then Interstate 80. To celebrate the completion of the Victory Highway and for the completion of the Lincoln Highway through Nevada, a transcontinental highway exposition was held in Reno. The exposition was held at Idlewild Park which was developed for the first time. States surrounding Nevada sent exhibits and California housed theirs in a permanent building which is still located at Idlewild Park. The State of Nevada constructed a building in downtown Reno across from the Washoe County courthouse. The State Building eventually housed many offices including the Washoe County Library and the Nevada

Historical Society. An arch was also built over Virginia Street to welcome visitors to the exposition.

The Washoe County Commission moved the library from the Carnegie Library spot to the State Building in 1929. The old library was demolished, and the post office eventually built in its place.

The most important development in the 1930's came early, when in 1931 the Nevada Legislature finally took off all restraints on gambling. The old card clubs turned increasingly from their old saw dust floors to more glamorous surroundings. Also in that same legislative session, the residency requirement went from three months to six weeks. And in the 1930's many women came out to Washoe County for six weeks and took the cure.

The population in the County continued to increase. By 1930 the population of Washoe County was 27,158, in Reno it was 18,529 and in Sparks it was 4,508. In 1931 Sparks received its first public library as a branch library of the Washoe County system.

In 1932 the depression that affected the United States hit home in Nevada as the great Wingfield banking chain went bankrupt. Wingfield banks all around the state closed their doors. Investigations were carried out to try to get to the cause and try to prevent the closing of the banks in the future. First National Bank of Nevada eventually took over many of the closed banks.

Two years later the federal government brought two of George Wingfield's associates to trial for many federal offenses including gangster accusations. These two associates, James McKay and William Graham ran the Riverside Hotel. A witness in the trial was going to be Roy Frisch, a cashier from one of Wingfield's banks, the Riverside Bank. Before Frisch was able to testify, he disappeared when he was on the way to a movie. He was never found and rumors of his eventual demise lasted for decades. The Roy Frisch disappearance remains one of Washoe County's great mysteries.

The New Deal and its accompanying federal funds fueled new projects for Washoe County. A county board of charities and public welfare was established in 1933. Federal funds from the Public Works Administration built a swimming pool at Idlewild Park and in 1935 construction began on an 18-hole golf course on the site of the municipal airport. The airport was moved off Mill street east of Reno.

Later in the decade two important gaming figures for the future of Washoe County moved into the

community. In 1936 Harold Smith came to Reno, later his father Raymond I. "Pappy" Smith joined his son and together they opened Harold's Club. In 1937 William Harrah moved to Reno. He operated several clubs, but his most famous club was still to come.

The decade of the 1940's was a momentous one in the history of the United States. In Nevada and in Washoe County, it was equally momentous as men and women left their homes to enter World War II. Many people received their first look at Reno by being assigned to one of the surrounding military bases. The population of Washoe County in 1940 was 32,476, Reno's population was 21,317 and Sparks had a population of 5,318.

The military made its presence known in the Washoe County area with the opening of the Reno Air Base in 1942. This airbase was built north of Reno and would later become the Stead Air Force Base. In Fallon, sixty miles east of Reno, another base was built and both the Reno and Fallon bases sent their soldiers to Reno for weekend passes and furloughs. Because of this, the military closed down the prostitution cribs in downtown Reno. These operations had been a tradition in Reno and had been allowed by the local authorities. The military brass informed the locals that the cribs must be shut down. The officials made a half-hearted effort and the army was not pleased that their orders were ignored. The next time the language used was a little stronger, and the cribs were closed for good.

In the midst of World War II, William F. Harrah opened up his Harrah's Club in downtown Reno, which rivaled Harold's Club for the downtown gambling club trade. After World War II Reno saw its first high rise hotel casino as the Mapes Hotel-Casino opened on the site of the former post office on the north bank of the Truckee River.

As the casinos started to proliferate in downtown Reno, the city council decided to make an effort to keep the clubs from spreading away from the city core. In 1947 the council adopted a master plan to restrict casino gaming to a commercial district downtown. This became known as the Red Line Ordinance.

In 1945 the Nevada Legislature authorized the Washoe County Commission to appoint an engineer, and in 1949 the Legislature enacted a law that created important consequences for the County's future.

Edwin Bender, a local leader and warehouseman, pushed a bill to improve the local economy. It became known as the Freeport law and by its

passage, a thriving warehouse industry came to Washoe County. The warehouses spread throughout the County, but especially in Sparks.

The 1950's was a decade of the continuing growth of the warehouse industry in Washoe County, and saw Reno for the first time in over 60 years not be the largest city in the state. Although Las Vegas and Clark County passed Reno and Washoe County in population, Washoe County did continue to grow. In 1950 it had a population of 50,205, Reno's population was 32,497 and Sparks was 8,208.

In 1951 the Reno Chamber of Commerce reported large trade increases in the region as several warehouses and manufacturing firms relocated in Northern Nevada due to the Freeport law. Edwin Bender, who had shepherded the bill through the Legislature, died in 1952, but his son Frank Bender continued to push the issue. The Freeport law became an amendment to the state constitution in 1960.

Another very important issue in the 1950's was the right to work law. In 1951 the legislature passed a law which prohibited the forced membership in labor unions as a job requirement. It also directed the state board of agriculture to execute a fifty year lease with Washoe County for the fairgrounds, the home of the Nevada State Fair.

Weather was prominent in the 1950's. The decade started with one of the heaviest winters in Northern Nevada history and there were major floods on the Truckee River in 1950, 1952 and 1953. Consequently the United States Army Corps of Engineers initiated flood control measures, significantly changing the look of the river as it passed through downtown Reno.

In 1952 Reno viewed its first television transmission as programming was seen at the lobby of the Riverside Hotel. Locals were able to see the World Series between the New York Yankees and the Brooklyn Dodgers. In 1953 the city of Reno took over the operation of Hubbard Field from United Airlines. Hubbard Field would later become the Reno-Tahoe International Airport.

The 1950's decade also witnessed the start of one of its most important landmarks in Sparks. In mid-decade Richard Graves opened a sixty-seat coffee shop called the Nugget Café on B Street. Graves operated a similar shop with the same name in Carson City.

The Washoe County Commission adopted a resolution authorizing the position of county manager in 1957, and in August of that year, the first county manager was appointed. Late in the decade, the 1960 Winter Olympics were awarded to Squaw Valley. Reno wanted to be able to capitalize on the number of tourists who would be coming to the games. This spurred Raymond I. "Pappy" Smith to begin a campaign for a four lane all weather highway over the mountains. He paid for signs urging tourists to write their congressman in order for funds to be appropriated for the highway. The campaign worked and the highway, Interstate 80, was built in time for the Olympics.

The whole country was different at the start of the 1960's than at the end of the decade and Nevada and Washoe County were no exception. Laws passed that had a profound effect on the future of the County and its economy. In 1960 the population of Washoe County was 84,743, Reno had a population of 51,470 while Sparks' population was 16,618.

In 1960 the Nevada Legislature authorized the Washoe County Commission to issue \$2,000,000 in county bonds for a jail and courthouse. The County Commission was also increased from three to five members. During this decade a juvenile detention facility, Wittenberg Hall, was constructed.

A milestone in Sparks history occurred in 1960 when John Ascuaga purchased the Nugget Café from Richard Graves. Another Sparks landmark opened early in the 1960's as William Harrah decided to share his automobile collection with the public and the museum was located south east of the Nugget.

An addition to the downtown Reno skyline appeared in 1963 with the opening of the sixteen floor First National Bank building. The county courthouse had a new neighbor during the 1960's when the State Building, built for the 1927 Transcontinental Highway Exposition, was torn down and the Pioneer Theater built on the site.

The southern portion of Reno was not to be left out of this building explosion. A convention center was erected on the southern edge of the city on Virginia and Peckham Streets. Since it was built at the time of the celebration of Nevada's 100th birthday, it was called the Centennial Coliseum.

In 1966 the United States Air Force closed the Stead Air Force Base and two years later William Lear established Lear Industries on 3,500 acres at the abandoned base. The buildings were also used by the University of Nevada and the Desert Research

Institute. The golf course was turned over to the County and became the Sierra Sage golf course.

Changes in the casino industry also occurred at the end of the 1960's. The Corporate Gaming Act was passed by the Nevada Legislature which enabled corporations to own casinos in Nevada. Previously casino ownership was only open to individuals. The man for whom the law was written was Howard Hughes, whose corporation immediately bought stakes in many casinos around the state.

In 1969 there were some changes in county offices. The first county public defender was appointed, as was the first comptroller. The county roads department became a division of the public works department, and a construction contract was awarded for a data processing center.

The population of Washoe County in the 1970's went over the 100,000 mark for the first time and by the end of the decade Reno would reach that milestone. In 1970 the census showed Washoe County with a population of 121,068, Reno with 72,863 and Sparks with 24,187.

The casino industry in Washoe County continued to see many changes throughout the 1970's as the Corporate Gaming Act had its important effect on the community. In 1971 the Red Line Ordinance was modified and allowed casinos outside the downtown core. In just a few years, the consequences of this action would come into focus.

Pressure from the Environmental Protection Agency led to the creation of the Crystal Bay General Improvement District at Lake Tahoe in 1972 as pollution became a problem at the mountain lake known for its clarity. Also in that same year an interlocal agreement was signed by Reno, Sparks and Washoe County for the operation of the district health department.

County wide cooperation was also evident with the creation of the Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District which provided for coverage in the suburban areas.

North of Reno some communities received increased services. In 1973 the Stead branch of the Washoe County Library system opened its doors, and in the next year, the Gerlach General Improvement District was created.

In more county office news during the decade, the position of coroner was established. Previously these duties had been part of the responsibility of the

offices of the public administrator and the justice of the peace. Also during the 1970's the Washoe County Sheriff's Department Employees Association became the first employees' association to be recognized by the Washoe County Commission.

In 1976 Washoe County issued its first economic revenue bonds for \$10,000,000 to finance water facilities to be used by Sierra Pacific Power Company in the furnishing of water available on reasonable demand to the general public. In the next year contracts were awarded for the building of a senior center and a finance center at the county building complex.

Late in the 1970's, growth spurted in Washoe County as three casinos opened their doors at the same time. The MGM Grand, which was built outside the downtown area, and two casinos located centrally, the Money Tree and the Sahara Reno.

These openings coincided with a severe drought in Northern Nevada. Between 1976 and 1979 the snow pack was well below average, and with the increase in job opportunities and population that came to Washoe County, the dominant political issue became growth and how it should be controlled. Washoe County was coming to realize that the water from the Sierra would not always be plentiful.

Growth continued to be the concern for the residents of Washoe County during the 1980's. The population of the County in 1980 was 193,623; Reno at 100,786; and Sparks at 40,780. The decade began with trouble and tragedy. New Year's Eve 1979 turned into 1980 and riots rocked downtown Reno. Later in the year Priscilla Ford drove her car on to sidewalks in downtown Reno killing six and injuring twenty-six. She was convicted and still awaits her fate on death row at the Nevada State Prison.

In response to crime in Washoe County, the secret witness program was established during the decade, and in 1980 a new Tahoe Regional Planning Agency compact with California was agreed to at a special session of the Legislature.

Concerns about growth derailed a project by the Redfield Land Company as it withdrew the plans for a 1,200 room hotel-casino and regional shopping center at Hash Lane and South Virginia. In 1981 the Sierra Pacific Power Company allocated the last of the water resources for approved projects. The company stated that funds would be needed to buy more water rights for the area.

Casinos made the news in the 1980's with new names, additional rooms and casino closings. Early in the decade, Holiday Inn purchased Harrah's and the Hilton Corporation bought the Sahara Reno. The MGM doubled in size by adding 1,000 rooms and was later purchased by Bally's. Circus Circus built a twenty-one story, 625 room addition. In Sparks, John Ascuaga's Nugget opened a new hotel tower, and Karl's Silver Club opened a new casino. Sadly several casinos in Reno, in fact some of the storied names in the area's history, closed their doors never to be reopened. The Mapes Hotel-Casino closed in 1982 and the Riverside Hotel-Casino closed in 1986. The Mapes family also opened the Money Tree Casino in Reno, but it closed its doors during this same decade.

In business news, interstate banking came to Nevada in the 1980's as the First National Bank of Nevada became the First Interstate Bank of Nevada. Porsche North America moved its headquarters to Reno, and R.R. Donnelly broke ground at Stead for a new printing plant.

Several community projects had their start during the decade. Lawlor Events Center opened in 1983 on the University of Nevada campus. The Centennial Coliseum expanded and became the Reno-Sparks Convention Center. The Alf Sorenson Community Center opened in Sparks along with the Sparks Family Hospital. The 408 acre regional park at Rancho San Rafael also made its debut during this decade.

Environmentally the County had a busy decade. In 1981 a brush fire consumed 5,000 acres near Zolezzi Lane. In 1983 a flood in Washoe Valley killed one as water cascaded out of the western part of the Valley and closed the road from Reno to Carson City. In 1986 floods ravaged Washoe County and President Ronald Reagan declared northern Nevada a disaster area. Damage estimates reached \$17 million. During the middle of the decade, smog concerns in the Truckee Meadows led to a network to forecast smog-prone weather so polluting activities could be curtailed.

At the end of the 1980's, architects presented a plan for future court expansion for the County and recommended the purchase of the Ardan's building and the Cavalier Motel. General obligation bonds were also approved for a new administrative building.

In the 1990's growth issues, and especially water issues, were the major concerns of the County. The decade started with a drought and ended with the

imminent demise of a controversial building. The population of Washoe County in 1990 was 254,667 with Reno at 183,850 and Sparks at 53,367.

Drought was the fate of the County in the first half of the decade. In 1991 the County declared stage 3 drought conditions and stage 2 water restrictions remained in place through 1995. It became so dry that by 1992 Washoe Lake completely dried up and plans were discussed for the dredging of the lake. These drought conditions led the County to look for more sources of water. This search led to an investigation of acquiring water and building a pipeline from Honey Lake Valley northwest of Reno in California. The water importation plan was stopped by the United States Department of Interior in 1994.

In 1995 the County declared an agricultural drought emergency, but ironically, the next year saw too much water instead of too little. The end of 1996 and the beginning of 1997 floods once again ravaged downtown Reno. Damage estimates this time were \$5.5 million. In consequence to these floods, a federal cost agreement between Washoe County and the United States Army Corps of Engineers was signed in 1998 concerning construction, operation and maintenance of the Reno-Sparks Metropolitan Flood Warning System.

Several major projects were realized in the County during the 1990's. In conjunction with the city of Reno, Washoe County acquired land adjacent to Huffaker School for a park; Incline Village received an administration building; a South Valleys Regional Sports Complex was approved; the community of Black Springs was renamed Grand View Terrace; the Ardan's building and the Cavalier Motel were demolished; construction of the new district court building was completed; the new federal courthouse called the Bruce R. Thompson Federal Building was constructed; and the National Bowling Stadium was erected.

As the County's population spread north and south, bigger developments made news during the 1990's. Twelve thousand acres were approved for the Double Diamond Ranch Estates project, as was an 18-hole championship golf course at Lightning W Ranch in Washoe Valley. The development of the Montreaux golf course in the Galena area led to the return of a professional golf tournament to the County with the Reno-Tahoe Open in 1999.

Fiscal matters during the 1990's included the "Fair Share" controversy. In 1991 the Nevada Legislature required Washoe County to pay back to Clark County \$6.6 million. The Washoe County Commission

approved an increase in local taxes. In 1994 the Regional Transportation Commission Blue Ribbon Committee for Transportation Funding reported a large projected shortfall in transportation needs for the Truckee Meadows. The committee recommended a five cent fuel tax increase among other suggestions. The 1990's brought a number of important issues such as the proposed depressed train-way project plan; the regional postal hub at the Reno airport; and with the most publicity, the demise of the Mapes Hotel-Casino building. As the decade ended these were some of the concerns of Washoe County citizens for the upcoming decade and the upcoming century.

