

# **An Oral History of Cindy Ainsworth**

4<sup>th</sup> Street | Prater Way History Project

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Interviewer: Alicia Barber, Ph.D.

A native of Los Angeles, Cindy Ainsworth moved to Reno with her husband in 1978 and worked in publishing and at the National Automobile Museum, where she could indulge her passion for transportation history. In 1997, she helped to found the Historic Reno Preservation Society (HRPS), and regularly leads a historical walking tour of East 4th Street. She is also a member of the Lincoln Highway Association's Nevada chapter.

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## CINDY AINSWORTH

Interviewed on February 28, 2012

Alicia Barber, Interviewer

*A native of Los Angeles, Cindy Ainsworth moved to Reno with her husband in 1978 and worked in publishing and at the National Automobile Museum, where she could indulge her passion for transportation history. In 1997, she helped to found the Historic Reno Preservation Society (HRPS), and regularly leads a historical walking tour of East Fourth Street. She is also a member of the Lincoln Highway Association's Nevada chapter.*

Photo by Patrick Cummings

Barber: This is Alicia Barber. I'm here with Cindy Ainsworth, who is a founding member of the Historic Reno Preservation Society, which is often referred to as HRPS, so we'll refer to it that way. We're on the campus of the University of Nevada, Reno, and today is Tuesday, February 28, 2012. I want to start with some biographical questions. When and where you were born?

Ainsworth: I was born in Los Angeles on July 28, 1952.

Barber: Were both of your parents from that area?

Ainsworth: No. My dad was from the Detroit area; my mom was from the Appleton area in Wisconsin.

Barber: What were their names?

Ainsworth: Kathleen Becker and Richard J. Hanus.

Barber: What brought them to Los Angeles?

Ainsworth: My dad was, of course, of the World War II generation. He served in the Army during World War II, and around 1947, he and his dad moved from the Detroit area to California and both got jobs working in the aerospace industry. It was a big, big industry at the time, and my dad worked with a lot of the Space Shuttle programs. He actually went back to the Mercury Program and some of those other early programs. He worked for Rocketdyne, Rockwell International.

My mom's parents retired from a business they owned—a movie theater in Appleton, Wisconsin—and moved to L.A. in the early 1940s. I don't know really a lot of the details about that. I think they retired and just moved to California for the better weather, as a lot of people did.

It was an exciting time for my mom. She was a teenager and worked in downtown L.A. I remember her telling me about working in the drugstores and all the servicemen

during World War II and dating. It was a lot of fun.

Barber: Did she have a job throughout your childhood?

Ainsworth: No. She was a housewife most of the time. After she moved to L.A., she worked for a while when she was young and then had my sister and me.

Barber: Is your sister older than you?

Ainsworth: Yes. She's nine years older.

Barber: Tell me what it was like for you growing up in Los Angeles.

Ainsworth: We lived mostly in the San Fernando Valley. I vaguely remember Burbank, California—we were very close to all the studios. We kept moving northwest. We lived in Reseda and then Canoga Park for a long period of time.

It was great. I remember growing up and just getting on my bicycle or taking a walk when I was very, very young, and going to the drugstore or the dime store. It's really different now. It's really a shame. Now kids don't have that freedom like we did—just going with your friends, staying out until dusk, nobody really worrying. That's what I remember, even in L.A.

Barber: Did you go to some large schools?

Ainsworth: Not really. They were fairly small in the Valley. I went to Canoga Park High School, and it had a pretty good-sized senior class. I remember that. I don't know how many people graduated, but it was fairly large.

Barber: Did you do much traveling when you were growing up?

Ainsworth: I traveled a little bit with my folks, but not a lot. The trip I do remember was when my grandfather passed away, and my dad said, "We're getting in the car and going across country," or partially across country, and we spent a month on the road. I was fourteen, and I remember stopping in the Grand Canyon, and going to St. Louis. We also went to Detroit, Michigan. It was just fun.

We went to Wisconsin to see my mom's hometown. I remember they showed us the theater her folks had operated. It was a cute little theater with an ice cream parlor. It was a shame they got rid of that; it was really wonderful. Maybe that's why I like roadside history, because I remember stopping at all these funky places.

We went to South Dakota. My mom wanted to go to South Dakota, and we stopped at all these places like the Mystery Spot. It seems like there's one in every region. I remember roaming herds of buffalo and donkeys, and stopping at Wall Drugs. Everybody has to stop there.

I know we rode on part of Route 66. We stopped at some weird places. I was looking at some of my postcards recently. My mom kept all that stuff for me, and I rescued it a few years back. With some of the places I thought, "Oh, this is a Lincoln

Highway thing. Oh, gosh, it must have meant something.” [laughs] It was really funny.

Barber: So you went through high school in Los Angeles, and then what were your plans after graduating from high school?

Ainsworth: I was going to be a teacher, but I got sidetracked and met my husband. I went to college at Cal State Northridge. I majored in English and minored in art. If you remember where the earthquakes were, it’s in that area. We called it Earthquake U. When I was attending, there was a big earthquake in 1971. They closed the college down for a week, and there were cracks in the walls.

Anyway, I went to college, was going to go to teach, got sidetracked, met Tom, and we moved to Reno. [laughs]

Barber: How did you meet him?

Ainsworth: We met on a blind date. A friend introduced us and we went bowling. We always crack up. It was a bowling date, of all things.

We went together for about a year. He was working at Channel 5 in Los Angeles. He was getting into media and finishing up his studies at Cal State Northridge. We did not know each other at college, which was really strange. He was finishing up school and working at night and he had the opportunity to start applying for jobs. Reno opened up, so he went to work at Channel 8.

Barber: When he got that job offer, were you familiar with Reno?

Ainsworth: Actually I was, because my folks would take a yearly trip up the coast to San Francisco. We’d go to Lake Tahoe, and then we’d always end up in Reno. So I kind of knew the area. My mom and dad liked the area, too. They thought it was a fun Western town at the time. And they gambled, of course. My mom loved to go to Vegas and Reno and gamble.

Barber: Can you remember any of your earliest impressions of Reno when you would visit as a child?

Ainsworth: I stayed in the motel room a lot because you really couldn’t do anything. My parents would always stay downtown. I remember staying at what was the Holiday Inn at the south end of town. I remember visiting the Harrah’s Car Museum. My dad was a car enthusiast and we had to go see that. I also remember going to the Ponderosa in South Lake Tahoe. I remember the arch, and I thought it was kind of a funky little town. But, like I said, when you’re underage, you can’t do much. It was a problem. But I do remember the Car Museum. It was building after building of cars.

Barber: It was in a different location than it’s in now.

Ainsworth: Right. It was in Sparks at the time, and I have vivid memories of that, because I know they had railroad equipment. I think they had part of the Pony Express

Harolds Club collection in the front, in a saloon-type area. My dad was in seventh heaven. By about the third building, my mom and I were saying, “Wow, these cars are overpowering.” I thought it was great. I thought, “Wow, this man collected all these cars.”

Barber: Working for the Auto Museum as it is now, you became much more familiar with the auto collection. In that earlier version of the museum, were the collections much bigger than what they’re showing now?

Ainsworth: Oh, yes. I don’t know how many cars they had. I think they had many buildings, and it used to be at the old icehouse in Sparks. Robert Lee has his collection in one of those buildings right now. They had one building that had nothing but Packards. He had every year of Packard, and it was just amazing. I don’t know how many cars there were just in that collection alone. Now they have around 220.

Harrah had cars stashed all over in storage areas too. If you look at any of the auction catalogs, it’s pretty amazing what he had.

Barber: What was the position that your husband had when he moved here?

Ainsworth: He was a reporter and covered the legislature for four sessions. It was a great time to move here in 1978 because everything was happening. There was a lot of development going on in Reno. MGM was opening. They remodeled Harolds Club. They took over another building, and that was opening. I remember the parties. It was really fun.

Meadowood Mall opened about the time we moved here. I said, “Oh, thank goodness there’s a mall.” [laughs] They had little Park Lane, but I said, “Wow, Meadowood’s opening? OK, this town’s pretty good.”

The town was small and you knew everybody. It’s still that way even today, but back then it was especially true in the media. We had a lot of friends in the media during that time. It was fun.

Barber: Did you find that you went downtown quite a bit?

Ainsworth: We did. We don’t gamble. But we would go for comedy clubs and music. We went to Harrah’s a lot, and they had a nice, small cocktail area—which I think they still have, by the way—and they used to have what would eventually be big acts. I remember seeing Jay Leno there quite a lot. There was also Paul Revere and the Raiders. [laughs] It’s funny, because I used to follow Paul Revere and the Raiders growing up.

You got to see a lot of acts that later became fairly well known. It was great seeing Leno, because he would come out to the bar and talk to people. It was really a nice time. I don’t know if that happens so much anymore. I don’t think so.

Barber: Did you ever go to the big shows at the MGM?

Ainsworth: Oh, yes. We went to Hello Hollywood Hello quite a few times. When people would come in town, you had to take them there. It was just a spectacular show. The

stage was the largest stage at one time. It was pretty impressive.

Barber: Did that show change over time?

Ainsworth: No, not really. I know they rotated staff within it because it was there for a while. They had acts in between that would change—like acrobatic acts or comedy acts. But the setting was in old San Francisco and a plane would come out at the end. It was pretty spectacular. They've since changed and had some pretty good shows there but not quite like Hello Hollywood Hello.

Barber: My understanding of the mid to late 1970s in Reno was that, because there was so much growth and construction, there was actually a bit of a housing shortage. Did you find that when you moved here?

Ainsworth: Yes. We didn't think we were going to stay here, so we lived in apartments for the time being. You could say there was a shortage because I remember the rent at apartments was high. Sparks was developed, but north Reno was not. There wasn't a lot even past old south Reno at the time. So we moved to the northwest and that's when Sparks and Spanish Springs started to pick up. But there wasn't a lot of housing back then.

Barber: So you didn't think you were going to stay. Was that because it was such a short contract or because you thought you might want to leave?

Ainsworth: Well, Tom thought he was going to move on to another media outlet—Fresno, heaven forbid, but someplace. No offense to Fresno. [laughs] But we stayed here and we really loved it. There was just something about it. We got very comfortable here. We made friends here. Tom had friends in the media. We enjoyed the area; there was so much to offer. It was a small town, but you were close to bigger communities. You could go to Sacramento, San Francisco, and Lake Tahoe fairly easily. What can you say? The uniqueness of the state as high desert was spectacular, so we just stayed.

Barber: Tell me about how you got involved in the community. Did you start working right away?

Ainsworth: I got a job at Baker and Taylor, a book wholesaler, which was great for me. I love books and I was a book buyer. It was an interesting job, seeing the fluctuations with bestsellers. I did it for about ten years.

I started doing a lot of tours outside the area, not so much in Reno. I was interested in Carson City and I was getting interested in history. They had a media party at the Governor's Mansion every year, so that got me going. I started thinking, "Wow, this is really an interesting place." We had some friends down there who had older homes. That kind of hooked me, too, so I started doing a lot more research. I had an opportunity to take some time off, and that's when I really got active in Reno, doing some history projects.

Barber: How did that start? How did you first get involved in the historic community here?

Ainsworth: In the early 1990s we were trying to get an Air Race Museum going. I was interested in aviation too—transportation things. We knew some people who were trying to organize that, and I volunteered there and helped them out for a while. They were in a lousy location, so they never stuck around. A southern California big aviation museum, Planes of Fame, organized and got it going. They're into air racing.

I moved on from there, and began my involvement in museums. I really enjoyed the nonprofit world. I applied at the National Automobile Museum a few times. It was hard to get in there at the time, because they moved into their new location. Actually, I think I applied even before then, when it was in the old location. I remember volunteering to help them organize some of their archives for a couple of weeks before they moved.

I finally got a job there at the front desk. I would have done anything, because I wanted to get in the museum world. Jackie Frady, the executive director, gave me an opportunity. She knew I was interested in history, so she asked me, "Why don't you curate part of this exhibit?" They were doing their symposium at the time. They do a biannual symposium, and this one was on local history of the 1920s. She said, "Well, there's an aviation segment of it. Do you want to do that?"

I said, "You bet."

So I really started getting interested at that time and doing research. I met Neal Cobb, and he really was great. He would give me photos, and he was so knowledgeable about the area. He really helped me get the bug, too. Working there was great.

Nancy Holmes worked there. She was a founding member of HRPS, too. I would always help her with the symposium in various ways, whether it was with research or doing exhibits. I remember we did a 1950s exhibit with a bomb shelter. It was fun. I did quite a few exhibits. Later, I did one on Triple-A's automobile road service. It was a wonderful use of their archives in San Francisco, and they were great people. I also did a Harley Davidson exhibit. You name it, I did a few exhibits there. It was great.

Barber: You would do research locally but also around the region?

Ainsworth: Yes, it was also regional. The symposium usually had local-interest exhibits. I did the divorce exhibit. We did the Reno Dames, Desotos, and Dudes. [laughs] So we got some ranch things. We set up the exhibit like it was in a ranch—a divorcee ranch area—and that was fun.

I also met Mella Harmon about that time at the Car Museum, because she was doing some of the lectures for the symposium, and she really got me hooked on the preservation side.

Barber: Who was the audience for that symposium? Is that for local people?

Ainsworth: Teachers—in-service class mostly—but there are a lot of people who come just because they're interested in the period. There's always that automobile element, too, and there are always a few lectures on automobiles. They try to wrap that around

whatever period they're looking at. It's always fun to be involved in that. I haven't been involved for a few years. I kind of miss it.

Barber: Were you aware of a historic preservation community while you were working at the Auto Museum?

Ainsworth: The controversy over the Mapes was happening at that time, and I started attending quite a few of the meetings at City Hall. That really got the ball rolling for preservation, or at least there was an interest started about that time. In the 1980s there was quite a lot of activity going on. You notice there are a lot of historic surveys that were done in that decade. I wasn't involved much at that time, but when the Mapes controversy kicked in, Nancy and I were upset. Both Nancy and I went on a walking tour in 1997 with Pat Klos for her Bricks and Stones Tour. The walk was wonderful and the next thing we knew, the media were there. I remember the press interviewing Pat. We met afterwards at My Favorite Muffin, because she wanted to start a preservation history organization.

Barber: At that point, was Pat just leading these tours on her own independently?

Ainsworth: Yes, and she had been doing it for years. Pat was a teacher and her interest was in Reno history. I think she had been leading various tours for about ten years before HRPS.

So we met, and the next thing we knew, we were in Pat's backyard forming an organization. That was in 1997.

Barber: Tell me a little bit about her Bricks and Stones tour that you went on. What is that?

Ainsworth: The tour has a lot of brick homes and stone homes. It's in the Lander Street, Humboldt area. You start at My Favorite Muffin and go south from there. It is a great tour. Pat would mostly talk about architecture, but she'd throw in a lot about the homeowners or what was going on in that neighborhood. Mt. Rose [Elementary School] was part of that tour. It's still one of our most popular tours.

Barber: Was it just you, Pat, and Nancy who formed HRPS?

Ainsworth: Actually, Pat had some friends who were interested, and I had somebody from the [National Automobile] Museum who was our secretary for a while. We formed the board fairly fast. We had about ten people at that time.

Barber: Why did you want to form a preservation organization and what was your mission?

Ainsworth: I think the purpose of the walking tours, and then later, of our programs, was to educate the local population about what's here. A lot of new people moved to the area. They did not know about the neighborhoods. So I think what we primarily wanted to do



was educate people.

We started out with about five tours the next summer, but we had programs right away in September. We weren't even a nonprofit organization yet. We were going through the bylaw process at the time. Our mission was focusing on education and just getting people interested.

Barber: Where did you hold those early programs?

Ainsworth: Mt. Rose Elementary School.

Barber: Where they are today.

Ainsworth: Yes, and we are almost outgrowing that site. The last few meetings have been out the door. So history is really cool right now. [laughs]

Barber: Do you remember how that association began with the school and how you organized that?

Ainsworth: We were looking for a room big enough to hold a crowd. Pat was with Washoe County schools, and she said, "They've got a nice room there. It's a historic building because the parents in the area at the time fought to maintain that building. It would be significant to be there."

If we do move, I'm going to miss meeting there, because it is a significant building in that neighborhood. McKinley is the only other one left of the four "Spanish Quartet" schools that were here. So it's sad.

Barber: What do you know about the history of the Mt. Rose Elementary School building?

Ainsworth: I'm probably not the person to ask. It was established in 1910. The architecture is great. That mission-style architecture is so reminiscent of coming from southern California. I think that's why I fell in love with those schools, because it's like a lot of the architecture where I grew up. It's a feel-good building, as I always say.

Barber: Did you have a lot of discussions about what to name this organization?

Ainsworth: I think Pat named the organization, and she said, "How about this?"

And we said, "Okay, that sounds good." So we all agreed.

She thought, "We'll be HRPS," or Harpies, as some people call us. [laughs] Pat named it, so I give Pat credit.

Barber: You mentioned the Mapes Hotel. It seems that one of the big issues of the time was what would happen to that hotel. Did HRPS have a specific agenda or any activities you intended to pursue regarding the Mapes?

Ainsworth: At the time, our board members individually attended a lot of the City

Council meetings. We wanted to start the programs right away in the fall to educate the public and to give an update of what was going on at our meetings, and that's pretty much what we did.

We stayed out of being direct preservation advocates as members of the board, but we did it individually. It got kind of hot and heavy sometimes when people would come and voice their opinions. We were hoping we could provide a voice that way in our programs.

Barber: Did you open to public membership right away?

Ainsworth: We had a secretary and a treasurer, and as soon as we got the treasurer, we started membership that fall. So I think we had twenty-five members, which we were happy to have. But it grew fairly fast. I know we eventually had about a hundred members.

We have our wonderful publication, FootPrints. It was four pages, mostly dedicated to discussing the Mapes. We used that to provide information. We didn't have as much of the research, stories, and articles as we have nowadays. But FootPrints was available to members, and they got the walking tours for free. So there was incentive, and we did get quite a few people that first year. I remember we were surprised. A lot of them joined during the walking tours.

Barber: What were the other organizations in the community that dealt with historic preservation? Did you feel like there were others?

Ainsworth: There was Nevada Landmarks, and I know Pat was part of that with the Lake Mansion. They saved the Lake Mansion and kept track of it for years. But, there really weren't a lot of nonprofits at that time. There were a few that came and went. There have been questions about what happened to a couple of them, and we don't know. But there weren't a lot of active organizations. There are more history-related organizations now. There are the Westerners and G.O.D. [Good Old Days] Club. There were probably some organizations like that, but not like there are now. If you wanted to do anything, you went to the Historical Society.

Barber: Was that relationship a good one? Did you find you had a lot of partnerships?

Ainsworth: Boy, did we. When I started doing quite a lot of research [at the Nevada Historical Society], it was like Homecoming Week. You would go there and everybody would be there on a Saturday. Sometimes you didn't get through your research because you were sharing stories with everybody.

This was in the research room. The library there was pretty incredible, and everybody would try to help you. And that's still the case today. HRPS built that relationship with them. We weren't that close with them, but we utilized them so often for research, that it was pretty fast that we built that connection.

Barber: The Mapes Hotel was demolished in 2000. Did that event have any impact on HRPS?

Ainsworth: I think it increased the membership. People wanted to be active and do something. They didn't know what to do, so they came to a history group to get some information, and maybe to have a chance to talk at our programs. Once again, our programs provided a forum where they could voice their opinion. It definitely helped our membership. People wanted to get involved at that time, and it was a sad period for preservation.

Barber: Did you have any kind of relationship with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office in Carson City, either with HRPS or personally?

Ainsworth: Not so much through HRPS. I did individually. I bugged them a lot because I had questions about preservation. Mella [Harmon] was working there at the time, and I would just go down there and ask to do some research. I got more involved in learning about preservation. Mella was great. I was naïve about what Section 106 was, and they would sit down and tell me, "This is what it is."

It was a great relationship because I later started attending the City of Reno Historical Resources Commission meetings. It was a way to figure out what was going on in the city. You could go to City Council meetings, but this way you got an inside look at what was going on—I think even more so than today.

I did a few things with them, mostly getting some plaques installed, nothing big. I figured that was the one way I could help with something. Then Mella asked me if I would be the citizen representative of the SHPO [State Historic Preservation Office] for the Historical Resources Commission. That's when I really got a bond with SHPO.

Barber: Do you remember what year you started serving on the commission?

Ainsworth: It was 2005.

Barber: This is the advisory board to City Council on issues related to preservation.

Ainsworth: Right.

Barber: When you were first working for the Historical Resources Commission, what kinds of places were you getting plaques for?

Ainsworth: I felt that the old Reno arch needed a plaque. Nobody knows about the history of that—what it went through, how many times it was moved—so that was the first one I worked on. I worked with Mella on the Jacob Davis plaque. I was really proud of that one. That was a great project.

Barber: Tell us about that one.

Ainsworth: We said, "We've got to mark the correct location." There was always a controversy over where the original Jacob Davis tailor shop was. Jacob Davis designed

the first riveted pants. They were white duck material at the time. This was around 1878.

A miner's wife came into the tailor shop, because her husband couldn't keep his pants up. So Jacob took some studs from a bridle, right from harnesses from horses, and used them as the rivets, to tack up the pockets. Little did he know what he had discovered.

He used to order material from Levi Strauss in San Francisco, and next thing you know, he was getting a patent with Levi for these riveted jeans, or pants at the time. That location was on North Virginia, only a few doors up from Second Street. So we got this plaque.

Barber: How did you get the plaque together?

Ainsworth: I said, "Mella, you write the text, and I'll go work with this gentleman in the Bay Area," who was working with us with plaques. I used to order plaques through them and had them shipped.

I said, "I want a pocket."

I sketched out a little design, and, sure enough, he said we could get that done. He loved the project. The pigment matched the color of jeans. We got that little plaque on Virginia Street. Then we had a big celebration. Some of the Jacob Davis relatives were there. We had representatives from Levi Strauss. They were really pleased. They brought out some old pants they had. The Marjorie Russell Clothing and Textile Research Center brought some from the Dangberg Ranch. It was really, really fun.

Barber: What do you think can be gained by marking the landscape historically like that?

Ainsworth: I think it's really valuable for heritage tourism, for one thing, since so many people come to town. I'm a history nerd, so I go and look at every plaque wherever I am. I'll stop and pull over the car if I see a marker. I think for heritage tourism it's very important to mark your history.

I know it's going to be changing in the future, with iPhones and that, but for now I think it's a way to carry on that history and make sure people know the significant events that happened.

Barber: What were some of the other activities during your time on the Historical Resources Commission that involved historic preservation?

Ainsworth: I don't think I was on the commission yet, but I know a big issue was the Fleischmann Planetarium. There was a threat that that would be done away with in order to build a parking complex at the university.

Nan Spina and Felvia Belaustegui, some of the commissioners at that time, really rallied people. I went to the meeting. I don't know how many people we had in there. The fire marshal must have freaked out. Even the architect's family came. It got a lot of press, and it really helped. Lo and behold, we still have that wonderful building. It's such great Populuxe architecture. I just love it.

Barber: Did you start giving any tours for HRPS in the meantime?

Ainsworth: I did. East Fourth Street was the first tour that I worked on. I worked on some bus tours, too, but Fourth Street was my main interest because of the transportation history along Fourth Street and Prater Way through Reno and Sparks. I just couldn't pass it up.

I went on a tour with Gaye Canepa. She led a great tour and I got interested. She did it for HRPS for a couple years, and then decided I wanted to further the research and add some more information. She gave me her notes and said, "Sure, you take it over. I'm pleased to have somebody else take it over." So I did research and just ran with it. I like the seedy side of the town more—the nitty-gritty industrial areas—for tours.

Barber: When you first started giving that tour, where did it start and where did it go?

Ainsworth: We started on Evans at Louis' Basque Corner. It's a great place to start because everything began at that location when the NCO [the Nevada-California-Oregon depot] was there; those neighborhoods to the north were being established, railroad neighborhoods. You had motels and apartments that were established primarily for the railroad. So that was a great location, and, of course, you had Louis'.

That particular building is the oldest continuously operating apartment or motel. It has been around since 1907, and a lot of people don't realize that. And the Marion, across the street, is the same. It's from 1908. Those were the early days of that neighborhood.

I start there and then I go down to Morrill Avenue. I've changed it a little bit a couple times, but I usually stick to the original route.

Barber: Do you stay on one side of the street?

Ainsworth: We zigzag up and down. I tried it a different way last year, and it didn't work out. So I still zigzag. People go back and forth. There are certain areas that I like. We'll be over on one side and then I'll tell them, "We've got to go over to the other side."  
[laughs]

On East Fourth Street there is the NCO Building, the Nevada-California-Oregon Building. That and the downtown post office are my favorite buildings in town. I remember early on in HRPS I met the owners who had the Flanigan building at the time, and we met there. It was a paint company, Flanigan's Paint and Supplies. We had a meeting there just to show off Fourth Street.

That's how I also got involved with Fourth Street. I was interested in that building. Ed Scalzo purchased the building for Forever Yours Fine Furniture, and he's done a wonderful job. I was so happy when he took it over. I worried about it, because it was for sale for many years. The NCO depot is not for sale, but it's sitting vacant right now, which is really worrying me.

Ed Scalzo is wonderful. He's had the same business, but in three different locations in that vicinity—the downtown core and up at Flanigan's. I nominated him for one of the awards from the HRC because he was a great caretaker of that building. He loves the building; you can just tell when you talk to him. He had it up for sale, and I know it would have been very hard for him to part with that building.

Barber: But then he didn't sell it.

Ainsworth: He didn't. He's sticking to it. It sounds like sales are up at Forever Yours. I was worried about a year ago when I interviewed him. I always go in before I do the tours to meet with him and say, "Hey, I'm coming in." I like to see what's new.

My tour is the only tour that has a ride. We take the ride on the 1925 freight elevator. It's in the Flanigan Building. The ropes go up. It's great. I always touch base with him. About a year ago, he was pretty down. He said, "I'm testing the waters to see if I could sell it or not." There were no takers, so he hung in there during these economic times. It was tough.

Barber: Are there other buildings along the street that you typically go inside on your tours?

Ainsworth: Yes. As I said, we zigzag up. I'm going to look at my binder. Forever Yours was in another building that is now an auction house, Anchor Auctions. Before that, it was a laundry. We detour through that, and usually on Saturday mornings they're having an auction. We'll go in there and they include our group in on the auction. It's really fun. We go in there and we go into Flanigan's—always a treat—and talk about Patrick Flanigan. When I can arrange to go to Abby's Highway 40, we'll stop in there. It's hard to get Donny [Schwartz] awake at ten and eleven o'clock in the morning. We've stopped there, and it was really a hoot, because people were having a beer before we traveled on.

Donny has wonderful neon. He really supports the highway history. There's a Lincoln Highway neon sign and, of course, the Highway 40 Abby's sign itself is terrific. He has great photos in there. But I can never get him to wake up to do it. [laughs]

Then we've gone to the Eveleth Lumber Company Building. It was originally Eveleth's. Now it's Ray's Recycled Tires. That building is a real jewel. It was the mill for the finishing and planning. Gaye Canepa took us in there, and the people on the tour were blown away. Nobody had been in there.

At the time, Reno Forklift owned it and they were very sensitive to what was there. They knew what they had. All the original equipment—what they used to use—is in that building. They used to use steam for all the mechanical saws. It was then converted to electric. We actually went down underneath the building. There are rats under there, but we went under there and looked. You could see the belts that operate. It's incredible.

It's just like arrested decay. The employees just picked up and left. We couldn't believe it when we walked in. They still had screen doors, screens they had made, and wood frames. I was thinking, "All these people in these older neighborhoods would love to get their hands on this." They had some wooden windows in there too. It was just incredible. Even the employees' health and safety information was still there. Some advertising was in there too.

Barber: When do you think that business stopped operating?

Ainsworth: I never could pinpoint a date when that left. I know Reno Forklift was in there. I would say that was probably around 1999 or 2000. I have a feeling it must have

closed in 1995. The equipment's still there.

Neil Forsyth, the owner of Ray's Recycled Tires, knows what's in there. He has lots of recycled tires in there. He just loves to show people, and I try to meet up with him. He's a busy man. He was a surveyor for the state of Nevada, and he's got some tales. He acquired this recycled tire business. He always tries to meet up with me and give us a little tour, and it blows people away. I haven't pinpointed the date on that building, but I know it's early. It's in early Sanborn maps. It's old growth timber. You can tell there's a lot of history there.

You worry about it; it's going to burn down some day or something. We were hoping that it would have been a hands-on history area for kids to go to at one time, but that didn't happen.

Barber: Tell me about some of the other buildings on your tour that you really like.

Ainsworth: I think those are the highlights I hit on the tour. The overall history is just incredible. It's related to the transcontinental railroad. These are major events in the history of the United States, and the history is right here in Reno. I go into quite a lot of information about that and of course I talk about Lincoln Highway, Highway 40, and the Victory Highway.

I know one building that I like and nobody pays much attention to is the old Denny's Building. I was talking about Populuxe. People are always surprised at the Googie architectural style, so I always get a giggle out of that. I talk about what that is. It's usually spacey-looking. That one's not quite as spacey as Jack's on Prater, down the road, but it is still a pretty nice coffee shop design, and it's hanging in there. It's what El Rancho used to be—the 777. It's the building in front.

Barber: Is it now vacant?

Ainsworth: It's vacant, yes. It's been many, many restaurants. I always like to stop and point that out. Unfortunately, I stop at Morrill Avenue, but all the really good neon is down the street. I like to point out the Sandman; what a great sign. I think that was one of the top 100 sites to stop at in USA Today at one point. If you're interested in roadside history, that's a great, great sign.

Barber: It sounds like you make a real attempt to get to know the business owners and include them in your tour.

Ainsworth: Yes, I do. Every year I try to meet somebody new or at least revisit somebody who I haven't seen for a while, and it's always fun when I go. About a month before I start the tour season, I'll go. People always laugh because I'm walking Fourth Street. "Honey," I'll say. "I'm leaving. I'm going to Fourth Street."

"Okay. Be careful."

I talk about the Reno Brewery also. We stop there. Sometimes they'll be working on a Burning Man project, so we'll go in there and take a look. I always hope that somebody's there from Artown to open the doors, because the building is pretty unique inside and another large space. It's being utilized in a good way right now, and hopefully

something else will be in there too.

Barber: This is Spencer Hobson's bottling plant building.

Ainsworth: Yes.

Barber: You alluded to thoughts that it's not the safest place. What do you think about that? Talk about your impressions of how safe Fourth Street is.

Ainsworth: I've been doing that tour for years, and I've never had any problems, never. People ask, "You go by yourself?" It doesn't bother me. I always have my clipboard, so I look official.

I don't know if I'd want to be down there alone at night, but I have been down there at night to the Studio on 4th. I've gone to events there. You just be careful. It's really well-lit, that's for sure. We do have good lighting on that street now. But you just have to be aware. I know the homeless shelter's there, but I haven't been bothered by anybody. One time I was doing a tour and I stopped at the NCO Building to show the tile off, and I said, "Look at the beautiful tile," and this poor gentleman was sleeping in the hall, and he didn't even hear us. He was conked out.

And people were saying, "Oh, okay. Don't mind him. He's just sleeping."

But safety is always an issue. If people need something to make them feel secure, we have good lighting on that street. I know in the past they've looked at the area for some potential projects, and they're looking at projects right now with RTC. I would hate to gentrify the exterior of some of the buildings too much.

There was a Reno-Sparks Corridor Business Association. I think they're still around, by the way. They were concerned about the homeless shelter being located on Record Street, and I think that's how they started. They were looking at making improvements and trying to get the business owners to clean up the fronts and get some people in those vacant buildings. That was a concern.

Alpine Glass is another building I'm concerned about. That's a Frederick DeLongchamps building, the premier architect in northern Nevada. I'd really like to see somebody get in there soon.

Barber: Does it seem to you, since you started giving those tours, that the street has changed very much? When would you say you started giving those tours?

Ainsworth: I'm thinking I probably started in 2005 or so. Things have changed because, with the homeless shelter, I have had to change my routes a couple times around the Morris Hotel, because there were a lot of people in the summer hanging around there. But usually I don't. Usually I just go across the street and I say, "Oh, this is our nice homeless shelter."

There was a Lincoln Highway Association convention last year at South Lake Tahoe. They came a little early and took a tour of Fourth Street because it's on the Lincoln Highway, so I did a tour then. They thought it was great. We talked about Burning Man when we got down to the Reno Bottling Works. It was good for the tourists, too. They had a good time, and they all went back to Louis' and had lunch.



Barber: To whom do you primarily give tours? Is it visitors, residents, or both? How do they find out about the tour?

Ainsworth: Through HRPS, we have a built-in group who go on every tour. But I have had people from outside sometimes, if they see it advertised. I think a lot of people are just curious about what's happening on Fourth Street. There has been a lot of interest lately. I average about thirty people, usually. I know some of them are HRPS members, but we also get people who aren't members. It's pretty mixed, actually.

Barber: Do you take old photographs with you on the tour to show them?

Ainsworth: I do. I take my binder. This binder goes with me everywhere. I've been carrying it around a lot lately to the RTC meetings. When we get to the Flanigan Building, we usually take a little break there because we take the elevator ride, so we always set it out and people can look at it there. I always try to add new photos every year. People will give me photos. That's a wonderful thing about history and research. History people are great. They want to share everything with you. It's just so much fun.

Barber: The binder you're showing here has incredible historic photographs and clippings from Fourth Street through the years. Now, you referred to a couple of organizations, the RSCBA, and some studies that were taking place about Fourth Street. Have you been involved in any discussions about Fourth Street on the city level or participated in studies or discussions?

Ainsworth: I attended some of those. They had community block grant money, and there was some funding for the business fronts. I have attended a few of those. Some of them got a little hot and testy, because at that period it was mainly about the homeless shelter. I kind of backed away because I felt things were not moving. I hate to talk about that, but the Business Association was butting up against the City of Reno, and there was a lot of turmoil there. I think they even questioned how much money was going to be given to the business owners during the block grant period. Instead, I just focused on the history and turned to that to educate people.

But I'm really pleased. I was reviewing the TOD information the other night, and they focus quite a lot in that report on promoting history. So I felt real comfortable with that project, and I used to talk about the Morrill Avenue building, with the apartments behind and the business building in front.

Barber: Where Zagol's Ethiopian restaurant is?

Ainsworth: Right. We stop there because the trolley barn was located across the street, so I talk about that. But I used to talk about the TOD project and what was going on with proper infill. I felt that that was a really good project. It was attractive and shows people what can be done if we stick to our guns.

Barber: What are your ideas about what might happen in the future with Fourth Street?

What would be your ideal scenario for how things should proceed from here?

Ainsworth: I'd like to see some moderate, low-cost housing along the way, bringing people back into that neighborhood. Artists' lofts are always wonderful. They bring in a different element for the street, and that's really happening right now. The fire station [11 @ the Firehouse] has some artists' lofts on the top there.

I would like to see some housing brought in to make it a vibrant area. It's got a lot of stuff going in—nightclubs and that at night—but it needs more so during the day. It was a shame they lost the art store located there. It's the one that moved off of South Virginia—Nevada Fine Arts. I used to go there. I felt bad about that leaving, because that's the kind of store you want to see. The Western store, D Bar M, is still there. I'd like to see more businesses like that coming back.

It's not looked at very graciously from an environmental standpoint, but I do like the industrial element still hanging in there. I like Martin Ironworks. I think it's terrific they're still there. I don't know how long they're going to hang in there, but they're a northern Nevada big business, and they built quite a few buildings in this town—the bowling stadium, and many, many casinos. They supply steel in southern Nevada, too. I like that industrial element and hope that stays. I don't know if it will or not.

There are a lot of auto-related businesses. That's just fine. You have to have auto-related businesses anyway in a neighborhood, so I support those. As a matter of fact, I met somebody whose family owns a Chevron station almost on the border of Sparks and Reno—it's a young couple who own this—and she was terrific. She was very enthusiastic about the area and wants to hang in there as a business.

But, like I said, I would like to see more affordable housing and some businesses where people could go during the day. Let's also do something about marking it for the Lincoln Highway or the highway history. In other communities across the country, they are really getting behind that heritage in their neighborhoods. Iowa and Ohio are just gung-ho about the Lincoln Highway, as is New Mexico with Route 66.

We need to jump on the bandwagon here, because people come into town and stop and look at whatever monument there is or what's left of the highway. It's a big tourist industry. I hope that comes back.

My dream is either to have a neon museum or to have some kind of a project where we could light up some of the neon that's there and help business owners light up their neon. They do it in New Mexico. It's a tough project because neon is so hard to maintain, but they do it. I think there are some federally funded projects in New Mexico along Route 66 that do that. They've got quite a few signs lit up not just in Albuquerque, but outside of Albuquerque, too. My dream would be to have that happen and bring in new neon too, like Abby's Highway 40. That's the perfect opportunity right there. Our neon heritage is important for this town.

Barber: While we're on the topic of that street, I know the RTC is interested in how people think the actual street might be improved to help what you're thinking about take place, everything from lanes and boulevards and medians to sidewalks. Do you have any feelings about any of those things?

Ainsworth: The two-lane concept is good. It slows traffic down. I think most of the

business owners will agree with that. We had one meeting and it looked like they were in agreement with that.

If we bring in more businesses to the area, I'd like to see some diagonal parking. It gives it that Main-Street feel. I don't know if Fourth Street wants to have a Main-Street feel, but it sure is handy to park.

Medians are a tough one. The only problem with the two-lane configuration that I've noticed in other areas of town is that it's hard to get the side streets to flow into traffic. Wells Avenue is tough because the traffic is slower. It is hard to get into the lanes. But that's something I think you almost have to live with if you do something like the two-lane concept. You probably have to have turn lanes. That's the easiest way to control traffic.

Like I said, I like the industrial look. You have to have some kind of streetscape. Landscaping would be good, but I almost like more of an industrial look on that street. I don't want to gentrify it too much. We should also clean up the sidewalks. Doing walking tours, I know the sidewalks are terrible along that street. Just fixing that really improves an area.

Barber: What's terrible about them?

Ainsworth: There's broken concrete, you name it, it's just really rough. A lot of it's gone; there's not even a sidewalk in some places. We're walking in dirt sometimes. It needs improvement that way. So I'm hoping that whole area will get improved as far as sidewalks are concerned. You could do some artsy stuff with the sidewalks too. I'd like to see gateways to announce the highway or city. You can even have something down at Keystone, and I know they talked about that at one time. I would love to see gateways. I've seen them in other communities and small neighborhoods, and it's really cool because they've used some marker of the neighborhood—whether it's a bungalow or a lamppost that they have in the streetscape—as the symbol of the neighborhood. We have a perfect opportunity to do that with the history of the highway. So, for Lincoln Highway, something like that could be a fun art project.

Barber: You've been very involved in Fourth Street at the same time your work with HRPS was continuing. We left off with some of the earlier types of programs and activities HRPS did. Can you tell me about some more of the recent activities HRPS has been doing?

Ainsworth: I've been really proud of what's materialized through the years. We have at least twenty-five different types of walks throughout the year. We go from May to September now, which is quite a few. The whole summer is now taken up with walks.

Besides FootPrints, we go into a fourth-grade class to talk about the history of primarily downtown Reno. We also talk about some of the older schools and then we sponsor a bus tour for them in the downtown region. That's a great program. Barbara Courtney started the program with Felvia Belaustegui and Jerry Fenwick. Jerry's great; he has so many photos to share, and he loves going into the classroom with the kids. It's a terrific program.

The new one we now have is the Neighborhood Preservation Fund. We've talked

about doing this for years, but we never could pinpoint how we were going to do this. We have a home tour we've started in the last couple years, which Sharon Honig-Bear, board member and president, started. We would always say, "Oh, gosh, a home tour. Will the community support it? Can we pull this off?" She pulled it together and got the volunteers. It takes a lot of volunteer work.

The funds from that are going to our mini-grant program, and we're starting out with small matching grants, around \$2,500. We look at each project, and if there's something that warrants a little extra funding, we will provide that. It's a matching grant for the façade, the front of the building. We've looked at landscaping. We're just deciding on that.

We've had some great projects. We had the First Methodist Church on First Street. They had a chimney that was blocking the windows. It was installed because they had fireside chats in the 1940s, and it was blocking the windows. They wanted to remove it to go back to the original look of the building. So we helped to pay for that. That was a great project. We jumped right on that one.

We've had some simple projects that just want to improve the brickwork or the mortar in the foundations, which is very important, and we help pay for that. Sometimes we do lighting. We had a beautiful stone house, a Craftsman bungalow-style home, and the owners wanted some kind of a Craftsman lighting outside, and we paid for that. I'm so excited about this. The people on our committee can't wait to see the grants come in. We're starting up another year of grants right now. I'm really proud of that program.

Barber: Has HRPS also been involved in doing architectural surveys of neighborhoods, or is that something that certain members have worked on individually?

Ainsworth: We've worked on that individually. I know many worked on the Powning District, mostly through the HRC, but HRPS provided a little funding for that to finish off the survey. The Powning addition is the first conservation district in the city of Reno. I'm very happy to work on that, along with Felvia again. Felvia and I worked together quite a lot during the years. She started the survey and I helped to finish it up. She had some university interns working, too. It took a long time to finish the survey. With only two people, it's very hard to do an entire neighborhood survey.

HRPS did help with that, but a lot of our members have helped individually. Barrie Schuster's on our board now, and she's really active west of Wells Avenue. Mella and I took her under our wing and said, "You've got to do a survey. You can't get around it. You have to do it." We showed her the ropes and how to do the survey. She got it done. She's finishing it up right now, and it took a long time. She had help, also.

Surveys are very important. You don't know what you have until you do a survey. If you're going to go for any kind of district recognition, like the conservation district or if you want a National Register district, you have to do a survey. HRPS will probably get more involved in that in the future as well. We have interest in the Plumas neighborhood, so we're probably going to have to help with some funding. They did start that survey. It's almost completed, but I think we're going to expand on the Plumas neighborhood. There might be some infill in that area that we're hoping won't happen.

Barber: Are there current issues regarding preservation in Reno today that you're

involved in, with or without HRPS but in general?

Ainsworth: I'm concerned about downtown right now. The Virginia Street Bridge is a big topic. HRPS' logo is the Virginia Street Bridge, but we know that it's going to be gone. That was a big issue; it was a controversial issue, and it still is, and I think it's going to be for a while.

I'm concerned about the post office. I don't know quite what's going to happen to that if the postal authorities decide to pull out of operating it, which I'm sure they are soon. That issue is going to come up fairly soon.

There's also the Masonic Building. We have these pockets of buildings. Maybe that's not the way we should look at it. Maybe we should look at the downtown core as a whole district now and pull that together. I always feel that Second Street itself could be a district. There are a lot of great buildings along there—from the Reno National Bank building on the corner all the way to the Senator Hotel. That's the way you need to pull it together instead of these individual projects. I know with the Virginia Street Bridge, there's not much you can do about that.

Neighborhoods are really coming together. We've lost so much downtown, but neighborhoods are something we can show off right now, and that's why the walking tours are so important. People get to see where other people live and what's going on in the neighborhood. Wells Avenue has done a great job. They're really getting their act together. A lot of young couples are moving into that neighborhood, so they're restoring a lot of the homes. Things are happening right now.

Neighborhoods are so important. I think that's where we need to focus on the history of Reno, as well.

Barber: In the fifteen years since HRPS was founded, you've seen so many changes. What do you think about the future for history, historic preservation, and heritage in Reno?

Ainsworth: Right now there's something going on. I've talked to other people with other organizations, like OLLI [the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute] and that's a different demographic. We're getting mixed age groups. We're getting younger people. It's really bizarre. We don't know what's going on. Maybe it's social networking. I don't know. I think it's working.

It seems that our home tours attract quite a lot of people. It's really a different demographic who attend those. They don't know much about a lot of the neighborhoods, so they're curious, more so than with our walking tours. They have an interest in the history already.

But something's happening, and I keep mentioning Wells Avenue, but there's also the new Midtown area. It seems to be really happening right now. There are a lot of older buildings there that are being adaptively reused. People are recognizing that you can't just tear them down. Let's use these buildings.

I just did an article on the Crystal Springs Ice House for HRPS. I was always curious about the building and the people who owned the building through the years. That's in the Midtown area, also. The new owner owns St. James Infirmary, a bar over on California, and he's really bullish on that area. He was adamant that, "I'm using this

building, because I hate it when you turn your back and something is gone.” I’m really pleased about seeing that building being used.

Barber: To wrap up, how do you think the information you’re giving me today could help the RTC or the city in making decisions about Fourth Street?

Ainsworth: I hope some of the suggestions I made would help them look at our history as being an important element of that street. I think they have recognized that. You’re doing the oral histories, which is important as well. I’d like to see some of the neon restored along that area, and I hope they seriously take a look at that and recognize the history of the highway’s development through that area.

Barber: I want to thank you very much for talking with me today, Cindy.

Ainsworth: Thank you. I hope this helped.