

History of Nursing in Nevada

Nurses Who Changed the Landscape of Nursing in Nevada



No child was ever turned away from the Daughters of Charity School and Orphanage. This sketch, drawn by artist and former Daughter of Charity Georgia Hedrick, personifies the care and concern the Daughters provided while also depicting the fun-loving, carefree side they displayed with their small charges.

Circa 1850s: Florentina (Nellie) Nostrossa (from Peru) learned midwifery in Eureka, Nevada via informal training helping two local doctors.

1862: There was at least one midwife in Virginia City, although her name is unknown.

1875: St. Mary's Hospital in Virginia City was established by the Daughters of

Charity of St. Vincent de Paul down *Six-Mile Canyon*.

Three religious Sisters arrived to set things up in 1864, Frederica, Xavier and Mary Elizabeth. In 1875, the hospital was described as *"the best in the mining district."* The hospital was named St. Mary Louise Hospital, named after Mary Louise Bryant Mackay, who donated the land. The four story building accommodated 60 to 70 patients. The first patient was admitted in 1876. The Hospital, supported by fees from miners, did emergency surgery only. The Daughters soon established a school and an orphanage.



1880s: Eliza Cook was one of Nevada's first frontier doctors. She was first tutored in nursing by Dr.

H.W. Smith to provide nursing care

for his wife, ill with puerperal fever. Cook read all of Dr. Smith's medical books while working as his assistant and nurse. After 6 months (1882) she applied to and was accepted in medical school.

She practiced in Sheridan, and later worked with a physician mentor in Genoa. "At this time, there were Reservation Hospitals for the Indians of Nevada with approximately 100 beds in all. There were 2 hospitals in Reno: Washoe County General Hospital and the Catholic St. Mary's. Owyhee, headquarters of Duck Valley Indian Reservation also had a hospital and a school to serve about 400 Indians who cultivated farms along the river." Walker Lake Reservation also had a hospital. In 1881 legislative



The music class of the school and orphanage of the Daughters of Charity. (Courtesy of Carson City Historic District Commission)



St. Mary Louise Hospital of the Daughters of Charity. (Courtesy of California Society)

monies were appropriated to establish a hospital near Reno for “*nervous and mental cases*”.

1893: State Board of Health was established.

1899: Mary Oxborrow, a midwife educated in Salt Lake City, provided medical care and delivered babies in Lund NV until her death in 1935.



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1898: The first Red Cross

Society of Nevada formed in Carson City through the efforts of Mrs. H.A. Lemmon. Within a month, groups formed in Wadsworth, Reno, Virginia City, Austin, and Winnemucca, and then gathered in Reno to form the Nevada State Red Cross Association. They raised funds to gather and distribute clothing, food, bedding and medical supplies to enlisted men. They were active in volunteer efforts in the Spanish American War.

Early 1900s: Mining companies built hospitals in McGill, Ruth, and East Ely. Workers paid a monthly premium for emergency care. Nurses came from other states to work in hospitals that opened in the Reno area. The first 20th century hospital was a small 5 room facility for students on the University Nevada Reno

campus. It was run by a practical nurse.

1907: Nevada State Journal newspaper ran a story that local nurses were organizing to form a “labor union.” The critical tone of the front page story accused nurses of being “*more interested in money than patient welfare.*” It reported that “*the goals of the nurses were to secure a wage of no less than \$45.00 a month, a move towards eight hour shifts and a limit to the amount of housework to be done by nurses.*” Jessie Joslyn Nelson responded to the press immediately to clarify the purposes of the organization, stating “*every state was forming a nurses’ organization and that medical associations were not accused of forming labor unions when they united.*”



1908: Mary Virginia Perkins Lytle, born in Overton 1883, trained as a nurse mid-wife in Salt Lake City. She lost her first three daughters in childbirth and saw the need for trained persons to help with the delivery of babies. She was a midwife in Overton and delivered more than 200 babies in 30 years.



I Mary Virginia Perkins Lytle,
 born Overton, Nev. Oct. 1843, in
 Eastern Nevada, my parents
 were V. W. Warren, Public and
 Sarah Ann Perkins. They moved
 to Doerster from Utah abt. 1851
 there was no Clark County at
 that time, the Clark settlers had
 located their property, as it was
 not known where they had to
 pay taxes, some thought
 they belonged, or were in
 no hands.
 The U. S. Saints left southern
 Nevada (were released) from
 the Valley and New-pioneers
 arrived at Henry's River
 as part of Joseph Co. Nevada
 at that time.
 I have seen the division
 of Joseph County, now Clark Co.
 by George A. Drake, who notes
 the first manufacturing plant

Mary Virginia Perkins Lytle's medical career was a more traditional female role. She trained as a midwife to serve the women in the isolated town of Overton where she had been born and where she spent most of her life. (University of Nevada Las Vegas Special Collections)

1908: In Reno, the Dominican Sisters converted a parochial school into a hospital, called *Sister's Hospital*. Only two Nurses were hired.



St. Mary's Convent, with parish school children, 1907. A year later the convent, built in 1897, became Sisters' Hospital.



The 1912 and 1908 buildings. The 1908 structure, first St. Mary's Convent, then Sisters' Hospital, was torn down in 1921.

1909: Elizabeth Cunningham was elected President of the newly formed Reno Nurses Association. Discussion centered around women practicing nursing “without certification of appropriate training.”



Student nurses at Saint Mary's nurses' training school. Dr. McKenzie is at right, Dr. Russel at left.

1909: George McKenzie, MD, who came to Nevada from Colorado, offered to provide lectures to nurses in an effort to help establish a nurse training school at Sister's Hospital in 1910. This created conflict among nurses about geographic variances in nurse preparation. "This is the first evidence provided by Nevada nurses of the still prevailing anti-intellectualism toward the frontier and nursing alike."



The "new" Saint Mary's Hospital, 1912.



Nurses and training school students, 1916.

1910: First class accepted at Sister's Hospital. Dr. McKenzie, who encouraged the sisters to open the training school to provide help for the hospital, ran the program for 15 years. He designed the curriculum, centered around lectures to students by physicians.

1912: Sister's Hospital became St. Mary's Hospital. The two-year program that they opened was the first nurse training program in Nevada and 18 nurses graduated 1912. A third year provided graduate nurses with a monthly salary of \$50.00 and full employment.



1914 - 1927: Margaret Arnoldus Windous was a midwife in the White River Valley for several years, then later provided nursing care in White Pine General Hospital, in Ely around 1927.



1915: The first of four attempts to legislate

nurse registration in Nevada. The first plan would have the Board of Health regulate nurse examinations and licensure. Also in 1915 the Nurse Alumni Association was formed. It was called the *Sesrun* (nurses spelled backwards) *Club*. Emma Springmeyer was president. The first meeting was at the home of Elizabeth Reddant and its activities were strictly social.

1917: Nettie Johnson was the first Nevada nurse deployed in World War I. There were reportedly 50 graduate nurses in the Reno area, although no state records about this have been located.

Although no state records have been located, "the Nursing Archives at Boston University indicate that the *Nevada Nurses* was organized on November 26, 1917. Application was made to the American Nurses Association on July 8, 1920 and acceptance was granted January 19, 1921. Elected officers were: Edith Peales, Chairman, Mary Evans, vice-chairman, Mary Robinson, Treasurer." They raised funds for the war effort during World War I, and were specifically involved with fund raising to provide a home for nurses serving in France. (There are no known primary records of the Nevada Nurses Association between 1917 and 1931)

1919: Sadie Hurst, assemblywoman from Washoe County, introduced the nurse exam and licensure legislation, which passed but was vetoed by the Governor. "The greatest opposition to the bill came from nurses who had attended training schools but did not receive diplomas."

1921: The nurse exam and licensure bill was again introduced by Assemblyman Heward. It was similar to the previous bills and was also defeated.

1922: The last class graduated from Sister's Hospital. It was thought that the impetus for state registration came from supporters of the St. Mary's Hospital Training School for Nurses. "The decision to close the school was prompted by the failure of the Nevada legislature to pass a Nurse Registration Act and, without the law, nurses could not obtain reciprocal registration with other states. Essentially, Nevada preparation would be

worthless so enrollment decreased. In addition, the national pressures to upgrade nursing education made increasing demands on the staff. As a result, the nursing school was sacrificed for better patient care.”

1922 to 1957: Nevada was once again devoid of any training school for nurses.

1923: Trained nurses organized and worked with support of the Nevada State Medical Society to petition the Nevada State Legislature to establish a State Board of Nurse Examiners.



Marguerite Gosse

1923: Assemblywoman Marguerite Gosse introduced the Nurse Practice Act of Nevada. This successful legislation provided the means to examine and register nurses in Nevada. The governor was directed to appoint three registered graduates to the Board of Nurse Examiners who would meet regularly, provide publicly announced examinations and develop lists of accredited training schools and nurses registered under the law. These women: Mary Evans, Emma Springmeyer, and Alice Craven, Board members of the Nevada Nursing organization, were instrumental in the passage of the Bill. A committee from the state nurses association had presented a draft of the

proposed legislation to the Nevada State Medical Society in 1922. After the passage of the nurse registration bill, the registered nurse was compensated with higher wages and the registration law reportedly increased the efficiency and standing of the nursing profession in Nevada. The \$10.00 examination fee for registration allowed nurses to put R.N. after their names. Registered nurses earned more money and the registration law reportedly increased the efficiency and standing of the nursing profession in Nevada.



Marguerite at her Desk
During the Legislature of 1923

1923: Nevada legislature established the Board of Nurse Examiners and Mary Evans, the first president, was issued Nevada license #1. Between 1923 and 1931, there were 196 licenses issued.

1931: The Nevada Nurses Association (NNA) incorporation. The articles of Incorporation were filed in the Office of the Secretary of State on March 23, 1931, and District One was formed. The purposes of the organization included: establish a code of ethics, improve the standards of nursing, establish reciprocity between Nevada Nurses and those of other countries and states, establish an office or meeting place, form auxiliary organizations, obtain property for the benefit of the association, and remain a non-profit organization. There were 42 members of the organization, or a 21% membership. The first president was Edith Alden, and dues were \$3.00/year.

1931: NNA was involved with employment issues at Washoe General Hospital.

1935: The Social Security Act passed.



1936: Christie Thompson Corbett announced that Nevada received \$40,000 to improve health conditions in Nevada, especially in rural Nevada.

Christie Thompson Corbett

1937: NNA adopted eight-hour work day, despite objections by medical groups.

1940: NNA Membership count, 209 members out of a total of 291 registered nurses. Also in 1940, Helen Bakken arrived in Las Vegas and District Two was formed. The population in Las Vegas was approximately 8500 in 1940.



Helen Bakken



1941: NNA, at the request of the ANA and the Nursing Council on National Defense, established a state council on national defense, and in 1942, the US Cadet Nurse Corps was formed to help recruit nurses.



NATIONAL NURSES WEEK—Mary Kennedy, seated, president of the Nevada State Nurses Assn., pins Roll Call Card of membership in the American Nurses Assn. on Genevieve Arensdorf, president of District 3, NSNAP. The photo was snapped yesterday in the offices of Mayor C. D. Baker, after he had presented the group with a proclamation drawing attention to National Nurses Week. Other nurses in photo are, from left, Marie Harrel, district roll call director; and Vivian Lindeberg, Nevada state director for roll call. 1-17-1953

1942: Mary Kennedy Rhymer arrived in Las Vegas; she worked at the Clark County General Hospital as a staff nurse in the ER, OR, and maternity. By 1945, Rhymer became Director of nurses at Clark County General.



1945: Committee to study practical nursing in Nevada.



Labertha Miller Johnson

1945: Labertha Miller Johnson, NAACP activist, was the first Black Nurse hired at Clark County General Hospital.



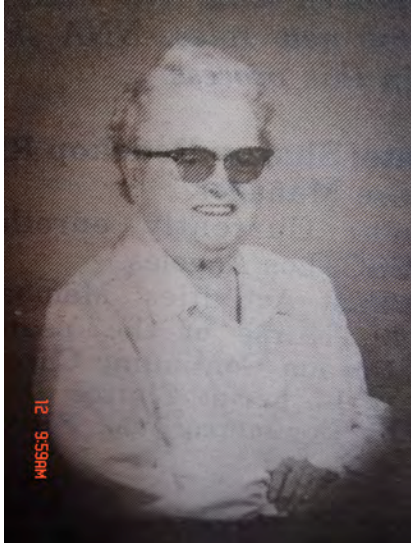
1946: NNA District Three was formed in Clark County.



Maida Pringle

Mid-1940s: Maida Pringle, chair of the NNA membership committee, used her vacation time from work to travel the state to recruit members. Main issues of concern were to increase membership and funds.

1947: Mary Hocker arrived in Las Vegas, where she first worked at Clark County General Hospital. In 1954 she was employed by City Jail as matron; she was the first jail matron in the nation.



Mary Hocker



LV Jail Matron Meets All Kinds of People

Every day is both challenging and rewarding for Police Matron Mary E. Hocker. "As the United States is called the 'melting pot of the world,' so might Las Vegas be called the 'melting pot of the U.S.'" Of these people who come from every walk of life, Matron Hocker gets to meet a certain number of them at the city jail.

Of five matrons assigned to the jail, Mary Hocker is Senior Matron, having been with the police department for more than 14 years. A police matron must be a registered nurse, since she is responsible for the medical care of all city jail "guests" and is in charge of all female prisoners. In addition, she assists in meal planning and supervision of food preparation.

Mary's hobby, pistol shooting, has earned her some impressive awards and trophies. She is the state champion, women's division, of the Nevada Peace Officers Association, and last year she won the Women's Trophy in the Inland Empire Matches in San Bernardino, California, both high honors in pistol shooting competition. Less explosive hobbies Mary mentions are bowling and sewing.



1949: Professional Nurse Practice Act was amended to reinforce mandatory registration and provide penalties for violations. Legislation was passed to regulate practice of practical nursing, and Louise Terrill was hired as Joint Executive Secretary for NNA and the Board of Nurse Examiners (now the Nevada State Board of Nursing).

Nevada State Nurses Association Reelects All Officers From Last Year

LAS VEGAS — Officers who served the Nevada State Nurses Association for the past year were reelected for another term at the annual meeting of the group in Las Vegas last weekend.

Reelected were: Mrs. Mae Kay Lee of Reno, president; Mrs. Louise M. Terrill of Reno, executive secretary; Mrs. Genevieve Sutton of Boulder City, first vice president; Mrs. Della Fitzgerald of Las Vegas, second vice president; Mrs. Evelyn Snell of Reno,

treasurer; Mrs. Janet Spencer of Reno, secretary; Miss Frances Brewing of Boulder City, Mrs. Ann Dohrenwend of Henderson, Mrs. Eva Young of Reno, and Mrs. Margaret Carroll of Seattle, Wash., board of directors.

Reno has been selected as site of the 1950 convention.

Highlight of the convention was the banquet Saturday night for more than 60 delegates at the Hotel Thunderbird following the sightseeing trip to Hoover Dam. Dr. and Mrs. Leo Rangell of

Beverly Hills were guests at the banquet. Dr. Rangell, psychiatrist and neurologist, addressed the group Saturday on "Mental Health," and outlined problems facing the nation today in relation to mental breakdown of many individuals.

Miss Luna Thomas of New York City, executive secretary of the American Nurses Association, addressed several of the sessions. She will continue on to Reno, Ely and Elko before returning to New York.

TUESDAY IN ELY

7:30 p.m.—American Legion. Joint meeting of Ely, McGill, Ruth and Kimber Poole Legion Hall.
7:30 p.m.—20-30 Club Hotel Nevada.
8 p.m.—LDS Primary Society Ely L. Church.
7:30 p.m.—Dues covered dish dinner Elko home.
Ely Theater—"Red Canyon," Ann Byrt Howard Duff, and George Brent.



NEW OFFICERS—New officers of Nevada State Nurses Association elected in Las Vegas last weekend were, seated, left to right, Evelyn Mac Snell, treasurer; Genevieve Sutton,

first vice president; M. Kay Lee, president; Janet M. Spencer, secretary, and Della Fitzgerald, second vice president. Other delegates to annual meet are shown in background.



Della Fitzgerald

1950: Evelyn McColl came to Las Vegas. She worked at Clark County Health Department around 1956 where Della Fitzgerald was her supervisor. McColl later became Director of Nurses at the Clark County Health Department.

1950s: NNA established a Committee on Careers, and members visited 28 out of the 38 high schools in the state to encourage nursing as a career.

1952: There was one practical nurse program in Las Vegas.



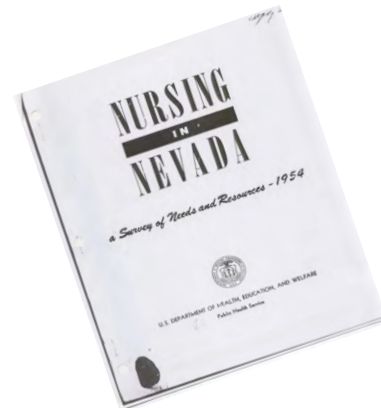
St. Mary's Hospital 1952



Patricia Whalen

1953: Patricia Whalen of Boulder City awarded a scholarship to study professional nursing in Utah by NNA District #3 because Nevada had no RN program.

1954: NNA participated in the statewide survey initiated by the US Department of Health Education and Welfare that identified nursing needs and ways to meet those needs. It recommended establishment of a BSN program at University of Nevada Reno.



1955: District Three's membership exceeded 100 for the first time.



1955: Jean Rambo in Las Vegas where she worked at Southern Nevada General Hospital.



1956: Genevieve Arensdorf arrived in Southern Nevada, where she worked as a school nurse, and later became director of nurses for the Clark County school district.



1957: The first Bachelor of Science in Nursing program in Nevada was established at UNR.

1958: Committee on School Nurse Certification formed with Ethelda Thelan as Chair.

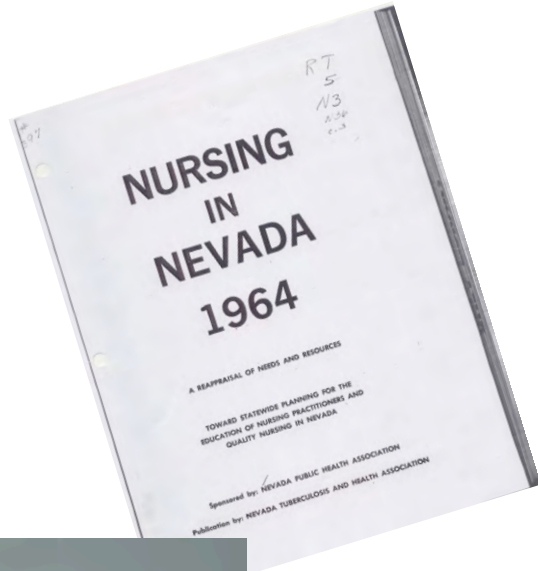




1960: The Las Vegas population was 64,405 with 107 registered nurses. Districts Four, Five and Six were established. NNA state membership, fluctuated since the organization began, and never seemed to be more than its highest count of 27% in the early 1970s.


1963: An amendment to the Nurse Practice Act which directed the governor to solicit names for the Board of Nurse Examiners from the Nevada Nurses Association. In 1963, there were eight practical nursing programs in Nevada.

1964: Survey done to identify current and projected nursing needs in Nevada. This was initiated by the Nevada Public Health Association and recommended preparation of nurses at all educational levels. NNA also participated in this survey



Program Will Help Nurse Shortage

By GLORIA REIBLE, SUN Staff Writer



A new educational door has been opened in Las Vegas and those who pass through it may well alleviate the critical shortage of nurses in Southern Nevada hospitals.

Beginning in September it will be possible for the first time to obtain a college degree in nursing in Nevada in only two years. The University of Nevada in Reno offers a four-year course.

The revolutionary two-year program will be conducted at Nevada Southern University under the direction of Mrs. Regina Jacobson. Upon graduation, the student will be awarded an associate degree in nurse education and will be eligible to take the registered nurse licensure examination in Nevada.

ACCEPT STUDENTS

Between 25 and 40 students will be accepted for the first class. There are no age limits. Both men and women may enroll.

Requirements include admission to the university as a student of regular standing, and a personal interview. Also, the student must be in excellent physical condition.

Mrs. Jacobson says that there are many advantages to this short term program. "The cost is within reason to many who would be unable to afford away-from-home education or the regular three or four-year program," she points out.

"Nursing practice is introduced early in the course and thoroughly correlated throughout the program with nursing theory so that students can decide quickly whether or not they are suited for a nursing career," she says.

LEARNING SITUATION

According to the director, the program combines preparation for an occupation with learning experiences that have value in many related areas. Half of the total required credits are earned in general education courses such as English, public speaking, sociology and psychology. The nursing aspect is approached through three broad areas—fundamentals of nursing, physical and mental illness and maternal and child care.

"The program will also result in a distinct advantage to the community," Mrs. Jacobson says, "because graduates usually remain in the locale where they are trained and currently Las Vegas is suffering from a critical shortage of registered nurses."

Cost of the course of study is approximately the same as the cost of a two-year course in any other major at the university. There is the small additional expenditure required for uniforms and equipment. Student loans up to \$1,000 under the Nurses Training Act of 1964 may become available, Mrs. Jacobson says.

SURVEY RESULT

The program was established as a result of a survey of nursing conditions and needs in the state. It was begun in 1962 under the auspices of the Nevada Public Health Association and was completed last year.

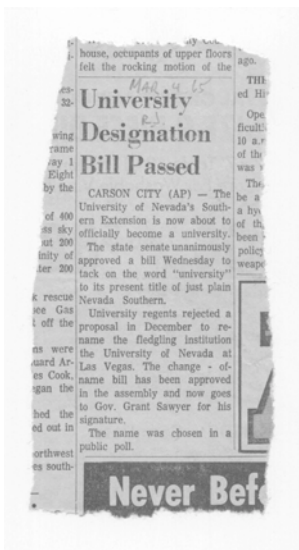
Assisting in the survey was the Orvis School of Nursing in Reno, the State Medical Association, County Medical Society and its women's auxiliary, Nevada State Nurses Association, Clark County Public Health Department, Nevada Southern University and several other groups and individuals.

Las Vegas was chosen as the logical location in which to offer the program for several reasons: it offered a large population with potential for recruitment; the Nevada Southern campus could be expanded to accommodate the program; and residents of Southern Nevada were studying in neighboring states which were closer to home than the Orvis School in Reno.

Also, there are six general hospitals, a county public health agency, a school nurse program and a psychiatric unit in Las Vegas, all of which could provide adequate clinical experience for students.

Mrs. Jacobson states she was interested in applying for admission to the program in contact her for further information. She may be reached by telephone at the university.

1964: Nurse Training Act passed. It helped finance nursing education and the building of nursing schools.



1964: Barbara Generaux was the first non-religious order member to direct nursing service St Rose de Lima.



1965: Associate Degree Program in Nursing was established at Nevada Southern University, renamed University Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) in 1969.



1966: Ethelda Thelan was elected President of NNA.





1966: First Capping in Associate Degree Program at Nevada Southern (UNLV)



1968: First refresher course established for inactive RNs.

1968: ANA Board created the position of Executive Director created and filled by Jean Rambo.

1969: Marguerite Clevenger elected NNA President

1969: Community College system was funded.



Patricia Ann Adler Peer

1970: Pat Peer candidate for nation's "Most Be-Involved Nurse."

1970s: NNA began studying criteria for continuing education for re-licensure & became involved with economic and general welfare issues.

1971: New articles of incorporation filed. Name changed from Nevada State Nurses Association to Nevada Nurses Association

1972: RN to BSN program at UNLV begun

1973: Dorothy Button, NNA lobbyist, successful with Nurse Practitioner Bell in Nevada; ANA conducted workshops in Nevada on Collective bargaining.



Dorothy Button

1974: Ethelda Thelan, NNA Executive Director



Pat Gothberg Smith

1976: NNA established an office in Reno and hired a full time executive director, Pat Gothberg Smith.

1979: NNA Education Committee was formed.

1982: 30 hours of continuing education became mandatory for re-licensure in nursing. NNA initially was the responsible group for accrediting these programs.

1984-1985: NNA negotiated for Washoe County School Nurses.

1990-2006: NNA continues legislative activities:

- Executive board position with the Nevada Health Care Reform Project
- Instrumental in passage of Nevada's Patient Protection Act and subsequent formation of the Office of Consumer Health Affairs, with requirement that the Commissioner position must be filled by a registered nurse
- Collaborated with Senator Harry Reid for passage of national needle-stick injury legislation
- Introduced successful state presumptive compensability legislation for blood borne infection with health care workers
- Worked at state and national levels on issues related to safe nurse staffing

References:

Nevada Nurses Association Archives at the Nevada Historical Society and at the University of Nevada Las Vegas Special Collections Department; Fries, Ellen. *Organized Nursing in the Silver State: A History of the Nevada Nurses Association* (1991); Fitzgerald, Mary *Nursing in Las Vegas 1940-1960* (1977); Nevada Nurses Association documents; Cleeve, Jan. *More Than Petticoats Remarkable Nevada Women* Globe Pequot Press 2005; Watson, Anita. *Into Their Own Nevada Women Emerging into Public Life* Nevada Humanities Committee 2000; Puddington, Grace. *A Biography of Marguerite H. Gosse*; Special Collections Department, University of Nevada Reno; Nevada State Board of Nursing; James, R.M. and Elizabeth Raymond; *Comstock Women The Making of a Mining Community* University of Nevada Press Reno, NV 1998; Nevada Women's History Project Southern Region *Skirts That Swept the Desert Floor* M.A. Duval, Ed. Stephens Press, LLC. 2006; WPA Guide to 1930s Nevada. University Press, Reno, circa 1940.