



Historic Reno
PRESERVATION
SOCIETY

FootPrints

Dedicated to Preserving and Promoting Historic Resources in the Truckee Meadows through Education, Advocacy, and Leadership.

vol. 12 no. 3 ❖ Summer 2009

Nevada's Early Mental Health History: The Buildings

by Kim Henrick

This article is not about how the "language" of the state's mental health history has changed over the last 127 years, so a quick summary might be useful. The physical facility has been called various names, some official and some not: Nevada Insane Asylum, Nevada State Hospital, Nevada Hospital for Mental Diseases, Nevada Mental Health Institute, and the current title, Northern Nevada Adult Mental Health Services (NNAMHS). The people receiving help from the facility have been inmates, patients, clients, and are currently called consumers. The street running along the Truckee River west of the hospital has been called Asylum Road, Hospital Road, Coney Island and is now Galletti Way. NNAMHS is within boundaries of the City of Sparks. The terms "patient" and "hospital" will be used generically in this history with no intention to offend.

We begin with the story of the buildings. In a future issue of FootPrints we will cover the people who lived and worked in the buildings.

On November 17, 2005, a 330L Caterpillar tractor's huge claw slammed down onto the second-story roof of a handsome brick building designed by Frederic DeLongchamps in 1927. The first pull of the claw tore off a section of the exterior brick wall and revealed two empty powder-blue rooms on the second floor. Eventually, bricks, windows, bays, doors, concrete and iron lay in a huge twisted mound. The last component to be destroyed was a glass door with large red letters painted on it: KEEP OUT. There was no fanfare. The demolition took two weeks—Mr. DeLongchamps designed his buildings to last. This article is written in memory of this building known as Building No. 6.

The story of Nevada's mental health history can be told in two parts: the people and the facilities. In reality, however, the two

parts have always been totally reliant upon each other. In a constant dance of mutual survival, doctors, administrators, staff, and patients have depended on the vast complex of buildings at Glendale Avenue and Galletti Way to support a certain standard of mental health care, and the buildings—often victims of hard use and short-sighted planning—have relied on administrators and politicians for adequate funding to support satisfactory, if not exemplary, maintenance and expansion.



The original hospital building, built in 1882, designed by Morrill J. Curtis. This photo was taken in the early 1900s. The building was demolished in the 1950s. Photo courtesy of Nevada Historical Society.

Outpatient services are the contemporary trend in the industry so there is little need for the number of buildings still standing on the property. Several buildings have been demolished in the last few years and on the recent Nevada State Public Works Board's Project C12 plans, seven more buildings are scheduled to be demolished. Fortunately, for now, three remaining historic buildings on that campus are not on that list. Their future remains in question and this article is about those buildings and the original hospital building.

The first hospital building opened on July 1, 1882, when 148 patients (Nevada residents) were transferred from Stockton, California. (Prior to the opening of this hospital, the State of Nevada paid to have its mentally ill patients housed at California facilities at a very high cost.) Morrill J. Curtis designed the hospital building and you will see a great resemblance between this building (see photo) and Morrill Hall on UNR's campus, which he also designed. The new hospital, which housed all of the patients and the entire hospital staff, was a grand, three-story F-shaped brick building of the Second Empire style. Facing Glendale Avenue to the south, it fanned out east and west from a tall central tower and had a smart, patterned Mansard roof. The second floor of the central north wing had "hardwood maple floors," a "dance hall," and "movie projector booth," according

Continued on page 2

The Buildings (continued)

Continued from page 1

to a drawing of the building made by architect Frederic DeLongchamps in the 1920s. An editorial in the *Weekly Nevada State Journal* on December 24, 1881 sums it up, "...it is a subject of wonder that so fine a structure could have been produced for a sum of \$60,000." In the next several decades, as other buildings were built to accommodate the hospital's expanding operations, this building was pulled down piecemeal; first the entire third floor and the far east end of the main building were razed, then the north wings were torn down, and finally the main building on the west side was demolished sometime in the 1950s.

The so-called Stone House, built in 1890, is the oldest remaining building on the hospital grounds—its existence is due to an embarrassing legislative blunder that cost the Nevada taxpayers approximately \$90,000. It was built (most likely with patient labor) from the remains of a partially-constructed massive stone wall built to surround a planned new prison on the site. In 1873, Democratic Governor Lewis Rice Bradley and the Democratic legislature wanted the new state prison to be built just north of the present hospital buildings, closer to Kietzke Lane. According to John M. Townley's account in *Tough Little Town on the Truckee*, "The wall enclosure was to measure 450'x 500' with foundations nine feet deep and seven wide, topped with twenty-six foot high walls, five feet thick at the base and three feet at the peak. Towers at each corner would be connected with walkways." Townley reported that the wall's foundation was built with stone blocks quarried from east of North Virginia Street, about one mile north of what is now McCarran Avenue and, ironically, the upper wall sections were built with sandstone blocks brought in from the old Nevada State Prison's quarry in Carson City.

A change in political power occurred in 1875 when only three sides of the "Great Wall" were complete. The new Republican legislature, along with powerful Republican supporters such as C.C. Powning, wanted the prison to be built in Carson City (where the existing prison was) and refused to allocate any more money to finish the wall. The unfinished prison wall cost 1½ times what the beautiful new hospital building cost seven years later. Between 1875 and 1890, the wall crumbled and neighbors walked off with many of the stones but enough sandstone remained to build the Stone House.



The so-called Stone House, built in 1890 with stones from the abandoned state prison wall (1890 to present). Photo courtesy of Kim Henrick.

The Stone House is a boxy, two-story structure built of huge, hand-hewn stones, each one with unique tool marks, a testament to the fine craftsmanship used in their making. The building (like most of the buildings at the hospital) served many functions over its lifespan, such as for hospital attendants' housing. The Stone House has two hefty iron hooks that stick out from the front of the building about head height, one near the front door and another down the porch to the east. One story (and it may only be a story) goes that the hooks were used in the very early days to secure "inmates" or "patients" until hospital staff arrived in the morning to admit the hooked people into the hospital. The stone building has

been boarded up for many years now, but it can easily be seen from Galletti Way. It is set just north of the large main two-story brick administration building (mentioned next) facing Galletti, with the curved driveway in front.

The hospital kept growing and the state legislature approved a new building to be constructed just west of the old original hospital building. They contracted with Frederic DeLongchamps to design the large T-shaped "Administration Building" in 1920. Today, it is called Building No. 1 and it faces Galletti Way. It is the handsome, rectangular, two-story brick building set behind a modern brick add-on building built in the early 1960s. (That add-on and the one in front of Building 3 were not researched for this article.) According to Mella Harmon (local architectural expert), the DeLongchamps buildings were built in the Renaissance Revival style with "horizontal aspect and the belt courses." Building No. 1 blended in well with the original 1882 building to its east.

A good example of blending in was the use of two-story bays, one on each side of the nine large archways on the front porch. (Unfortunately, the 1960s building was attached right to the building's front and obscures all but a few of the arches.) The front lobby area was pure class, a step back in time. A drawing of DeLongchamps describes its "Floor, Columns, Pilasters, Wainscott & Cap and Base," all made of beautiful marble. Terra cotta coping was used between the floors and a band of "ornament" wraps around the outside of the building. The first floor had administration offices, a kitchen, a women's ward and the visitors' area. The second floor had a women's dormitory on the north end and a men's dormitory on the south end. On the second floor wing that was built to the east there was a large room with a laboratory, pack room, Doctors' Scrub Room, Operating Room, and a Hydrotherapy room.

The Buildings (continued)

Between 1925 and 1927, Frederic DeLongchamps designed two more buildings in the style of his "Administration Building." The first is the large, L-shaped "C Ward," known today as Building No. 3. Similar in quality and style to Building No. 1, even the stairwells were nicely designed with tile on the walls, oak handrails and plate glass entry doors. It has four two-story bays, two facing Galletti Way and two facing Glendale Avenue. Its south wing faced Glendale until, again in the early 1960s, a modern brick building with an open-brick-wall design (like you would expect to see on a patio) was built in front of it. Between Building No. 3 and the modern add-on, there is an odd white wall with red and blue squares that complements nothing around it. The 1960s add-on (Building No. 4) and Bldg. No. 3 stand vacant today.

The other building constructed around this time was the "Men's Ward," or Building No. 6 as it was called when it was demolished in 2005. It was smaller than either Building No. 1 or Building No. 3, but had the same Renaissance Revival look and had one two-story bay on the east side and one on the west side. On the drawings for both Buildings Nos. 3 and 6, Frederic DeLongchamps instructed: "Brick—all brick is to be Reno Pressed Brick Company's product or any other Nevada made brick which is equal in quality to the above named brick." According to local brick enthusiast Beth Miramon, not only did the records of the time indicate that bricks from "Reno Pressed Brick Company" were used for the hospital buildings designed by DeLongchamps, but there was absolutely nothing of equal quality to be found locally.

Another notable architect, Edward Parsons, also left his mark on NNAMHS history, when in 1949 he designed a large, two-story, flat-roofed "Male Ward Building" northeast of the other hospital buildings. A sign of the times, it was a plain affair in comparison to DeLongchamps designed buildings



NNAMHS around 1950 (date on photo is wrong). On the left, the large 1920 DeLongchamps Administration Building with the two bays and arches; on the far left is the Stone House. To the right of the Admin. Bldg. is the last western section of the beautiful 1882 building that was totally gone by the 1950s. Lower right L-shaped building (facing Glendale) is DeLongchamps "C" Ward (now Bldg. 3) and just to the right of that is Bldg. No. 6 that was demolished in 2005. In the upper right is the sprawling Edward Parsons "Ward" Bldg. built in 1949 and torn down in 2007. Photo courtesy of NNAMHS.

1, 3 & 6, with a modern look more like that of a contemporary sprawling high school. According to the "Survey of the Nevada Hospital for Mental Diseases, Bulletin No. 10," published in 1950, the ward was designed to accommodate 160 patients. This report indicates that within nearly two years, this building was showing signs of deterioration in the flooring and hardware and plumbing and the flat roof needed repairs due to leakage. Despite the quick decline (which mirrors complaints reported about the original 1882 building), Edward Parsons was brought back time and time again to work on other building projects, such as renovations on the DeLongchamps' buildings and the Stone House. Parsons' Male Ward Building was demolished in 2007.

Truckee Meadows ditch-lovers might want to know that besides having water rights to the Sullivan-Kelly Ditch, the hospital also filed a deed in April 1887 for the "State of Nevada Insane Asylum Flume." The English Mill Ditch also meanders through the property.

For those interested in cemeteries, recent efforts by the non-profit group, Friends of NNAMHS Cemetery, has opened a dialogue with the hospital and the City of Sparks to begin an era of respect for those who have been buried on the hospital grounds. They have plans to restore and preserve the hospital's cemetery. Their website is <http://friendsofnorthernnevadaadultmentalhealthservicescemetery.com/>.

I wish to thank Arline Laffery, Rosie Cevasco, Carolyn Mirich and Beth Miramon for sharing their great research materials, Mella Harmon for her architectural help, and Carol Coleman for her patience. Also, thanks to UNR Special Collections staff and the Nevada Historical Society staff for always accommodat-

ing my tedious projects. I obtained information from various Reno newspapers; government publications such as the Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau Bulletin No. 10; architectural drawings at UNR Special Collections; photographs, Sanborn maps, Nevada State and Assembly Journals, and vertical file information from the Nevada Historical Society; and online sites such as <http://nevadaculture.org/shpo> and <http://www.unr.edu/tour/mh.html>.

Kim Henrick is a volunteer at the Nevada Historical Society. She is a member of the HRPS Editorial Staff.