

Reno Gazette-Journal by Patty Cafferata

Reno was a sophisticated town even in the 1920s and 1930s. Prominent residents organized social and sporting clubs for their own entertainment. The members of one of the groups, the Reno Golf Club, discussed building a clubhouse as early as 1917. Under the club's second president, Cole Harwood, an attorney, the clubhouse was built near the west side of Plumas Street up the hill overlooking the club's nine-hole golf course. (The site is just north of West Moana Lane today.)

The club hired Reno architect Frederick DeLongchamps to design the seven-room building with two wings and a center two-story section. Contractor Jerry Bernasconi built the clubhouse on a rock and concrete foundation with a stone terrace around the building. The main floor and upper story were built of stone and white split shingles. The clubhouse featured a lounging hall with a rock fireplace, men's and women's locker rooms with showers, an electric kitchen and separate living rooms for the members and the staff.

The cost of building, the furnishings and 80 acres of land was about \$40,000. The clubhouse opened on

Nov. 10, 1923. Vice president, Mrs. Samuel Platt, the official

hostess, greeted many of the 200 members on arrival. Musical selections, dancing and light refreshments were offered at the gala opening.

For a brief time, the members enjoyed social and golf activities, but the clubhouse was destroyed by fire before June 1926. The members again engaged DeLongchamps to design a new clubhouse on the same site. He used the same stone and shingle materials for the new building. Unfortunately, the club experienced financial difficulties and closed around 1932.

Trying again

In July 1934, attorney Harlan Heward bought the property and donated about half of the land to Washoe County for a new 18-hole golf course. He retained the clubhouse and balance of the acreage. In 1935, Heward sold the property to local restaurateur Charles Rennie.

Rennie convinced the Lewis Luchenbach San Francisco-New York steamship line to invest about \$225,000 in the country club. Local architect Russell Mills redesigned the 1926 clubhouse to include a glassed-in porch.

Rennie hired Frederick Quant from San Francisco to design a swanky interior. "Luxurious" describes the heavy velvet draperies, flowery decorations on the coved ceiling and indirect lighting in the dining room. Private dining rooms were available for private parties.

Powder blue velour covered the walls in the cocktail lounge with a circular bar in the center of the room. Three other bars were planned, including a portable glass bar to be wheeled from one private party to the next.

The club also had a casino decorated with large murals on the walls behind the gaming tables painted by Bay Area artist John H. MacQuarrie. Rennie offered nightly floor shows and entertainment. Music was piped into all the rooms. Reno's radio stations KOH, KFBK and Columbia-Don Lee Network broadcast from the club on opening night on June 27, 1935.

In addition to the golf course, Rennie included two polo fields and later swimming pools, one hot and one cold, in his plans.

Rennie managed the property for a brief time but experienced financial difficulties. He closed the club and returned to his Town House Restaurant downtown. Shortly thereafter, James Merrill reopened the club as the manager. He was associated with Jack Dempsey in the restaurant business in New York City.

The final blow

In the early morning on May 15, 1936, a fire started in the kitchen under one of the serving tables. The clubhouse burned to the ground within hours. At first, two firefighters and one truck responded to the call. They climbed the golf course fence and raced to the irrigation ditch 200 feet away with a hose. Upon investigation, fire chief Leo Hawcroft said that the fire was incendiary in nature with all indications that the fire was set. The arson investigation was never solved.

The Reno Evening Gazette reported in August 1936 that the clubhouse would be rebuilt within 90 days. That was the last mention of the Country Club in the newspapers.

In the 1950s, all that

remained of the building were china fragments, a metal stove and the bottom of the fireplace in the basement. Motorists on Plumas Street caught glimpses of the stone foundation.

Today, the Brighton Manor townhomes stand where the Country Club once was.

Patty Cafferata, author of Nevada history books and articles, says she played in the rubble of the 1935 clubhouse in the 1950s. She can be reached at [pdcafferata@sbcglobal.net](mailto:pdcafferata@sbcglobal.net)