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“We Seek to Be Patient”:
Jeanne Wier and the Nevada Historical Society,
1904-1950

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Information Studies

by

Su Kim Chung

2015
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“We Seek to Be Patient:”

Jeanne Wier and the Nevada Historical Society, 1904-1950

by

Su Kim Chung

Doctor of Philosophy in Information Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Mary Niles Maack, Chair

This dissertation focuses on Jeanne Wier and the years she was active in shaping the Nevada Historical Society (NHS), 1904-1950. It is the story of the institution as it unfolded over four decades, but more broadly, it considers how Wier shaped what Amanda Laugesen has framed as the idea of “public historical culture” in the state of Nevada. This culture not only included the collection of documents and books to provide a basis for research, but also the collection of relics for a museum that sought to be a showplace of Nevada’s history for her citizens. It includes the means by which the NHS performed outreach to make Nevada’s history a viable part of the community through anniversaries and celebrations and its efforts at preserving historic sites. The study considers the tension that arose in Wier’s attempts to have the NHS fulfill these different roles and the challenges that she faced in obtaining financial, governmental and community support for the institution. An important consideration of the
dissertation is its evaluation of how successful Wier was in achieving the goals of the NHS regarding its mission of developing a historical consciousness within the state and its citizenry. In defining success, the study considers the general volume and frequency of collection donations to the Society as well as the research it supported and the historical papers it published. When possible, the study considers quantitative data such as the number of patrons that visited the Society, the number of people attending events and lectures, and the amount of financial support obtained from the legislature and via private funding. Moving beyond numbers, an assessment of her legacy at the NHS must also consider the collections she gathered over the years. Questions of collecting focus and in particular, an exploration of whose history was collected also form part of the study.
The dissertation of Su Kim Chung is approved.

Stephen Aron

Anne Gilliland

Jonathan Furner

Mary Niles Maack, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015
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On the top of this list are my parents who have supported me every step of the way, from taking care of my dog during my frequent absences to fly to Los Angeles for class or to Reno for archival research, to feeding me when I was too exhausted to cook while working full time and trying to eek out a few sentences in the evening, and for always believing that I could finish no matter how much I doubted myself. I could not have done it without them.

As I worked full-time throughout the nine years it took me to complete the PhD program, many of my work colleagues at UNLV have also been a source of support. UNLV Libraries Dean Patricia Iannuzzi was supportive from the first time I announced my intention to pursue the PhD in 2005. Former boss Peter Michel got me through the difficult early years of coursework, and current boss Michelle Light has provided support at the end as I struggled to reach the finish line with the dissertation. Dave Schwartz and Claytee White have shown kindness and compassion when I was at my lowest ebb. Other co-workers such as Kathy War, Jonnie Kennedy, and Mary McCoy were there for me at the beginning of the program, offering encouragement and working extra reference desk shifts so that I could take time off to finish coursework. During my nine years in the PhD program, Joyce Moore has been a significant source of comfort during my struggles and also cheerfully covered many desk shifts so that I
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The path to a PhD is a long and challenging one that requires much in the way of personal and life sacrifices. Chief among those is losing time with family and friends, and I want to thank all for their patience during this interminably long process. To my family members near and far, I hope to be a better daughter, sibling, auntie, godmother, and cousin now that I am finished. To my friends Sara, Murray, Alyssa and so many others, who have had to endure countless times the refrain, “No I can’t go because I have to work on the dissertation”—thanks for your understanding. I will never be able to repay my family and friends for their support and patience during the PhD process, and I am so grateful that they remained at my side for the duration.
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“‘Flies Millions Thick’: Archival Work in Southern Nevada, 1908,” as part of the panel *Archival History in the West* at the Society of Southwest Archivists and Conference of Inter-Mountain Archivists joint meeting, Mesa, AZ – May 24, 2012.

“Nevada Historical Records Survey: The Clark County Perspective” with Tom Sommer as part of *Alphabet Soup: The New Deal in Nevada* – 9th Biennial Conference on Nevada History presented by the Nevada Historical Society, May 2008

**Selected Publications**


Su Kim Chung. “‘Flies Millions Thick’: A Diary of Jeanne Wier’s Collecting Trip to Southern Nevada, July-August 1908.” *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*. 26, nos. 3-4. (Fall/Winter 2013).


CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

… the important thing for Nevada to realize is that the promotion of a study of its own history is an obligation that rests primarily on Nevada itself. It is gratifying to know that goodly beginnings have already been made. Patriotic citizens and energetic workers have organized a historical society and kept it alive under adverse and even disheartening circumstances…The energy which your secretary has displayed in bringing these things to pass, in the midst of a busy life as a college professor, is to the outsider no less than a marvel.1

For Jeanne Wier, these warm words of acknowledgement praising her efforts in organizing the Nevada Historical Society (NHS) were no doubt welcome in 1912, just eight short years after its founding. The fact that they came from the pen of the eminent Western historian Herbert Bolton was even more of an honor. As the annual meeting of the NHS came to a close after Bolton’s speech on the evening of May 13, 1912, Wier must have no doubt felt relieved that the lengthy speech had gone well; it was so well-regarded, in fact, that the Nevada State Journal printed it in its entirety shortly afterward to edify that portion of the Reno public who had not attended the lecture.2 Indeed, Bolton’s speech played well into Wier’s larger goal of inculcating a historical consciousness into the Nevada populace, a task she had taken on with enthusiasm and vigor upon her appointment as Secretary of the NHS at its founding in 1904.

Wier was to hold the post of secretary (and curator) for almost a half century until her death in 1950 (nearly concurrent with her tenure as professor and chair of the History

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2 “Obligation of Nevada Toward Writing of Her Own History,” Nevada State Journal, May 19, 1912.
Department at the University of Nevada), and during that time Wier’s own historical consciousness was reflected in her all-consuming desire to collect, organize, preserve and promote the history of Nevada; for most of her tenure, however, the state paid little more than lip service to the idea of preserving its history, and financial and material support came only grudgingly in the smallest of increments as a result of Wier’s constant lobbying for her beloved historical society. Consequently, Wier never had enough money to build the proper facility to house the collections or the funds to pay for sufficient clerical help to relieve her from the menial tasks that would free her to take on the additional field work and historical research that she saw as so vital to the Society’s mission. In addition, the lack of sufficient funding long handicapped the Society’s ability to hire professional librarians to catalog the library’s collections. All of these deficiencies Wier felt profoundly, longing as she did to mold the NHS into an institution on par with the great historical societies of the Midwest such as those in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Yet even as she failed, she succeeded. Without Wier’s indomitable spirit, and unceasing drive in the face of such apathy, Nevada might never have seen its early historical documents and objects preserved, the stories of its pioneer citizens collected, and a foundation laid from which other cultural heritage institutions in the state could take inspiration and guidance. A life-long spinster, Wier once famously described the NHS as “my child,” and it was perhaps the fierceness of this motherly devotion that made her refuse to give up in the face of adversity that might have made a lesser person quit. Wier’s success, however we may define it, was even more remarkable when one considers that she was a woman in a state dominated by men. Her status as a professional woman with a college degree made her a rarity in early twentieth-century Nevada, a state that was barely out of its territorial infancy, and where the majority of the
population was more concerned with exploiting the latest mining bonanza than gathering the
department history of those pioneers who had come before them.

    The historical society in the United States, with its unique amalgamation of books,
manuscripts and objects, has sometimes defied categorization as an institution; not quite a
library, nor a museum nor an archive, it can claim membership in all three categories. Perhaps
for this reason, it has never attracted the scholarly attention that has been devoted to academic
and public libraries, museums, and even archives. The scholarship on historical societies has
also tended to focus on the early institutions founded in eastern states such as Massachusetts,
New York, and Pennsylvania that contained materials closely connected with the founding of the
Republic. The large historical societies of the Midwest, founded as they were in the mid-
nineteenth century had time to grow and prosper and were rich in collections documenting the
wave of explorers and fur traders who dug further into the continent, and they too have been the
subject of considerable scholarship. Historical societies of the Western region documenting the
history of the frontier states that came last to exploration and statehood were founded late in the
nineteenth and early into the twentieth century and have become the subject of scholarly inquiry
only recently.

    Much of this literature on Western historical societies is narrative and descriptive in
nature, containing little substantive analysis or scarcely any attempt to put these historical
societies in context with other historical societies or larger issues relating to history making,
collecting, and keeping. Accounts of individual Western historical societies have also been
narrowly focused and consist largely of narratives of the institution such as those created for the
anniversaries of the Arizona and Washington State historical societies. Only Amanda
Laugesen’s recent work has attempted a more sophisticated analysis of the Western historical
society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: a comparative study of three distinct historical societies representing different regions of the West—Wisconsin, Kansas and Oregon—and framing them within the context of the development of a “public historical culture” in the West.³

Michael G. Kammen argues in Mystic Chords of Memory that in the late nineteenth century “local and regional pride heightened the importance of historical consciousness,” thus increasing the importance of state and local historical societies.⁴ Similarly, Laugesen’s work is grounded on her assertion that “Western communities needed a history for themselves, and they too, in the spirit of the age, sought to shape histories of themselves, and attempted to turn their disparate stories and memories into some sort of coherent public history.”⁵ Her study documents how these state organizations shaped a “public historical culture” in various ways—collecting historical materials, records, and objects for their institutions, promoting significant anniversaries and festivals, and erecting statues and historical markers. Laugesen’s work also explores where these western historical societies placed Native Americans and their societies within the public history of their respective states. She is not silent regarding the role of women in the development of public historical culture either: “Women thread their way through the story of public historical culture because of their interest and enthusiasm for cultural work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”⁶ However, Laugesen’s focus on the historical societies of Kansas, Wisconsin, and Oregon in the time frame under study (1880-1910) leads her to

⁵Laugesen, Public Historical Culture, 2.
⁶Ibid., 65.
conclude that “Unsurprisingly, women achieved little by way of leadership roles within historical societies. Professionalism, as it evolved, was a heavily gendered discourse; but at the basic level of reality it was unlikely that a woman, however talented or dedicated, could assume leadership of an important cultural institution.”

Although Laugesen’s work provides one framework for studying the Western historical society, Jeanne Wier’s nearly fifty years at the helm of the NHS demonstrates that Laugesen’s work is limited in its scope and claims about the contributions of women. A study of Wier and the NHS can thus provide another perspective on the development of the historical society as an institution in the West and expand our understanding of women’s leadership roles in early cultural heritage and information institutions. In doing so, it also provides a portrait of the professional woman in the West in the early twentieth century that adds an additional layer of understanding to the overall history of women in the West.

**Content and Scope**

This dissertation focuses on Jeanne Wier and the years she was active in shaping the Nevada Historical Society, 1904-1950. It is the story of the institution as it unfolded over four decades, but more broadly, it considers how Wier shaped what Laugesen has framed as the idea of “public historical culture” in the state of Nevada. This culture not only included the collection of documents and books to provide a basis for research, but also the collection of relics for a museum that sought to be a showplace of Nevada’s history for her citizens. It includes the means by which the NHS performed outreach to make Nevada’s history a viable part of the community through anniversaries and celebrations and its efforts at preserving historic sites. The study considers the tension that arose in Wier’s attempts to have the NHS fulfill these different

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7 Ibid., 66.
roles and the challenges that she faced in obtaining financial, governmental and community support for the institution. An important consideration of the dissertation is its evaluation of how successful Wier was in achieving the goals of the NHS regarding its mission of developing a historical consciousness within the state and its citizenry. In defining success, the study considers the general volume and frequency of collection donations to the Society as well as the research it supported and the historical papers it published. When possible, the study considers quantitative data such as the number of patrons that visited the Society, the number of people attending events and lectures, and the amount of financial support obtained from the legislature and via private funding. Moving beyond numbers, an assessment of Weir’s legacy at the NHS must also consider the collections she gathered over the years. Questions of collecting focus and, in particular, an exploration of whose history was collected also form part of the discussion.

Wier’s high standards of professionalism were undoubtedly one major cause of tension within the NHS as an institution. Although she did not have a Ph.D. during her tenure at the University of Nevada and the Nevada Historical Society, she nonetheless considered herself to be a “professional historian.” She was thus adamant that the Society be run with a high degree of professionalism (in contrast to other Western historical societies founded in the nineteenth century such as those in Oregon or Arizona that were initially run by pioneer members) and recognized early the need to have trained librarians on staff to catalog the society’s collections. Greatly impressed with the workings of more established institutions such as the Wisconsin Historical Society and the Washington State Historical Society, Wier sought their advice and counsel in shaping the Society into the professional organization that she envisioned for Nevada. Wier’s concern with professionalism—in the library, the museum, in collecting public records
and publishing historical memoirs and accounts—is an important theme considered throughout the dissertation.

The NHS was one of the last of a number of historical societies to be founded in the West (Arizona, Utah, Washington, and Oregon among others preceded it) in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Most had similar aims and therefore experienced similar struggles in their efforts to document the history of their individual states in a society that was still very new and oftentimes raw, and which viewed the funding of historical work as a low priority. Wier herself made reference to historical trends that typified the West in the early twentieth century (e.g., its newness, the migratory habits of its people, and pioneers who departed with their wealth) and that served to place an additional burden on “the Western state historical society” as it developed. Indeed, she proclaimed in her 1910 address before the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Society that “in Nevada western conditions are exaggerated, [and] the difficulties of western historical work are here most clearly to be seen and appreciated.”

It is important, then, to put the NHS in context with the development of other Western historical societies in terms of their leadership and missions as a means to demonstrate how it was both an exemplar and an exception in comparison.

Placing the institution in context with developments within Nevada is also an important part of this study. The state and the city (Reno) that gave birth to the NHS in 1904 were undergoing tremendous change in the early twentieth century. After a twenty-year depression at the end of the nineteenth century, a new mining boom and Senator Francis G. Newlands’ reclamation project were attracting positive attention to Nevada and beginning to demonstrate her potential in a new light. Significantly, a spirit of progressivism had enveloped Reno at this

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time, and Nevada historian Wilbur Shepperson has described the Nevada State Historical Society as “a product of the expansion and reform of the decade.” Thus, any consideration of the NHS must take into account these changes and provide a larger perspective of the state and its place in the West at this time.

Although Wier was the primary party responsible for the collecting and day-to-day operations of the Nevada Historical Society, she did not operate in a vacuum. The governing board that worked with Wier over the decades (including those persons who had initially founded the NHS with her in 1904) was composed of some of the state’s most prominent and financially successful men (and much later, women) whose names constitute a virtual “who’s who” in Nevada history. Active in academia, business, politics, and law, these men should have been effective advocates for Wier and the NHS, but the numerous struggles she had in her nearly fifty years with the Society demonstrate that their assistance was of an uneven quality. Thus, an examination of the work of some of Wier’s associates and an assessment of their contributions to the Nevada Historical Society is woven into this narrative.

This dissertation is also the story of Jeanne Wier as a professional woman in Nevada in the early twentieth-century urban West. As a woman who emigrated from the Midwest (Iowa) to follow a teaching job in a remote part of Oregon, who pursued higher education at Stanford University, and who obtained professional employment (University of Nevada) in the last decade of the nineteenth century, Wier’s story is not necessarily unique in the West. Her success in achieving a position of institutional leadership, however, within both the History Department of the University of Nevada and the Nevada Historical Society, in a region that was widely regarded as a “man’s state,” was more unusual. Wier was intensely devoted to her work at the

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Nevada Historical Society, so much so, that it might be possible to forget that in her nearly forty-six years at the helm, she worked without compensation; her main salary came from her work as a professor (and later chair) of the Department of History at the University of Nevada. Her work at the two institutions was undoubtedly intertwined and perhaps complementary in some respects, but the burden of conducting the two jobs concurrently was the cause of friction and genuine exhaustion in her personal and professional life. Wier was supportive of women’s causes in Nevada, including the women’s suffrage movement, and participated in a number of other women’s organizations in Reno throughout her life. A study of Jeanne Wier must thus take into consideration these various roles and how they affected her work at the Nevada Historical Society.

Although she was not a librarian, Wier’s experiences at the NHS were similar in nature to the work of those progressive women librarians depicted in Passet’s *Cultural Crusaders: Women Librarians in the American West, 1900-1917* and their efforts at Western community building. Passet’s study also attempted to understand how librarians constructed and gave meaning to their lives as independent women in predominantly rural western communities; a study of Wier’s work at the NHS will enable us to expand this understanding of women and cultural heritage work into Nevada, a state that was excluded from Passet’s examination of the West. As a portrait of a professional woman in Nevada, this dissertation also broadens the existing body of literature on women and their contributions to the development of early twentieth-century Nevada.

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Theoretical Framework

The New Western History

Wier’s tenure at the NHS began just eleven years after Frederick Jackson Turner made his seminal address on the frontier at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893.11 Turner’s argument that “the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development”12 was part of his larger explanation of the frontier. He saw it as responsible for American development, democracy, and character, and his essay (with the aid of the US Census) pronounced the frontier closed: “never again will such gifts of free land offer themselves.”13 Although not warmly received at the time, Turner’s “frontier thesis” soon became the driving theoretical force in American historical studies. Many historians (and politicians) later utilized it as a means to explain (and justify) various incidents in the history of America and to define a particular “Western” character. Turner’s characterization of the frontier as “the meeting point between savagery and civilization” justified as inevitable an expansion into the West that had in many instances run roughshod over existing cultures and the physical landscape. Male figures that symbolized the values of democracy, individualism, independence and self-reliance—from fur trappers and traders to farmers, cattle raisers and soldiers—were glorified in Turner’s narrative in which he argued that “…this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous

11 As an alumna of Stanford University, Wier kept in regular contact with the history faculty who later included Turner’s close friend, Max Farrand, and Herbert Eugene Bolton, one of Turner’s most promising students from the University of Wisconsin, who taught at Stanford from 1909-1911 before moving across the bay to the University of California, Berkeley. See James T. Stensvaag, “‘The Life of My Child:’ Jeanne Elizabeth Wier, the Nevada Historical Society, and the Great Quarters Struggle of the 1920s,” Nevada Historical Society Quarterly 23, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 5.
13 Ibid., 59.
touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character.”

For much of the early twentieth century, historians revered the frontier thesis, and it served as the theoretical basis for additional scholarship on the West. Yet cracks began to form in the 1920s and continued after Turner’s death in 1932 as a variety of scholars pointed to discrepancies in the way he had used his historical evidence and took issue with his fuzzy definitions and his sometimes faulty logic. John Mark Faragher notes the emergence (beginning in the 1930s) of a number of alternative frameworks for western history—the “Spanish Borderlands” studies of Bolton, the “colonial” western history of DeVoto, Webb’s portrait of the West as an arid region, McWiliams’ study of Mexican-Americans among others—and concludes that “Their approaches were all new and had very little to do with the frontier thesis, and within a quarter century of Turner’s death had inspired several shelves of good, non-Turnerian western history.”

Such were the beginnings of what would later be termed the “new western history.” This new framework, guided by developments in social history methods, broadened the scope of inquiry for the study of the West beyond the process of the frontier and added dimensions of place, culture, and gender. One of its foremost proponents was clear on just what Turner’s apparently unifying concept of the frontier had left out: women of all ethnicities and most men beyond English-speaking white men. In terms of the frontier landscape, Limerick noted that Turner’s model was more focused on agrarian settlement and left little room for “deserts,

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14 Ibid., 32.
15 Ibid., 22.
mountains, mines, towns, cities, railroads, territorial government, and the institutions of commerce and finance...”

The studies that form part of the new western history consider ethnicity, western cities, and immigration, and provide the foundation for newer descriptions of the West as “an ethnically diverse, urban, and internally segmented region.”

In addressing the multiple limitations of the frontier thesis, the “new western history” has thus brought the contributions of a much wider variety of participants — women, western Indians, and other regional minorities such as Hispanics and the Chinese — to the history of the West. Yet beyond simply providing a place for them in the existing narrative, the “new western history” has conceived of the West as a meeting ground where people of various cultures, languages, and religions came together, and as a location for the cross-fertilization of customs, ideas and worldviews. It has emphasized the interlocking relationships of these various ethnic and racial groups and classes as connecting the various parts of the West. The “new western history” has elevated the frontier beyond process into an “inter-section where peoples came together—to trade, to fight, to procreate, to preach contrary conceptions of the good life, to restore old worlds, and to make sense of new worlds.”

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20 White, “Western History,” 207.

In her summation of the frameworks used by the new western historians,” Limerick acknowledges that they define the West as a place—broadly the region west of the hundredth meridian—22—but acknowledges that they also see a “process” at work in the region’s history. She describes this process as “the convergence of diverse peoples . . . and their encounters with each other and their environment.”23 This characterization of the West as place where peoples and cultures “bumped” or “collided” in a challenging environment is a common theme in much of the “new western history.”24 This process of contact and convergence was not limited to the nineteenth century by any means, and has been a part of the development of the West for centuries.25

In broadening the range of participants under study, much of the “new western history” has focused on ordinary people and the conditions and communities that shaped their lives. As one historian noted, “even the most heroic people lead ordinary lives 99 percent of the time—and that is what we are looking for to construct a realistic western history.”26 Such a perspective, with its focus on the contact and interaction between these peoples in their new environment, also considers “the emotional and psychological dimensions of western history, the human responses to the peculiar physical and social settings of the West. Whereas the other approaches

22 Patricia Nelson Limerick, “What on Earth is the New Western History?” in Trails: Toward a New Western History ed. Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner, and Charles E. Rankin (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991). Limerick’s is only one of many definitions of the West that has been debated in recent years. For more on these conflicting views see Walter Nugent, “Where is the West? A Report on a Survey,” Montana: The Magazine of Western History, no. 42 (Summer 1992): 2-23.

23 Limerick, Legacy of Conquest, 26.


consider western history from the top down and the bottom up, this one looks from the inside out.”

**Western Women’s History**

One of the most valuable contributions of the new western history paradigm has been its more inclusive stance toward the contributions of women to the development of the West. Virtually invisible in Turner’s conception of the frontier, women’s appearance in early traditional western studies was limited and often stereotypical. Jensen and Miller characterize women in these histories as “invisible, few in number, and not important in the process of taming a wilderness. Or conversely, their role has been sentimentalized and given a rhetorical mystical importance approaching sainthood.” Western women in these histories have typically been stereotyped into four categories: the gentle tamers, the women who acted as a civilizing influence by bringing the social and cultural values of home to the frontier; the sunbonneted helpmates whose duty was to work diligently to help their men succeed; and finally collapsing the last two categories into one, the hell-raisers and bad women, the women whose behavior placed them on the fringes of society such as cowgirls like Calamity Jane, and prostitutes respectively.

Studies of western women within the context of the new western history have expanded this limited perspective of women’s contributions. These studies indicate that westering women came from different backgrounds, had different experiences, and responded to frontier conditions.

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in different ways. Though they admit there is a grain of truth to every stereotype, the more inclusive studies of women attempt to explore and rethink these stereotypes from the woman’s perspective. Thus, with regard to the study of western women’s lives, they argue that it is important to start with women’s own words and explanations. Armitage, for example, points to Lerner’s definition of women’s history as “The true history of women is the history of their ongoing functioning in [the] male-defined world, on their own terms” and suggests that it is understanding these terms that makes the woman’s perspective. Expanding and overturning these stereotypes also involves placing them in context with the larger social and economic changes that affected the West.

In addition to focusing on the woman’s perspective, these new studies have sought to more accurately depict the diversity of women in West, not only in a racial or ethnic sense but in terms of regional and class affiliations as well. With its focus on the multicultural nature of women in the West, the new western history analyzes the intersections of race, class, and gender and provides a portrait of western women “at the cultural crossroads.” Only recognition of the diversity of their lives and experiences allows us to understand the different circumstances of

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western women’s lives and enables us to come to more accurate generalizations about what the West has been for women.  

Women’s history framed within the paradigm of the new western history also examines the nature of gender roles in the West. In disproving some of the typical stereotypes of women such as the passive “gentle tamers” and dutiful “sunbonneted helpmates,” these studies examine the expanded and often different roles that shaped women’s lives in the West when the “ideal definitions of womanhood were accepted, rejected, or adapted by nineteenth-century western women.” They explore whether contacts among people with different heritages, experiences, and beliefs created new understandings of sex roles. It is notable that the gender boundaries that developed in the West also served to shape new regional identities distinct from each other and from those that had existed in the places from which they had emigrated.  

For instance, an examination of women’s roles in community and institution building provides a useful way of exploring and rethinking the “gentle tamer” stereotype. The traditional stereotype framed women as the civilizers of frontier society with their concern for schools, churches, culture, and reform but implied that they were passive participants in these endeavors. The new western history has examined the stereotypes and uncovered the much more complex historical reality of the situation. Armitage argues that the women she has found in her research are anything but passive, noting that “they played an active role in building their communities” by lobbying and raising money for various projects and organizations. According to Jameson,

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35 Ibid., 4-5.
women were not hidden in the household, but rather creators of a female community which supported them as they helped to shape communities and politics in the West.\textsuperscript{38} Myres points to the teacher as a prominent public figure in Western communities whose role as a civilizer and community leader could be an extremely important one.\textsuperscript{39} Significantly, she notes that community activities “did not radically change women’s views of themselves and their role in society, but the frontier did offer many new opportunities for women and an expanded definition of ‘woman’s place’”.\textsuperscript{40}

The new western history has allowed for a wider perspective on the West as a place and a process. It has created a more inclusive paradigm for the study of women in the West that moves beyond traditional stereotypes and focuses on women’s perspectives and expanded gender roles. Using the framework of the “new western history,” this dissertation studies the development of the NHS as a cultural heritage institution in Nevada within the context of the state and the West as a whole. It looks at the social, cultural, ideological, and economic forces that shaped its development as a public institution in the West. A close examination of the NHS also illustrates the manner in which western societies and cities attempted to define themselves and their region’s importance to the historical development of the United States. Lastly, through the lens of western women’s history, this study also provides insight into the role of women in shaping the community and giving it identity through the development of cultural institutions and in doing so, illustrate expanded gender roles of women in the West.

\textsuperscript{38} Jameson, “Women as Workers,” 158.
\textsuperscript{39} Myres, Westering Women, 85.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 212.
Research Questions

There are three central questions that drive the narrative of this dissertation and a number of sub-questions that provide context for these larger questions. Source materials used to answer these questions are listed next to the sub-questions.

1. How was the NHS used to promote the development of a historical consciousness and a public historical culture in Nevada?

2. How was the NHS similar to or different from other Western historical societies? What characteristics distinguish the Western historical society from those in the East?

3. In a portrait of Jeanne Wier (JW) and her work with the NHS, how does JW fit into a framework of other western women of her time (professional, educated, middle-class) who attempted to build community in Nevada and the West?

Sub-questions: NHS and historical societies in the West

1. What types of efforts did JW put forth as a means to develop this public historical culture? [biennial reports, NHS correspondence and newspaper articles detailing library and museum events, describing the collection of manuscripts and historical relics, documenting the publication of historical “papers,” records of historic preservation of early Nevada structures, anniversary celebrations, and public history talks given by JW]

2. Are there historical trends that typify the West that also characterize the development of western historical societies and the NHS? [JW speeches, secondary sources on the other western historical societies]

3. How did Tuner’s concept of the frontier affect JW’s collecting philosophy and her efforts to develop the NHS and a public historical culture in Nevada? [JW’s speeches, biennial reports, NHS correspondence]

4. How successful was the NHS in achieving its goals/mission statement? Success here is defined according to the variety of collections accessioned, number of visitors to the museum, research projects supported and papers published, accounts of people attending events and lectures, financial support from the legislature, and private funding made available. [biennial reports and correspondence of the NHS, newspaper articles]

5. How was the NHS perceived locally and throughout the state? Was it valued? Was it considered necessary? [newspaper articles, Nevada governor’s correspondence, NHS correspondence, biennial reports]
6. Who were the other people who worked with JW in establishing the NHS? Who worked within the institution itself? Were they also educators? Were they lay people or prominent citizens in the community? How much influence did they have in the society or with JW? Was there friction or conflict? [biennial reports, NHS correspondence, Nevada State Archives correspondence]

7. Early historical societies were more the province of amateurs who did not have formal degrees or training in history. As professional training for historians increased in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this was professionalization was reflected in how historical societies were run. Were there tensions between professional and amateur approaches in the NHS, and if so, how did these tensions play out in the NHS with JW? What about the role of professional librarians? Was there also a concept of the archivist as a professional whose skills were needed at the NHS? [biennial reports, and NHS correspondence]

8. What was the collecting focus of the NHS during JW’s tenure? Whose history was collected in the years 1904-1950? Was it on the “short history”—a phrase used by Amanda Laugesen (2006) that referred to a state history that focused solely on a state’s history since white settlement—or a focus on dead white men who came to “tame” the frontier and get rich? Or did it seek to provide a more inclusive history of the different ethnic groups in Nevada? What kind of efforts did it make to collect the history of Native Americans? Did Wier display any interest in documenting the history of women at the NHS? Did actual collecting efforts match rhetoric? [Lists of donations from Biennial Reports, newspaper articles on donations, NHS correspondence]

9. How were the NHS collections formed – via donation or purchase? How was funding obtained? [biennial reports, correspondence, newspaper articles]

10. Was Nevada unique as regards its growth and development as a historical society in the American West? How did its leadership, structure, funding, public interest, collections develop? Was there a spectrum of differences between the different societies? [Secondary sources on other historical societies in the West]

**Sub-questions: Portrait of Jeanne Wier**

1. Biographical sketch of JW: what was her personal background and family situation? What inspired her to seek higher education and move west? As an unmarried female faculty member at the University of Nevada, did she face particular challenges in her teaching career? Did her gender have an effect on her work at the NHS? [JW correspondence, NHS correspondence]

2. What were gender roles and expectations when she was growing up? Did she find greater opportunities by moving west? Are gender roles and opportunities in Nevada similar to what was experienced elsewhere in the West? [Secondary sources on women in the west, women in higher education, and Nevada]
3. Was JW as a woman in a leadership role in the NHS unique in comparison to women in other historical societies in the West? [Secondary sources on historical societies in Washington, Oregon, Utah, Arizona, Idaho]

4. What was the status of women in Nevada in the early twentieth century? How was JW’s experience representative of professional women in Nevada, in the early 1900s, and in the West in general? For example, was it common for professional women of this era to be active in the suffrage movement, as Wier was? [Secondary sources on the University of Nevada, women in Nevada]

5. JW was a rarity as a professional, educated woman in a state that was largely considered to be a man’s world. Was she supportive of other women like herself? What were her relationships with other women like within the context of the NHS and her role as history faculty at UNR? [NHS correspondence, JW correspondence] Did she mentor other women, or was she a lone crusader? Did professional women in Nevada of that era have networks, or any they laboring largely on their own?

6. Lastly, to what extent did Wier accomplish what she set out to do? [biennial reports, local newspaper articles and editorials.]
CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

**Historical Societies and Historical Consciousness**

Despite a lengthy and storied legacy dating back to the early days of the Republic, the historical society as an institution has been one of the least-studied areas of library and archival history. In a 1997 review essay entitled “Historical Societies as History,” Leslie H. Fishel (then director of the Wisconsin State Historical Society) noted that

> The literature by and about individual historical societies is rich in bibliographic aids, genealogical data, biographical vignettes, technical assistance, periodic reports, and local reminiscences. Studies which look at historical societies as institutions and as an influential movement in the United States are rare.¹

Its peculiar structure, combining the functions of a museum, library and archives under one roof, no doubt make it difficult to categorize within histories focused solely on one of these types of institutions. Dunlap produced the first general history of historical societies in the United States but covered only the years 1790-1860, so it was not surprising that his focus was limited to those historical societies founded primarily in the East.² States such as New York, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania with their significant connections to the founding of the republic (and the respective importance of the documents in their care) are covered in depth, and those founded in New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Maine are covered to a lesser extent. Other societies such as those founded in Indiana and Illinois receive attention, but it is the State

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Historical Society of Wisconsin, founded in 1853, that is most representative of the “western” historical society in Dunlap’s work. Owing to the period or the particular institutions under discussion or perhaps the time in which he himself wrote this study, it is notable that women barely merit a mention in Dunlap’s study either as members or leaders of the various historical societies.

Whitehill’s lengthy volume on independent historical societies is the other major historical treatment of the historical society in the US and provides gazetteer-like coverage of each state. Although his reporting is distributed more evenly on a geographic basis (he obtained much of his data by personally visiting or writing letters to these institutions), its most in-depth treatment is again reserved for the oldest and most revered Eastern institutions such as the historical societies of Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania as well as the American Antiquarian Society. Whitehall also considers the important distinction between those societies that are privately funded and those that receive state support, focusing on Wisconsin as the model for the latter type of institution. The author does give some attention to almost every historical society in the West, however sparingly, with the exception of Arizona, which appears to have been omitted entirely. The Nevada Historical Society is the subject of a mere two paragraphs that acknowledge Wier’s work and provide a brief description of the collections. Overall, to his credit, Whitehall does provide a more complete portrait of the men and women who have shaped historical societies (both state and local) throughout the United States, but his survey approach naturally favored some institutions and individuals over others.

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Beyond these survey treatments, individual works on historical societies (both monographs and PhD dissertations) have also tended to favor the long-established Eastern institutions. Only a few scholars have moved beyond the East and considered the historical societies of the Midwest and the South, and only two recent monographs have focused on individual historical societies in the West. While some of the early studies have been strictly institutional histories of the historical society as a whole or its library, other studies have sought to provide a more nuanced portrait of the historical society and its larger role in the development of a public interest in history.

Studies that place the historical society within the context of a larger movement—the growth of a national and local interest in history, tradition and historical studies in the United States—while not numerous, have provided a perspective on the historical society that clearly demonstrates how this institution played a central and dynamic role in many communities and

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was more than simply a repository of documents and relics. Van Tassel’s chronicle of these efforts includes both the early work of the New Englanders from 1790-1815 and the spread of the historical society phenomenon (“a national pastime”) westward into states such as Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan, and then southward into states such as Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina in the years between 1815-1860. His is a useful account that places the historical society in context with other historical movements of the time and the growth of professional historical studies in the nineteenth century, but as he ends his study in 1884, none of the historical societies in the far West, including Nevada, are discussed. What is also overtly missing from his account, however, is an acknowledgement that women may have played a role in these efforts to record America’s past.

A recent edited anthology of essays that considered the development of historical consciousness in the early Republic was similarly focused on the work of institutions such as historical societies and museums. Chapters chronicle individual historical societies with the traditional focus on those that originated in the early years after the country’s founding (Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania) but with additional essays devoted to those institutions (collectively) that developed in the trans-mountain states (Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee) and the trans-Mississippi states (Arkansas, California, Iowa, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon, and Texas). Conclusions at the end of each essay provide useful connecting threads and similarities between the institutions, and add a broader perspective and analysis to the study of the individual institutions.

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The chapter on the trans-mountain states, for instance, acknowledges that the rise of historical consciousness proceeded at a different pace in the states of the trans-mountain west as compared to their eastern neighbors. As the years under study were devoted to the early republic, 1791-1861, those historical societies founded in the latter part of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century were not included. Notably, the authors of the various essays decry the lack of scholarship on the early development of historical studies, and suggest the need to carry the story forward into the postbellum era and into additional studies on state and regional historical societies.

Perhaps the most comprehensive volume devoted to this concept of historical consciousness and the connection between collective memory and national identity is Kammen’s *Mystic Chords of Memory.* His study of the numerous vehicles that contributed to the development of an American culture and tradition (anniversaries, celebrations, preservation of historic sites and buildings, erection of monuments, publication of historical documents) naturally included an examination of the historical society with its emphasis on gathering regional and local history. As Kammen’s goal is to provide comprehensive coverage of the growth of tradition and historical memory in the United States, he acknowledges the role of the West in this phenomenon. He moves beyond chronicling the traditional contributions of the Eastern and Midwestern historical societies, and his coverage of the West is centered on Oregon and California, with forays into Idaho and Montana, and to a lesser extent, Utah and New Mexico. Although some of his discussion does center on the nostalgia factor given to the stereotype of the “Wild West” that was pervasive in the East, his work is significant in that it

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provides a strong argument for the importance of the historical society in building a sense of community in the West. Kammen’s work is also important because it provides the most comprehensive and evidence-based argument for the contributions of women to the preservation of cultural heritage and their participation in a variety of tradition-related activities. It is unfortunate, then, that Nevada is not included in Kammen’s discussion of the work of Western historical societies.

Other works that examined the growth of a historical consciousness and tradition in American society provided insight on historical societies by focusing on a particular function of the historical society such as the support they provided for the writing of local histories and the commemoration of public historical events. Russo focuses on the work of antiquarians writing local histories that served to provide a sense of community and pride in a number of towns and cities across the United States, some prominent (Boston, New York), and some not so prominent (Deerfield, St. Paul) in the nineteenth century. He considers the work of historical societies in inspiring and supporting this work (with their resources) as well as the conflicts and cooperation between professional and amateur historians in the early twentieth century in writing said histories. He also acknowledges the role that women played in writing some of these local histories. Although his study considers the work of antiquarians writing about local communities in the Midwest such as Chicago, Iowa, and Minnesota, and even discusses the histories of

communities in California, Washington and Utah, the West as a whole is sparingly covered, and Nevada is again excluded from this valuable discussion.\footnote{This is despite the fact that in the later part of the time span under consideration in Russo’s book, the Nevada Historical Society was fairly active and had actually published at least three volumes of its own local historical papers.}

Bodnar’s analysis of historical commemoration in the United States is strongly intertwined with ideas relating to public memory and patriotism and focuses less on the role of historical societies in actually promoting these commemorations. He acknowledges the value of historical societies in providing source material for the study of these public commemorations, but does not bring their role into prominence in his discussion. Within the range of topics he considers (ethnic memory, commemoration in the city, public commemoration in the Midwest among others), Bodnar does not reach into the West. Nevertheless, he provides a valuable perspective on these commemorations and public memorials and their role in shaping public memory of historical events. In particular, his analysis of the memory debate and how early public commemorations in the Midwest brought together aspects of regionalism and nationalism provide a model and framework for studying this aspect of the historical society’s mission.

**Historical Societies and Cultural Heritage in the West and Nevada**

Given the general lack of literature on historical societies, it is not surprising that there exists little scholarship on historical societies in the West. In fact, literature on cultural heritage in the West overall has been limited. For example, Stauffer pointed to the paucity of literature on the history of libraries (public, academic or private) in the Inter-Mountain West in her PhD dissertation on the development of public libraries in Utah in 2004.\footnote{Suzanne Stauffer, “Establishing a Recognized Social Order: Social and Cultural Factors in the Development of Utah Public Libraries, 1890-1920” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2004).} Passet, writing exclusively about public librarians in the early twentieth century, fills a nearly empty niche on women and
librarianship in the West, and also makes a valuable contribution to the literature on the professional woman in the West.¹³ Passet’s look at women librarians in public libraries from 1900-1917 focuses on the similarities of the women who came West—their motives, struggles, challenges, and the legacy they left—and the vigor with which they sought to bring a sense of civilization to rural areas in the West. It is especially strong in its consideration of the Progressive-era politics that gave birth to the zeal with which these women approached their profession. Unfortunately, as Nevada had little in the way of libraries or librarians in the first decade of the twentieth century (the Nevada Historical Society was just beginning its quest and there was only one public library in Reno), Passet gives Nevada only the briefest of mentions.

The literature that does exist on Western historical societies has consisted primarily of articles that have been published in the respective journals of individual historical societies. Limiting this study to the definition of the West used by Passet,¹⁴ a thorough search of the literature has uncovered articles on California, Washington, Oregon, Montana, Idaho, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada.¹⁵ Primarily narrative histories of the institutions, these

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¹⁴ In her study of women librarians in the American West, Passet defined the West as those eleven states west of the one-hundredth meridian: Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Passet, *Cultural Crusaders*, xvi.

articles have also discussed (albeit briefly) the state and society out of which these historical societies emerged, and the conflicting demands of running a library, museum and archive under one roof. Not surprisingly, most have considered the personalities and leadership involved in the founding of the societies and the conflicts between these individuals. Within this discussion, most of the articles have provided some insight into the contributions of women to the various societies over the years. As these articles vary in length and in the time span coverage they provide of their respective historical societies, however, most are too brief to bring any consistent perspective to our understanding of how these institutions cultivated a sense of historical consciousness or a public historical culture within their respective states. Institutional centennials prompted both Arizona and Washington to produce monograph-length works on their institution’s histories that have enabled them to provide a more complete portrait of their respective institutions.\footnote{Sonnichsen, \textit{Pioneer Heritage}; McClelland, \textit{Window to the Past}.} Individual works that focus on founders of historical societies are even rarer; Dee’s flowery tribute to the Oregon pioneer George Himes provides only a brief glimpse into his work on behalf of the Oregon Historical Society.\footnote{Minnie Roof Dee, \textit{From Oxcart to Airplane; a Biography of George H. Himes} (Portland, OR: Binfords & Mort, 1939).}

Beyond these individual histories, Laugesen’s study, as has been noted previously, is the most significant contribution thus far on the study of Western historical societies that considers the broader context and significance of historical society work.\footnote{Amanda Laugesen, \textit{The Making of Public Historical Culture in the American West, 1880-1910: The Role of Historical Societies} (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006).} It provides an analytical and
comparative view of the historical societies in three Western states: Wisconsin, Kansas, and Oregon. The author argues that the state perspective “is essential because state-based historical organizations played an important role in shaping a distinctive type of public historical culture that existed between, and mediated, the local and the national.”\(^\text{19}\)

Although acknowledging that they are not “comprehensively representative,” Laugesen selected these states as case studies because they represent different aspects of the Western settlement experience.\(^\text{20}\)

Beyond providing a historical treatment of each institution and its leadership, her study focuses on the various aspects of historical society work that made them effective arbiters of public historical culture and community building in the West: large scale collecting of books, documents and artifacts on their respective states, placing historic markers, commemorating significant state historical events, and compiling pioneer citizen reminisces and memories. Laugesen also takes into consideration questions of professional versus amateur with regard to the leadership of the societies and how such conflicts affected the institutions under study. Throughout her study, Laugesen remains cognizant of the need to consider historical societies within the context of historical practices and the development of historical consciousness.

With the exception of the cumulative volumes on historical societies and cultural heritage that have failed to consider Nevada in context with other Western states, the literature on cultural heritage institutions in Nevada has also been limited. A thorough search of the literature reveals very few articles on Nevada’s cultural heritage. In fact, *Oases of Culture*, the first and only monograph on the history of libraries (public and academic) in Nevada, relied greatly on

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid., 4.
\(^\text{20}\) Ibid. According to Laugesen, Oregon is valuable because of its importance in the making of Pacific Northwest culture and its connection to the overland trail experience of settlement. Kansas represents the pull of both North-South historical identity and the Western settlement experience. Wisconsin was settled at the end of the “Old Northwest” settlement and its historical society developed as the model for the “Western historical society” that many others, including Kansas and Oregon, followed.
unpublished papers and newspaper articles on academic and public libraries across the state as source material. Primarily a survey or “panorama” of the state’s libraries and their growth and development, it acknowledges the unique nature of Nevada (one of the least populated and most poorly funded states in the US until the mid twentieth century) that is no doubt responsible for this dearth of literature on cultural heritage: “The history of Nevada libraries in the twentieth century is a paradigm for the host state. A hundred years ago, Nevada was a desert not only geographically but intellectually.” As the library of the Nevada Historical Society did not fall strictly into the academic or public library categories, however, Hulse makes only the briefest of mentions of Wier and her work in assembling a library that would document the history of the fledgling state.

Beyond its brief appearance in Hulse’s work, the Nevada Historical Society, as a cultural heritage institution, has been the subject of a small number of articles which have, not surprisingly, appeared in the society’s own publication, the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*. The Society’s recent centennial in 2004 served as a catalyst for articles celebrating its collections and one that provided a brief overview of its history with a biographical sketch of Jeanne Wier written by the Society’s director. Prior to that, Stensvaag provided evidence of Wier’s stubborn dedication to the mission of the Nevada Historical Society in his article detailing her struggles with Nevada’s governor to maintain control of the Society’s collections in the late 20th century.

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1920s during a time of great turmoil.\(^{24}\) Lastly, Barbara Richnak, biographer of Nevada newspaper publisher Robert Fulton,\(^ {25}\) profiled his role as one of the co-founders of the Nevada Historical Society in a brief article, and discussed his work as its first president.\(^ {26}\) Of these articles, only Stensvaag provides any real evaluation of Wier’s personality or work beyond the usual superlatives, but his study is limited to only one incident in her nearly fifty years of work at the Nevada Historical Society. Richnak’s work is useful in providing an example of the progressive Nevada businessmen who worked with Wier in preserving Nevada’s cultural heritage early in the twentieth century.

**Literature on Women in Nevada**

The state’s youth notwithstanding, the role of women in Nevada has been chronically understudied since historians first began reporting on the history of the “Silver State” in the 1880s with the “mug book” histories typical of that era. In fact it was not until the last two decades of the twentieth century that women began to emerge from the background as historians began to paint a more complex picture of the state’s history. Women had sometimes been accorded small bits of space in the general histories of Nevada under subjects such as suffrage, but there have never been entire narratives framed around their contributions. Progress came slowly with early works such as *Pioneer Women of Nevada* (fashioned like a twentieth-century mug book with each profile devoted to a notable Nevada woman of the nineteenth and early twentieth century).\(^ {27}\)


Profiles were generally celebratory and lacked analysis or critical insight into their subjects. In fact, most studies of Nevada women have been biographical sketches focused on individual women who have made contributions to the social, cultural, and economical development of the State.

Not surprisingly, such studies have focused on women’s contributions to two of the state’s most significant industries—mining and ranching. Individual profiles and oral histories have chronicled the stories of women on the Nevada frontier, struggling to create homes and communities in barren desert environments in all regions of the state. More recent volumes such as *Comstock Women: the Making of a Mining Community* and Zanjani’s *A Mine of Her Own: Woman Prospectors in the American West, 1850-1950* have examined the contributions of women who played supporting roles in mining communities or who were active participants in the mining industry in the Nevada and the West. Other studies have focused on the roles of Native American or Chinese women in shaping the history of the state.

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Reflecting a similar bias to other general studies of women in the West, far fewer studies have chronicled middle-class professional women in Nevada. The women’s suffrage movement in Nevada, which made its first appearance in 1869, has been a popular topic with scholars and its central protagonist, the Reno-born and Stanford-educated Anne Martin (Wier’s nemesis in later years), has been the subject of significant biographical studies. As the first woman to run for Nevada’s United States Senate seat, Martin’s political career was also the subject of scholarship. Bennett has recently considered women in Nevada state politics in the years 1919-


and a few articles have profiled women journalists in Nevada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.36

There has been virtually no scholarly published work on women who have contributed to the educational or cultural development of the state.37 Pioneer teacher and political activist Hannah E. Clapp, who worked as an educator in Reno shortly after its founding in 1860, was the subject of one study as was Nevada poet and writer Idah Meacham Strobridge.38 As has been noted previously, Wier, as founder of the Nevada Historical Society, was the subject of a few brief articles in the Nevada Historical Society Quarterly. In addition, Hulse recently examined Wier’s role as a history professor at the University of Nevada and her work in promoting the study of women’s history long before it became popular.39 In recent years, oral history treatments have focused on Nevada’s modern-day cultural crusaders such as Jean Ford, founder

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37 Since 1994, the Nevada Women’s History Project, a grassroots organization of Nevada women devoted to “providing visibility and support for the gathering and dissemination of history about the roles and contributions of Nevada women of every race, class, and ethnic background” has researched the lives of Nevada women from all walks of life around the state, and placed these biographical profiles online at [http://www.unr.edu/nwhp/index.htm](http://www.unr.edu/nwhp/index.htm). None of the material has been formally published in scholarly journals, so it was not cited in this literature review.


of the statewide Nevada Women’s Archives initiative and the Nevada Women’s History Project.\footnote{Jean Ford, Victoria Ford, and University of Nevada, Reno, \textit{Jean Ford: A Nevada Woman Leads the Way} (Reno: Oral History Program, University of Nevada, 1998).}

Building on the legacy of Jean Ford, Watson has provided the most comprehensive historical treatment of Nevada women thus far, examining their work in a variety of public spheres: women’s clubs and civic betterment, the temperance movement, suffrage, politics, and the work force.\footnote{Anita Ernst Watson, \textit{Into their Own: Nevada Women Emerging into Public Life} (Reno, NV: Nevada Humanities Committee, 2000).} The topical survey style of Watson’s work is useful in moving beyond the biographical sketches of individual Nevada women and placing them in context with other women and larger trends in the West. The author admits, however, that her work is limited, in that it only discusses women in the public sphere and notes that there is much work to be done in profiling other groups. Wier is briefly mentioned in the chapter on women in the work force as one of the few Nevada women who pursued teaching and education at an advanced level. Her work at the Nevada Historical Society merits a brief mention, and it is noted that, like most Nevada women, she was active in a variety of projects and causes. Wier is acknowledged for “taking a traditional women’s field, teaching, a step further.”\footnote{Ibid.,137.}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Stauffer argued that “…library history has long ignored the differences between the society and culture of the Eastern, Midwestern, and Western United States,” and has suggested that “the history of the development of the public library in the Eastern United States is the history of the development of the public library in the United States as a whole.”\footnote{Stauffer, “Establishing a Recognized Social Order,”18.} This assertion
could easily be applied to the history of cultural heritage institutions such as historical societies, in the West, but it has been widely ignored in the existing literature on historical societies, so much so that one might think that citizens in the West had little interest in preserving their cultural heritage or promoting a sense of historical consciousness in their individual states.

The existing literature on historical societies is not only sparse in comparison to the documentation on other types of information institutions, but it has also tended to favor the contributions of those societies in the states that have the longest histories. As an institutional history, this dissertation adds to the limited body of literature on historical societies, and in so doing, addresses some of the deficiencies that currently exist in the literature on cultural heritage in the West. In providing another much-needed study of a Western historical society, it sheds light on some of the regional differences between the work of those societies in the East and those in the West. It focuses on Nevada, a state that has long been ignored in most treatments of historical societies, with a particular emphasis on its role in developing a regional historical consciousness and public historical culture. As a portrait of Jeanne Wier, the study enriches the existing history of women in Nevada. In directing the affairs of a historical society, she was, in some ways, unique in the West and certainly in the realm of historical society founders, and this study can thus expand our understanding of the role that women played in developing a public historical culture in the West. Lastly, this dissertation provides a much-needed perspective on the educated, middle-class professional woman and her contributions to the development of the West and its history in the early twentieth century.
CHAPTER 3:
HISTORICAL SOCIETY BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Early Historical Societies in the US from 1791-1860

No two societies are exactly alike or ever will be. Their principles, resources, and aspirations could never be adequately reduced to punch cards or expressed in statistical tables.¹

Dunlap’s study of early historical societies (1790-1860) limited the definition of the American historical society to “associations of individuals organized primarily to collect, preserve, and make available the materials for the history of the United States or a section of it.”² A more recent definition is similar but more inclusive, noting that they “collect, preserve, and provide access to printed records and material culture of enduring value related to a particular place, people, way of life, or event.”³ Although the second definition reflects more modern sensibilities, both definitions provide us with an understanding of the basic goals of the historical society, an institution whose origins lead back to the very early days of the Republic as “a product of the developing nation-state.”⁴

If the activities of early historical societies appear now to be antiquarian and provincial in nature, with the air of the amateur about them, it is important to remember the significant role they have played in the development of historical studies in the United States at both the national

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² Leslie W. Dunlap, American Historical Societies, 1790-1860 (Madison, WI, privately printed, 1944), vii.


⁴ Ibid., 2064.
and local levels. In addition to building fine libraries, archives, and manuscript collections, they were pioneers in developing history and nature museums, gathering oral histories, multiplying access by printing previously unpublished documents and reprinting rare and out-of-print materials. The collecting activities of the first historical societies were part of an even larger plan with the most powerful states attempting to dominate the nation’s historical writing much as they sought to control its politics and economy. One historian chronicling the rise of historical studies in American even went so far as to describe the historical society of this period as “the most significant development in the field of local historiography between 1790 and 1815” and “a weapon in the battle to dominate the writing of national history.”

It is not surprising that the earliest historical societies were founded in those states most closely associated with the founding of the Republic. Even before the Revolutionary War, historians were interested in chronicling the founding of the various colonies and putting forth narratives from the viewpoint of the colonists. After the war, there was even more of a pressing need to write histories chronicling the revolution and an urgency to find and preserve the documents that might allow historians (mostly of the amateur variety) to “trace the progress of society in the United States.” Jeremy Belknap, a Harvard-educated minister and historian who had become an ardent nationalist during the revolution, founded and organized the first historical society in the United States in 1791—the Massachusetts Historical Society—drawing upon precedents set by the London Society of Antiquaries and the Society of Antiquaries in Scotland in designing the organizational structure of the institution. This in turn inspired John Pintard (a

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7 Ibid., 61.
wealthy New York merchant who had originally suggested a society of antiquaries idea to
Belknap) to create the New York Historical Society in 1804, and Isaiah Thomas (a printer and
bookseller) to form the American Antiquarian Society in 1812. These three were followed in
1815 by the Pennsylvania Historical Society, which was initially a branch committee of the
American Philosophical Society before a number of wealthy Philadelphians organized it its own
right as the Pennsylvania State Historical Society in 1824.8

Shortly after their founding, institutions such as the Massachusetts Historical Society and
the New York Historical Society focused on collecting materials that were national in scope, but
it should be remembered that at that point in time, “national” would have referred only to the
original thirteen colonies (now states) in 1791, which had grown to just seventeen states by 1804,
the year the New York Historical Society was founded. Although he naturally sought out
material in Boston from the eminent figures who lived there, it was said of Belknap that his quest
for documents had no geographical limits: “It extended from Boston to Europe and beyond.”9
The New York Historical Society also engaged in such a quest, doing so with a spirit of local
pride and a consciousness of their own role in the making of history, as did the Pennsylvania
State Historical Society later in the 1820s. Van Tassel suggests that it was only when “other
states challenged their pretensions and when the resurgence of nationalism after 1815 threatened
to subordinate all states to the nation, these societies acknowledged a measure of defeat and set

8 Ibid., 60-65. These four institutions, perhaps due to their significance as the earliest historical
societies, the importance of their collections to the early history of United States, and their influence on
later historical societies, consistently receive the most attention in works that focus on the history and
development of historical societies in the United States.

9 Louis Leonard Tucker, “Massachusetts,” in Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic: The
Origins of State Historical Societies, Museums, and Collections, 1791-1861, ed. H.G. Jones (Chapel Hill,
about the task of championing their state’s primacy in the nation.”\textsuperscript{10} Of these early organizations, only the American Antiquarian Society had the chance of achieving national importance because it was not tied to a particular locale as were the others.\textsuperscript{11}

Early historical society founders such as Belknap in Massachusetts, Pintard in New York, and Thomas at the American Antiquarian Society saw their primary function as collecting historical material vigorously and ambitiously. Not content to wait passively for material to fall into his lap, Belknap once famously likened his method of collecting to “prowling about like a wolf for the prey.”\textsuperscript{12} Although this was decades before professional training for librarians or archivists existed, the societies usually had a member—often the corresponding secretary—who held the title of librarian. Lacking any kind of standards or guidance, however, their valiant attempts to organize the often haphazardly-collected materials were more topical and chronologically-based and resulted in significant (and sometimes unfortunate) reorganization of historical documents.\textsuperscript{13}

Additional responsibilities included overseeing the creation of transcriptions or copies of historical records held in other institutions since the early historical societies were particularly focused on ensuring the publication of these early documents, believing strongly that the surest way to preserve a record was to multiply the copies. Producing copies and publications was a larger part of the work of preservation and diffusion that they saw as an essential part of their mission. Following in this vein of diffusion, they held annual meetings and other lectures

\textsuperscript{10} Van Tassel, \textit{Recording America’s Past}, 65.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12} Tucker, “Massachusetts,” 8.

\textsuperscript{13} Richard C. Berner, \textit{Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), 11-13. It was not until the early twentieth century that archival standards of provenance and organization were applied to the collections held in many historical societies.
reporting on the work of their institutions. Other more public events included celebrations and commemorations in honor of historic events that provided an opportunity for members to socialize and engage with the larger community. They also sponsored historical writing — local and national — by providing the resources and support for writers. To some degree, in the first half of the nineteenth century, they also performed many functions of public libraries, an institution which did not become well established until after 1870, as they were often asked to provide information on matters that were not historical in nature.¹⁴

Relationships among the societies were a constant and important factor in their establishment and growth and were “ordinarily conducive to the development of good-will and historical research.”¹⁵ The more established societies often gave advice to founders and supporters of other institutions even before the societies were organized. There were, however, episodes of jealousy and competition between particular institutions when it came to lending or copying particular documents or when more than one society was angling for a particular document to add to their collection. Yet there was generally a spirit of cooperation, and as historical societies became more numerous in the 1840s and 1850s (and more spread out geographically), the leaders of these various institutions realized the need to have a regular means of communication that would convey the activities of their respective institutions. A number of publications sprang up beginning in the 1840s (American Pioneer and Literary World) and 1850s (The Historical Magazine, and Notes and Queries Concerning the Antiquities, History and Biography of America) that were intended to meet this need. The last of these was the most successful, providing the proceedings of societies, profiles of officers, information on individual institutions and reports on historical work sponsored by the various societies. It was

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¹⁴ Dunlap, American Historical Societies, 128.
¹⁵ Ibid., 109, and 113.
highly regarded and supported by historical societies, and it remained in print for nearly twenty years, from 1857 through 1875.\textsuperscript{16}

The funding difficulties that have consistently plagued historical societies originated very early in their historical development. The early historical societies in the East generally relied on private funding that came from endowments and membership dues. From the beginning, the Massachusetts Historical Society relied on the “industry and generosity of its members.”\textsuperscript{17} The New York Historical Society was more fortunate in receiving aid from the state legislature in 1814, and on subsequent occasions but it still found itself in debt in the mid-nineteenth century due to poor money management and weak leadership.\textsuperscript{18} Membership dues and some state help aided the Maine Historical Society and private endowments funded the New Hampshire Historical Society. Some institutions benefited from the donation of buildings to house collections, and others were helped with a different form of government aid as when city government provided a free building for the use of the Virginia Historical Society in the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{19} Other institutions endowed small publication funds to help support their primary goal of publishing historical sources.\textsuperscript{20} It would be safe to say, however, that not one of the early societies suffered from an abundance of largesse, and this unfortunate “tradition” continued well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The individuals who founded and led these early historical societies (and made up the membership) had two things in common: they were well educated, and they were men. In arguably the most significant work on the history of early historical societies, Dunlap’s \textit{American Historical Societies}, 114,119-122.\textsuperscript{16} Whitehill, \textit{Independent Historical Societies}, 19.\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 46.\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 93,113, and 134.\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 118.\textsuperscript{20}
Historical Societies, 1790-1860, the author titled his chapter on the founders and leaders of these societies as “Professional Men and Scholars” for a reason: the founders were predominantly men from the educated professional classes. They were statesmen, judges, scholars, physicians, attorneys, ministers, and leading merchants of the day, and there was not a woman among their number. It was the same with the officers who led these early historical societies. In some cases, however, founders were drawn from special groups of individuals (still men). The Alabama Historical Society, for example, drew its officers from the ranks of the trustees of the state university after the former was founded in 1850. A rather unique case was that of the Historical Society of New Mexico (founded in 1859), where the most important posts in the institution were held by army officers who were leaders in the cultural activities of the territory.21

From the available secondary sources, it does not appear that women played a part in the founding or subsequent collecting activities of any of the societies founded in this early period (1791-1860). Anecdotally, one finds mention of women gradually being allowed to attend social functions held at the historical societies, but it appears they were generally dismissed after scholarly lectures and before the business meetings were held.22 Yet it should be noted that women provided assistance in more tangible ways, leaving bequests of money, collections, or buildings to particular historical societies throughout the nineteenth century.23

Membership in these early societies was also largely limited to men, and oftentimes only to men who met particular geographical and residency qualifications for the institution in question. This was common to membership requirements at a number of historical societies such

21 Dunlap, American Historical Societies, 22-25.
22 Whitehill, Independent Historical Societies, 47.
23 Ibid., 48, 51.
as those in Massachusetts and Maine. In the majority of societies, membership was also divided into classes, with resident members being the most numerous and important, as they resided in the area and could participate in activities and provide the most assistance to a society. Corresponding members were on the next tier of membership and were selected from those persons who did not live in the geographical area, but who were interested in the activities of the society. Lastly, there were honorary members, who were drawn from the ranks of distinguished men of American and foreign birth. In the early societies, they included notable men such as John Quincy Adams, George Bancroft, and even Andrew Jackson. Honoring such men with special memberships was thought to add to the respectability of the fledgling societies and lead to possible donations in the future. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania was a rarity in that its constitution had a provision offering “honorary membership” to persons residing in any part of America, including females.

Some early historical societies sought to limit the number of persons accepted for membership in their institutions at any one time (this was accomplished somewhat by the residency requirements). In such instances, men were to be selected for membership only if they were truly interested in historical research and had made or were in the process of making a genuine contribution to historical studies. Yet not all societies or their officers shared this elitist attitude as they felt it would be detrimental to the success of their respective institutions. The first president of the Pennsylvania Historical Society objected so much to this practice that he nearly refused the office in 1825. The South Carolina Historical Society, founded toward the end of this period in 1855, was also not in favor of placing such a burden on membership. Lyman

24 Ibid., 19, 116.
Draper, together with Wisconsin’s governor and others, also argued in 1853 against this process for the reorganized Wisconsin State Historical Society, suggesting that “an aristocratic historical society is not a prosperous one.”

The Massachusetts Historical Society dominated historical studies in New England until the 1820s, when other states in this region began to take an interest in preserving their own local history. In quick succession, beginning in 1822, Maine founded its own historical society and was followed by Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Connecticut—all established by 1825. Vermont arrived somewhat later upon the scene in 1838. Between 1825 and 1860, historical societies spread rapidly throughout the growing republic into both long-established states and those that had only recently left behind territory status. In a few instances, historical societies were founded in regions that had not yet achieved statehood (Michigan and Minnesota).

The 1830s saw historical societies established in many of the southern states beginning with Virginia and followed by Louisiana, Kentucky, Arkansas, and Georgia. New Jersey and Maryland, the so-called “middle states,” and two of the very first states in the union, organized their historical societies only in the 1840s. As the frontier spread westward in the nineteenth century, some of the early settlers founded historical societies in these newly acquired territories, beginning in the 1820s with Illinois and Michigan, and continuing into the 1830s with Ohio and Indiana, and into the 1840s and 1850s with Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Additional southern historical societies were founded in the 1840s and 1850s, including those in South Carolina, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Florida. Ironically, Delaware, the first state

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admitted to the union, was the last of the eastern states to found a historical society in 1864.\textsuperscript{29} Unfortunately, in many cases, the enthusiasm with which these historical societies were founded by eager settlers did not translate into permanence. A number of the societies floundered after their initial start, lacking the infrastructure, committed personnel, and financial resources necessary to keep them running under the best of conditions in urban areas such as Boston and New York, let alone the sparsely populated wilderness of the western frontier.

**Historical Societies Move West**

*In such surroundings the man of leisure and property, who had been the mainstay of historical societies in the east, was conspicuously absent.*\textsuperscript{30}

Often western historical societies were formed “before there was any considerable body of history to record” and settler populations were sparse. An anecdote by Whitehill provides some insight into the challenges faced in 1849, when the Minnesota Historical Society was founded just eight months after the territorial government was established. He quotes a clerical speaker at the society’s first annual meeting in 1850, lauding the organization of the society during this “favorable” period:

> On the bluff where we are assembled, there are temples of religion and education…but around us, the skin-lodges of the Dakotas are still visible…The scalp-dance is yet enacted within our hearing, and not a year rolls by, but the soil of Minnesota is reddened with Ojibwa and Dakota blood.\textsuperscript{31}

The speaker’s choice of words, beyond suggesting the existence of less-than-favorable relations with the indigenous population, also provide evidence that the society’s members, as recent settlers, might have more on their minds than organizing a library and collecting documents. This


\textsuperscript{30} Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies*, 244.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 245.
was indeed one of the most common problems of historical societies as they moved into what is
termed the trans-Mississippi and trans-mountain West in the first half of the nineteenth century.
Kammen has pointed out that historical awareness and concern for tradition developed
differently in this region, and that “the sense of the past” was weak owing to the fact that
problems of economic and physical survival were paramount. He argues that “new communities
were understandably more concerned about whether they would have a future than whether their
past was interesting or just how it had shaped their lives.”

A number of differences thus marked the development of a historical consciousness in
the trans-mountain and trans-Mississippi region (prior to 1861) that puts it in sharp contrast
with the manner in which historical studies grew in the eastern states. There was of course the
matter of the limited and often transient population of these states, and the fact that there were
very few large cities with the resources to support historical societies as they developed, their
towns often “no more than crossroads or river confluences and market places.” As historical
societies were typically located in state capitals, one historian has pointed to the troublesome
location of some early state capitals in the western region as affecting the development of

32 Michael G. Kammen, Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American

33 Mason defines trans-mountain west as the following states: Alabama, Illinois, Indiana,
Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee. Philip P. Mason, “Trans-Mountain States:
Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee,” in Historical
Consciousness in the Early Republic: The Origins of State Historical Societies, Museums, and
Collections, 1791-1861, ed. H.G. Jones (Chapel Hill, NC: North Caroliniana Society and North Carolina
Collection, 1995), 125.

34 Lemmon defines the trans-Mississippi west as the following states: California, Iowa, Louisiana,
Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon, and Texas. Alfred E. Lemmon, “Trans-Mississippi States: California, Iowa,
Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon, and Texas,” in Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic:
The Origins of State Historical Societies, Museums, and Collections, 1791-1861, ed. H.G. Jones (Chapel
Hill, NC: North Caroliniana Society and North Carolina Collection, 1995), 188.
historical societies.\textsuperscript{35} Perhaps most importantly, however, these states also lacked a sufficient number of wealthy citizens who could devote leisure time and financial resources to historical activities.\textsuperscript{36} Describing one of the most common causes for the dissolution of historical societies in this region, Van Tassel notes that “there were few citizens with either the time or the inclination for activities that did not directly relate to the material prosperity of the town and the family business or farm.”\textsuperscript{37}

In the face of these very real difficulties, many of the early frontier historical societies struggled, but whatever their troubles, their very existence had a particular symbolism for the citizens and prospective residents of a state. They served as evidence, along with the existence of schools, churches, and branches of the Masonic lodge, that “civilization” had reached their state. Van Tassel has even suggested that the establishment of historical societies in the western territories was “part of an unconscious effort to achieve cultural equality with the older states commensurate with the political equality assured them in the constitution.”\textsuperscript{38} A lofty claim, perhaps, but it was certainly not impossible to believe that the states with the shortest histories would somehow find it incumbent upon themselves to use their historical societies as a means to provide the resources to achieve their ultimate goal of writing a state history that would emphasize its importance to the nation.

The historical societies founded in the West in the first half of the nineteenth century differed from those in the eastern states not just by reason of their populations, cities, and the

\textsuperscript{35} Mason, “Trans-Mountain States,” 137.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 125.

\textsuperscript{37} Van Tassel, \textit{Recording America’s Past}, 99. The South was also sparsely populated but its problems were due to the fact that the men likely to support historical societies were unable to contribute more than time and access to their private libraries and lacked sufficient capital to endow these struggling institutions.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 96-97.
nature of their membership; their collecting focus was much different as well. Just as documenting the events of the Revolutionary War and its patriot leaders had inspired those historical societies in New England, these western historical societies sought to record the history they knew and focused on “the frontier, settlement, military leaders and Indian warfare.” In writing of those historical societies in the seemingly disparate states of the trans-Mississippi west, Lemmon suggests that what links them together are common themes of “appreciation of pioneer and Indian alike, natural history, the esteem of books under the most rugged of circumstances, and the role of history as a vital ally for a prosperous future.”

Another notable difference between the eastern historical societies and those founded in the west prior to the Civil War was the manner in which they were funded. The majority of the early eastern societies were privately (and meagerly) funded, while many of those societies initially founded in the west received state funds in support of their work. Of these early state-funded societies, the Wisconsin Historical Society, founded in 1854, is usually held up as the shining example of the state-funded historical society. Others included the Minnesota Historical Society, which received its first state appropriation from the legislature in 1856 (funding a full-time librarian by 1868 when established institutions such as the Massachusetts Historical Society did not have one until well into the twentieth century), and the Iowa Historical Society, which received its first annual appropriation of $250 from the general assembly in 1857.

**Some Western Historical Societies after the Civil War**

_Equally divergent viewpoints may be adopted toward the work of state and local historical societies; one may measure it by high standards of scholarship and find

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40 Lemmon, “Trans-Mississippi States,” 189.

much of it defective, or one may compare it with a void and be grateful that so much has been done.\footnote{Julian Boyd as quoted in Whitehill, \textit{Independent Historical Societies}, 289.}

As the United States continued to expand westward during the latter half of the nineteenth century, the historical society as an institution representing permanency and civilization also continued to follow into the new territories and states.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
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<td>1884</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>1912</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Nevada</td>
<td>1904</td>
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\footnote{The pioneer society was a social organization common to the western territories and states in the second half of the nineteenth century. Membership was limited to those persons (male and sometimes female) who had immigrated and settled in a particular territory or state by a certain date. The societies held social activities where pioneers could gather and tell stories of the old days, and they were often}
of a pioneer society being founded after the historical society, as the former came into being in 1884, while the Montana Historical Society itself was founded in 1865. New Mexico was the earliest of the societies organized in the area under consideration as the West for this study, founded as it was even before the Civil War and several decades before it became a state.

In the intermountain states that border Nevada, it was Idaho that first took an interest in preserving its heritage. In 1881 “representative men of various counties and sections” of the Idaho territory founded the Historical Society of Idaho Pioneers so that the old pioneers could gather together and “exchange experiences and compare notes with regard to their memory of past events.” Although hopes were high, it floundered like many early historical societies after the initial period of enthusiasm had waned. The organization struggled to hold regular meetings, collect the artifacts of the pioneers, and compile “an accurate and commendable history of the territory.” Although women had never been barred from the organization, it was not until after its reorganization in 1904 as the Pioneer Historical Society that their contributions—in particular the work of Mrs. Leona Cartee, daughter of an Idaho pioneer—became significant. When the Society became a state agency in 1907, Mrs. Cartee was the only woman appointed to the Board of Trustees.

The Society of Arizona Pioneers followed in 1884 as a celebration of the rugged pioneers who had settled the desert territory. Like the Idaho Pioneers, its collecting efforts were minimal in those early years, and it focused more on providing opportunities for socializing than as an

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45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 9-10.
organization devoted to collecting the state’s history. In January 1897 it was reincorporated as the Arizona Pioneers Historical Society for “historical scientific literary and benevolent” purposes and provided with an appropriation by the territorial legislature. Yet just as it had struggled to collect dues from its members, the Society’s officers often found it challenging to secure their appropriation from the legislature on a regular basis. Women were not really allowed to fully participate in the Society until the second decade of the twentieth century, and the appointment of Edith Kitt in 1925 resulted in significant professional growth for the Society.

Utah was the last of the intermountain states bordering Nevada to organize a historical society. Unlike the societies in Idaho and Arizona, the Utah State Historical Society was not founded to celebrate pioneers but in response to a historical event—the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the state’s settlement in 1897. Notably, at least five Utah women (including Eurithe K. LaBarthe, one of three women elected to Utah’s first state legislature) were among those who signed the original roster to found the historical society, and two women were among those elected as officers for the fledgling organization. The new Society accomplished little, however, as its only activity for the first twenty years of its existence was an annual meeting. Even after the state recognized it in 1917, the Society received no funding until eleven years later, and this was specifically directed toward the publishing of the *Utah Historical Quarterly*. Like so many western historical societies, it failed to properly organize its collections in its early decades, with materials languishing uncataloged for years in a small space in the state capital.

These historical societies contrasted with those of the Pacific Northwest, where women played no role in the founding of such organizations. Washington organized the first historical

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society in 1891 shortly after statehood, but it was not incorporated until 1897. Like the others, it floundered after the period of initial enthusiasm and struggled to keep members interested in its work without any professional guidance. Even after it was officially recognized by the state in 1903, the organization continued to experience financial challenges with an unresponsive state legislature. The Oregon Historical Society followed in 1898, although the long-standing Oregon Pioneer Association preceded it. Like other western historical societies it had been established as a privately controlled institution and found financial support from the state less than generous in its early years. Both institutions were initially led by men with more of an antiquarian rather than professional interest in history.

Women appear to have had a larger role in the founding and development of some historical societies in the West in the post-Civil War period because of developments in the Progressive Era. In many of the Western states women already had the vote, and greater educational opportunities were available for women in the last two decades of the nineteenth century when the majority of the Western historical societies were founded. The founding and development of the Nevada Historical Society fits into this framework, as do some of the societies in the other western states that surround it.
CHAPTER 4:
JEANNE WIER

Family and Early Life

The woman who would later become the doyenne of Nevada history and proclaim her love for “the mountains and the valleys and even the desert wastes of this State”\(^1\) was born deep in the Midwest—Grinnell, Iowa—on April 8, 1870, as the second daughter of Adolphus William Wier and Elizabeth Greenside Rood Wier. Although a lack of documentation from this period makes it difficult to provide a complete portrait of Jeanne Wier’s early years, it is possible to piece together a sketch of some of the more important events that shaped her life as a young woman growing up in America in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Much of the information, stitched together via census records, directories, obituaries, and newspaper articles, reveals a family history touched by events that illustrate some of the major historical themes (immigration, westward movement, the Civil War, increased access to higher education) that left their mark upon nineteenth-century American life.

Elizabeth Greenside, Wier’s mother, was born a leap-year baby on February 29, 1840 in Akron, Ohio, the daughter of British immigrants who had originally settled in Canada prior to their move to the United States. When she was twelve, her family moved west to Iowa, settling in Jasper County. Many years later, her obituary included a description of the perilous nature of this westward journey made over “the covered wagon routes.”\(^2\) When Elizabeth Greenside was eighteen, her mother died, and the family relocated to the area near Fort Dodge, where she kept

\(^1\) Jeanne Wier, “Mission of the State Historical Society,” 62.

\(^2\) “Pioneer Woman of West is Called,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, March 29, 1928.
house for her father and younger siblings until her marriage. Census records reveal that at age
twenty, Elizabeth married James Rood, a farmer six years her senior, on March 28, 1860 in
Webster, Iowa. The young couple settled in Fort Dodge, and the following year, a daughter,
Clara Belle Rood, was born. Shortly afterwards the Civil War, as it did for many families at this
time, interrupted their lives. In August 1862, less than a year after his daughter’s birth, Rood
enlisted as a private, and was assigned to Company I, 32\textsuperscript{nd} Iowa Infantry Regiment.

Wier’s father, a Prussian by birth, had emigrated from his home country with his mother
and brothers around 1859 when he was just fifteen and settled in Vernon County, Wisconsin. A
memorial profile of A.W. Wier, written at the time of his death in Reno in 1917, noted his
father’s involvement with the Revolution of 1848, and how the young Wier, despite his tender
years, claimed to remember the discussions and plans made by the revolutionists in his father’s
house. Wier and his family were thus part of that large influx of German immigrants who came
to the United States at this time, fleeing some of the tyrannical despots who ruled Europe in the
mid-nineteenth century. Like many immigrants of that era (including his three brothers), Wier
volunteered to serve his new country, entering the Union Army as a member of Company F, 49\textsuperscript{th}
Infantry Regiment Wisconsin in February 1865. Yet while he was discharged in November of

\begin{itemize}
\item[4] James Rood entry, Dodd, Jordan, Liahona Research, comp., \textit{Iowa, Marriages, 1851-1900}
\item[5] James Rood entry, Rootbound Genealogy; Martin-Rott, Susie, \textit{Iowa Civil War Soldier Burial
\end{itemize}
that year without a scratch, Wier’s mother would be profoundly affected by the Civil War, suffering a loss that would change the course of her life forever.  

On March 14, 1864, James Rood was one of a small number of fatalities incurred by the Union Army at the Battle of Fort De Russy, and Elizabeth was left a widow at barely twenty-four years of age. Prospects for a young widow with a small child must have seemed bleak at the time, but within three years, Elizabeth Rood would secure a future for herself and her child by marrying A.W. Wier, a Union veteran and Grinnell College student, in Webster, Iowa, on November 26, 1867.  Although her obituary states that she gave up her “ambition to teach” upon her marriage to Wier, it is not clear if she had any kind of formal schooling at this time.

Just one year after their marriage, the couple’s first child together, Eva Amelia Wier, was born on their homestead near Fort Dodge, Iowa.  The couple’s second daughter, Jennie Elizabeth Wier, was born on April 8, 1870, after the couple had moved to Grinnell, Iowa—a move occasioned by the presence of “Indian depredations” according to Elizabeth Wier’s obituary.  Although he matriculated at Grinnell College, it is not clear whether A.W. Wier ever graduated from that institution.  However, it was while in Grinnell that Wier began his long

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9 “Pioneer Woman of West is Called,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, March 29, 1928. Despite the fact that Clara was the daughter of Elizabeth’s first husband, it does appear that A.W. Wier treated her as his own daughter and may have even adopted her as she is always listed by the Wier surname in subsequent US census records.

10 Although she transformed herself into the more sophisticated-sounding “Jeanne” at some point during her first decade in Reno, her family would always refer to her as Jennie.


12 Email correspondence with Grinnell’s university archivist (March 1, 2011) did not reveal any evidence of A.W. Wier receiving a diploma from this institution.
teaching career. Census records for 1870 list Wier’s profession as “school teacher” and his wife’s as “keeping house.”

The US Census of 1880 reflects the birth of two additional Wier children, Adolphus William Jr. (Will) in 1872, and Melbie A. in 1876, along with some other notable changes.¹³ The family had moved to Rockwell, Iowa, and significantly, both of Wier’s parents were teaching school. Eldest daughter Clara, then nineteen, was obviously charged with taking care of her four younger siblings as “keeping house” is given as her profession in 1880. In a letter written to the editor of an Iowa paper in 1929 after her parents’ death, Jeanne Wier notes that the family had moved to Cerro Gordo County, Iowa from the southern part of the state around 1876 or 1877, and that her father served as principal of the Rockwell school and her mother as primary teacher.¹⁴ With both parents working outside of the home, it must have a fairly progressive middle-class household for the time.

Handwritten family history notes from Wier’s personal papers reveal that a fifth sibling, Clarence Leslie, was born in June 1881. The family resided in Rockwell only a short time before moving to Clear Lake in 1882, where Wier’s father took a position as principal/superintendent of schools, her mother worked as a primary teacher, and Clara was an assistant in the high school. It was here that tragedy struck when young Clarence Leslie, not quite five years old, was struck down by what his obituary described as “strangulation” after an illness caused by whooping cough and canker sore throat.¹⁵ After the tragedy of his death in February 1886, there was some

¹³ Handwritten family notes found in the Jeanne Wier Papers at the Nevada Historical Society record Adolphus W. Wier, Jr.’s birth year as December 1871 and Milton Harry Wier’s as November 1875.

¹⁴ Jeanne Wier to Mr. W.E. Muse, March 15, 1929, box 1, folder 18, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

¹⁵ Clarence Leslie obituary, n.d., Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada. Elizabeth Wier’s obituary from March 1928 also alludes to this painful loss as it reveals
happiness shortly afterward in June 1886, when eldest sister Clara began a new life, marrying Thomas Nichols Putnam and settling in Carrington, North Dakota Territory.  

Although she would have a rich and full life of her own, raising four children and becoming heavily involved in her community, it appears that Clara remained quite devoted to her family from the numerous letters she wrote to her sister Jennie later in life.

**Early Education**

Education was highly valued in the Wier household and young Jennie, with two school teachers as parents, received most of her early education from her parents and proved to be an excellent student; report cards and certificates from her teenage years attested to her excellent progress, and to the fact that she was rarely absent or tardy, with examination grades just prior to graduation showing exceptionally high marks in algebra and mathematics. At just sixteen years old, she graduated from Clear Lake High School as class valedictorian on June 18, 1886, delivering the first in a lifetime of public speeches. It was around this time that Wier’s father, who had given the graduation address at her commencement in his role as Superintendent of Clear Lake High School, took the position of County Superintendent of Schools in Cerro Cordo County, moving his family once again, this time to Mason City, Iowa. A paper at the time noted that other superintendents found him “painstaking and successful in his work.”

Sadly, it was here that the Wier family suffered another painful loss when Milton Harry (Melbie) died from an unknown cause just a few days short of his thirteenth birthday in October 1888 according to handwritten family notes in Wier’s personal papers. It was perhaps these tragic family events that of her six children, only four were living at the time of her death. “Pioneer Woman of West is Called,” *Reno Evening Gazette* March 29, 1928.

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that made the remaining family members exceptionally close throughout their lives and that inspired Wier’s extraordinary devotion to her parents and siblings—a devotion that was the cause of much stress in her later life as she struggled to balance university work with her numerous historical society duties, and elderly, infirm parents.

Her parents’ influence and the increasing availability of higher education opportunities for women in the late nineteenth century undoubtedly determined Wier’s path after high school. In her study of women and higher education in America at this time, Solomon noted that the most crucial factor in a woman’s desire to pursue a college education was family support. She described female collegians in the late nineteenth century as coming from “families within the
broad and expanding middle class” and included fathers in the professions (doctor, lawyer, professor, and teacher) who were distinguished by their “economic and social mobility”—achievers in professional and business enterprises.18 Wier’s ambitious father, who moved frequently to take positions with increasing responsibility and prestige, certainly fit into this mold. Her mother, who had teaching ambitions before marriage and had worked throughout her marriage as a primary school teacher, was most likely a positive influence in her daughter’s educational aspirations as well. Such parents, Solomon argues “increasingly identified with their daughters’ quest for intellectual as well as economic independence.”19 As Wier’s older sister, Eva, and her younger brother Will also graduated from college (and the latter from law school as well), it is clear that their parents not only encouraged but expected all of their children to pursue higher education.

Although teaching was widely viewed as the most “respectable” profession for women throughout the late nineteenth century, family tradition may have also influenced Wier’s choice of study, as she began coursework in didactics at the Iowa State Normal School (ISNS) in Cedar Falls after her high school graduation.20 It does not appear that she entered ISNS (now the University of Northern Iowa) directly after high school; instead she alternated her studies in Cedar Falls with teaching primary school in both Mason City and Rockwell, Iowa.21 Although she did not specify the reason for this, it can be assumed that it was due to financial necessity.

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19 Ibid., 66.
20 Wier’s sister Eva also graduated from ISNS in 1888 with a Bachelor in Didactics.
21 Her high school education would have qualified her for primary school teaching at this time as most states did not have significant licensing laws for teachers until the early twentieth century. Lynn D. Gordon, Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 19.
Teaching work aside, Wier appears to have been an active and engaged student during at least part of her time in the three-year didactics course at ISNS. As a demanding career and family caretaking absorbed much of her later adult life, the years between her high school and college graduation may have been the most carefree time of her life. Her school notebooks that survive from her time at ISNS are filled with notes on various educational and pedagogical lectures by ISNS President Homer H. Seerley, carefully written in a fine script alongside doodles that reveal a more playful side to the serious-looking woman depicted in portraits of the young Jennie Wier.

Articles in the Normal Eyte, an ISNS publication from the early 1890s, reveal that Wier actively participated in two organizations while attending the college. In early 1892, she took a leading role in the YWCA chapter at ISNS and was even selected by her chapter to serve as a delegate from the school to the annual YWCA state convention later that year. Wier also showed a flair for the dramatic (and public speaking) as president of the school’s Shakespearean Society in her senior year, delivering the opening address at one of the society’s events—Greek symposium—in December 1892. A review of the program in the Normal Eyte described her delivery as “marked by ease and dignity of manner” and her production as showing “much thought and beauty of expression.” Thus, even at this early stage of her life, Wier showed herself adept at public speaking and demonstrated a willingness to take on leadership roles—two qualities that would serve her well in her pioneering work with the Nevada Historical Society.

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24 Untitled, Normal Eyte, December 13, 1892.

25 The Normal Eyte also publicized a small news item about Wier being ill in late November 1892. “Miss Wier,” Normal Eyte, November 29, 1892. While hardly an earthshaking reference, it was evidence that the unspecified illnesses that plagued Wier throughout her life (brought on, she claimed, by
On June 21, 1893, Jennie Wier, aged twenty-three, graduated with a Bachelor of Didactics from the Iowa State Normal School and could now seek employment based on her professional credentials. Mature beyond her years, she had gained considerable experience in teaching primary grades prior to and during her time at the college and was uniformly praised by school officials in Mason City and Rockwell, Iowa. One letter of reference from the Mason City Superintendent of Schools, dated June 22, 1889, described the nineteen-year-old Wier as possessing “those natural qualifications which every good teacher should have” whose work was of “excellent quality and gave complete satisfaction.”\(^{26}\) Another letter from a Rockwell school official in March 1893, praised her three years of teaching in their schools, calling her “an unusually proficient teacher, particularly gifted as a primary teacher…”\(^{27}\) Praise for her teaching abilities in March 1893 also came from a former student, W.J. Flint in Sheffield, Iowa, who pronounced Miss Wier to be “a perfect lady” whose influence was always good. He generously described her as understanding “the principles of education” and declared her “a success both as an instructor and disciplinarian.”\(^{28}\)

**Moving West**

Although these references no doubt stood her in good stead, Wier fell into her first professional position as a result of family connections. In the early 1890s, Wier’s family left Iowa and moved to the tiny town of Heppner in northeastern Oregon—a move necessitated by overwork and stress) and that she frequently mentioned in both her personal and official Nevada Historical Society correspondence had begun early in her life.

\(^{26}\) Letter of reference from William Wilcox, June 22, 1889, box 3, folder 1, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\(^{27}\) Letter of reference from J.S. Hutchins, March 4, 1893, box 3, folder 1, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\(^{28}\) Letter of reference from W.J. Flint, March 18, 1893, box 3, folder 1, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
her father’s failing health. The frontier town, which had only been incorporated in 1887, offered employment to three members of the Wier family: her father once again took a position as superintendent of schools, her mother taught the primary grades, and older sister Eva worked in the local high school as both teacher and assistant principal. It is not clear if Wier deliberately planned her move to Heppner, but as the family appeared to be a close one, it seems to make sense that she would follow her family rather than remain in Iowa alone. Thus, after a brief side trip to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago following graduation, Wier made the long trip westward to Heppner. There she took over the assistant principal position at the high school in 1893, replacing her sister Eva, who left to pursue a degree in English at the University of Michigan. There is little record of Jennie’s time in Heppner as no personal correspondence survives from this period.

Heppner at this early date must have been quite different from the towns Wier had known growing up in Iowa. She was particularly affected by the surrounding landscape: a view of the north side of Mount Adams from her classroom window was a source of inspiration during her first year in Heppner. There was something altogether different about her new locale that touched her in an unexpected way, as she recalled fondly in 1929:

“That was my first experience in the West. The wonderful mountains, the shut-in canyons, the sage brush and bunch grass were so new and strange to me; altogether it was the beginning of a new period in my life.”

Whether her poetic musings on the western landscape were contemporaneous to the two years she spent in Oregon or the product of a more mature vision in hindsight is not clear; what is clear

30 From the frontpiece of the Mountainier Journal, volume 4, 1911, box 7, folder 8A, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
31 Jeanne Wier to Mr. Crawford, March 11, 1929, box 1, folder 18, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
is that the young Wier soon became committed to her life in the West and whether by circumstances or personal choice, never returned to the state of her birth.

Although Wier and her parents both enjoyed their time in Heppner, it was but a brief interlude before circumstances intervened to bring them to California. It is unclear if her parents had planned to move and Wier chose to follow them or vice versa, but she remarked later that they had left Heppner in 1896 only because of the dire economic situation caused by the town’s low tariff. They moved to the small community of Newark in the San Francisco Bay area, where A.W. Wier once again took a position as a school principal. Wier herself, perhaps inspired by her sister Eva’s departure for the University of Michigan, applied for entry into Stanford University in September 1895, where she majored in history. A reference letter from one of her early mentors, Iowa State Normal School President Homer H. Seerley, to the faculty at Leland Stanford Jr. University in December 1895, characterized her as an “excellent scholar” who was “worthy in every respect” and gave “the best of satisfaction to all the departments.”

**Stanford Years**

Leland Stanford Jr. University had been founded a mere four years prior to Wier’s arrival, but it had already achieved some distinction in California. It and the University of California (Berkeley) were the two co-educational institutions that provided the primary university opportunities for women in California (indeed the West) at the time. Despite its youth, Stanford University had been the result of several years of careful planning by Jane and Leland Stanford, both from the standpoint of the physical design of the campus (created by the noted landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead) and the academic side, which consisted of

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32 Ibid. It is presumed that she meant that low taxes meant that there was little revenue to support schools, but she does not clarify this in the letter.

33 Homer H. Seerley to President and Faculty of Leland Stanford, Jr. University, December 6, 1895, box 3, folder 1, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
promising faculty recruited from universities throughout the country under the direction of David Starr Jordan. According to the *Fifth Annual Bulletin of Stanford University*, the first to list Wier’s name among its student body, there were 1069 students in the 1895-96 school year, and of these, 691 were men and 378 were women. A liberal residency policy enabled non-traditional students like Wier to attend, as only one year’s residence was required to attain the degree.\(^{34}\) It is clear from her transcripts that Wier’s coursework from the ISNS had stood her in good stead as she granted both full entrance standing, and nine credit hours toward the 120 hours required for graduation as a result of prior work done in education and psychology.\(^{35}\)

Beyond her official transcripts, there is little trace remaining from Wier’s years at Stanford, as there is no personal correspondence from the 1890s in her personal papers. In the archives of Stanford University there is but a single telegram that she sent to Mrs. Leland (Jane) Stanford in March 1896 congratulating her on an administrative victory.\(^{36}\) As Wier was twenty-five years old when she applied to Stanford, and a mature student who had to make her own way in the world,\(^{37}\) it is quite possible that she did not have the time or the inclination to participate in school activities as she had during her carefree years at ISNS. There is no mention of her in either the Stanford yearbooks or the *Daily Palo Alto*, Stanford’s university newspaper, during the dates of her attendance. As she noted in a later autobiographical sketch for the *Who’s Who* series, an unidentified illness and the fact that she also had to teach part-time tempered her

\(^{34}\) *Leland Stanford Junior University: Fifth Annual Register, 1895-96* (Stanford University, California: Published by the University, April 1896), 163

\(^{35}\) Stanford transcripts, box 3, folder 9, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS /NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\(^{36}\) Box 9, folder 5, Jane Lathrop Stanford Papers (SC0033B), Dept. of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA.

\(^{37}\) According to Solomon, “It was not uncommon for women in their twenties and thirties to enroll at new institutions, where there was not established clientele.” At Stanford in particular, the first women were “generally more mature”—only 34 percent of the female students between 1891-1900 were below age twenty. Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 70.
attendance at Stanford. Her teaching took her to different parts of the state, as the Stanford Bulletin for 1896-97 lists her residence as Reedley, a small farming town located in California’s Central Valley, and the bulletins for 1897-98 and 1898-99 list her residence as Newark. A hand-written caption on a photograph of her father from this time with a group of schoolchildren suggests that she may have followed her parents to Reedley to teach briefly. Given Wier’s previous actions and her devotion to family, a move to Reedley would have followed the pattern of her life thus far.

Professor George Elliott Howard, an instructor who emphasized the “elements of methodology and creative research in his teaching,” directed Wier’s historical studies at Stanford. Her transcripts over the five years show coursework that was divided fairly evenly between European and American history, with classes that included the Pacific Slope, French Revolution, American Constitution, American Colonies, general European history, and England to 1485. In addition to these classes, Wier participated in two courses known as “historical seminary,” which were designed mainly for post-graduates. Even at this early stage of her

38 Draft of biographical profile for Who’s Who, box 3, folder 3, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

39 Leland Stanford Junior University: Fifth Annual Bulletin, 1896-97 (Stanford University, California: Published by the University, April 1897); Leland Stanford Junior University: Seventh Annual Bulletin, 1897-98 (Stanford University, California: Published by the University, 1898); and Leland Stanford Junior University: Eighth Annual Bulletin, 1898-99 (Stanford University, California: Published by the University, 1899).

40 Photograph of A. W. Wier, Nevada Historical Society photo collections.

41 Arthur James Todd, “George Elliott Howard, 1849-1928,” American Journal of Sociology 34. no. 4 (January 1929): 693-694. Howard himself was one of the first graduates of the University of Nebraska and later spent two years studying history, political science, and Roman law in Paris and Munich before returning to serve as the first professor of history at the University of Nebraska in 1879.

42 Stanford transcripts, box 3, folder 9, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

43 Other coursework included two semesters of French, both elementary, and advanced German language study, various classes under the general category of Hygiene (required for students going into
history studies, Wier showed a firm grasp of the discipline; Professor Howard later noted that “she held her own well among nineteen graduate students” even though “she was but a second year student.” In fact, Howard was so impressed with Wier’s work that she acted as his teaching assistant in grading examination work for juniors and seniors (even prior to her own graduation), and did tutorial work under his direction in preparing boys for the University—he deemed her success in this area as “remarkable.”

Wier was indeed fortunate to have the support of Howard, a man of remarkable qualities who firmly believed in the importance of higher education for women and its ability to transform and improve humanity. In addition to organizing the first graduate seminar at the University of Nebraska, Howard had been instrumental in founding the Nebraska State Historical Society before moving to Palo Alto as part of the inaugural group of history faculty at Stanford. A former student later described him as “an enthusiastic supporter of all efforts to promote equality between the sexes in opportunities and recognition.” He treated his women pupils with “justice and complete lack of sex bias” and female associates were inspired by “his faith in their capacity to do scholarly work.”

Wier benefited not only from Howard’s confidence in her academic abilities, but also from “the inspiration for real social service which he radiated” and in absorbing his belief of how “knowledge of the past might be brought to bear on the problems of the present and even of the future…”

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44 Letter of recommendation from Dr. George Elliott Howard, May 27, 1899, box 3, folder 1, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

45 Todd, “George Elliott Howard,” 698.

46 Ibid., 696. Howard’s research interests later transitioned from social history to sociology, and he would eventually become head of the department of political science and sociology at the University of Nebraska. As a noted sociology scholar, he was elected to the presidency of the American Sociological Society.
The history course descriptions from Stanford’s Bulletin indicate that original research using primary sources was both required and valued in the program. A thesis was not required, but undergraduate students were given an extra hour of credit if they presented a “satisfactory thesis embodying the results of independent work.” It is not surprising that Wier, scholarly, conscientious and described by Dr. Howard as “strong in methods of independent research,” would take up this challenge. In 1897, she began fieldwork in northern Nevada studying the Washoe Indians for her thesis. On the surface, it was a subject more anthropological than historical in nature. What led Wier to focus her research on the American Indian, and in particular the Indians of northern Nevada is unknown, but her interest in their history continued to develop throughout her career and had a profound influence upon her early work with the Nevada Historical Society. Significantly, her attitudes, while considered progressive and kindly for the early twentieth century and motivated by sincere concern for the Washoe Indians, appear patriarchal and prejudiced in the modern era.

As Wier approached the end of her program at Stanford, she was no doubt thinking about her future career plans. Teaching was a natural choice, but where, and in what capacity? In addition to her history coursework, she had taken education classes at Stanford that would eventually allow her to qualify for a Certificate of the High School grade from the State of

47 Leland Stanford Junior University: Fourth Annual Register, 1894-95 (Palo Alto, California: Published by the University, April 1895)

48 Particularly cringeworthy is this excerpt from her thesis: “Therefore I hold that neither the church nor the ordinary school can single-handedly civilize Indians. These by themselves can only succeed in tarnishing over the savage life. These will leave him in a condition where a single war-whoop will suffice to transform him again into a hideous savage. More than all else service is the homes of thrifty and high-minded white people will bring about that change of ideals which is the first requisite for a better life.” Jeanne Elizabeth Wier, “The Washoe Indians” in Michael S. Green and Gary E. Elliott, Nevada Readings and Perspectives (Reno, NV: Nevada Historical Society, 1997), 8.
One clue as to her career plans come from a reference letter from her mentor Dr. Howard to President H.D. McAneney of Chapman College dated May 27, 1899. He writes glowingly of Wier as one of his “ablest students” and states that she will soon be applying for a place in the latter’s institution as a teacher of history. Wier’s intelligence and capability had clearly impressed Howard. Although admitting that she did not quite have all her hours toward graduation, he stated firmly that she was “much better fitted by natural ability, experience and attainments than most of our leading graduates.” He clearly viewed her as a credit to his department and one who had mastered historical research methods according to his teachings. She would, he felt, command respect “by her manner and earnestness” as a “mature woman of perhaps twenty-seven years of age.”

What became of Wier’s application to Chapman is not known; however, fate intervened and presented her with an unexpected, and no doubt welcome, career opportunity soon afterward. Although Wier’s focus on her studies and her outside teaching work while at Stanford kept her from participating in the typical extracurricular activities of an undergraduate, she did find time to pursue occasional friendships. One friend in particular, Anne Martin, who later became famous in her own right for her pioneering work in passing woman’s suffrage in Nevada in 1914, would change the direction of Wier’s life in a way Weir could never have imagined at the time. In September 1899, Martin, who had been teaching in the history department at Nevada State University (NSU) in Reno since her graduation from Stanford in 1897, requested a leave of

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49 Letter to county and city boards of education in California signed by David Starr Jordan and David L. Snededen, March 20, 1902, box 3, folder 9, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

50 George Elliott Howard to H.D. McAneney, May 27, 1899, box 3, folder 1, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
absence from the Board of Regents; she asked her former classmate Jennie Wier to fill in for her during this absence.\textsuperscript{51}

Wier and Martin, on the surface, had some life circumstances in common, and it is easy to imagine how a friendship developed between the two women. Martin, like Wier, had a progressive and understanding father who recognized her intelligence and encouraged her to pursue higher education. Both women excelled academically and had a desire to teach. Unlike Wier’s father, however, William Martin was a wealthy and successful Reno businessman, which meant that his daughter was able to pursue her education without taking outside employment.\textsuperscript{52} She had attended Reno’s prestigious Bishop Whittaker School for Girls, and as a result of her coursework, was qualified to enter NSU at age sixteen as a sophomore in 1892. The young college, a small and struggling institution, was no doubt far from a fully developed university curriculum-wise, and Martin easily finished her remaining coursework in two years, graduating in 1894. It was a very basic course, however, and like Wier, the intellectually curious Martin elected to further her studies at the newly-established (and nearby) Stanford University.

In contrast to the relatively mature Wier, Martin was still a teenager when she entered Stanford in late 1894, just short of her nineteenth birthday. With the support of a wealthy family behind her, she was free to engage in a number of campus social activities and left behind a lively record of her activities in Stanford’s yearbooks and the school newspaper. Despite her youth, she shared Wier’s dedication to the study of history but found her academic mentor and role model not in Dr. George E. Howard, as had Wier, but in a female instructor, Mary Sheldon Barnes. Working closely with Barnes, she received her A.B. in History in 1896 and went on to

\textsuperscript{51} Anne Bail Howard, \textit{The Long Campaign: A Biography of Anne Martin} (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1985), 44.

\textsuperscript{52} Abundant leisure time may have been one reason that Martin was able to keep a diary, making it possible to be privy to her motivations to a far more intimate degree than those of Wier.
earn her Master’s Degree in 1897. Directly after graduation at age twenty-three, she was appointed to a teaching position in the history and political science department at Nevada State University. It would have seemed an ideal posting for the recent graduate, who was described by her biographer as “longing for home and a true affection for the lively family she had left behind,” but the young and inexperienced Martin had some trouble adjusting to the rigors of teaching: a lack of confidence in her abilities meant that she often grew frustrated with herself and her students. In summer 1899 she also experienced the death of a former classmate, John Gregory, whom she later described as “almost a fiancé” in an accident. Martin’s biographer Anne Bail Howard notes that it may have been the combination of these two events that led to her decision to take a leave of absence, but whatever the reason, she left Reno for the East Coast a week after her leave had been announced and never returned to full-time teaching.

**Arrival in Nevada**

Wier was a few credits short of graduation when she departed for Nevada in September 1899, but it did not affect her appointment as Acting Assistant Professor of History in charge of the Department of History. At the time of her arrival that fall, the university was in the midst of a spirited period of growth and development under the leadership of Dr. Joseph E. Stubbs, who had arrived just five years prior to Wier. Founded as a land-grant university, the original campus, described as a “university preparatory school,” had only one instructor and seven students when it opened in the fall of 1874 in Elko, in the northeastern part of the state. Nevada’s sparse population and a lack of students with adequate preparation meant that the campus never had more than one to two instructors and thirty-five students per year during the first ten years of its existence. The difficulty of attracting students to Elko resulted in the

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legislature and the Regents moving the campus to Reno in 1886. Still, the fledgling university struggled to attract qualified students, faculty, and balance the teaching of “the traditional liberal arts studies of older colleges, the needs of a teacher-training school, and the technical fields mandated by the Morrill Act.”

The arrival of President Stubbs, a man later described in near reverential tones by historians of the University of Nevada, saw the campus undergo a number of changes that led to a significant improvement in Nevada’s ability to provide higher education to its citizens. Stubbs’ advocacy and influence meant that the legislature and the community became more aware of the financial needs of higher education, and he was able to greatly improve teaching facilities. The campus, which had had only five buildings at his arrival in 1894, had grown to eleven by the end of the century, just as Wier took up her position in the Department of History, where she joined the existing faculty of twenty-eight which included nine other women (or eight not counting the absent Anne Martin). He had been less successful in building up the student body: it was said to number about three hundred in the mid-1890s but declined at the turn of the century even as the state’s population was growing.

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54 The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 required colleges who received funding via this legislation to provide instruction in agriculture and the mechanic arts. Ibid., 285-286.

55 Stubbs was also influential in raising the standards of the University to match collegiate standards of the day, raising entrance requirements and the level of coursework required. Recognizing that many students in Nevada were not prepared for college-level work, he had expanded the University’s high school-level offerings and promoted the establishment of high schools throughout Nevada. He later became a crusading moral force in Reno, determined to rid the city of the vices he felt discouraged parents from enrolling their children at the University. At first it was bars and bordellos, and then gambling that aroused his ire. He was a leading force in the movement to outlaw gambling in Nevada—a law that took effect in 1910. James Hulse, University of Nevada: A Centennial History (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1974), 32-35.

56 Twelfth Annual Register of the Nevada State University for the Year 1899 with Announcements for the Academic Year, 1900-1901 (Carson City, NV: State Printing Office, 1900), 8-10.

57 Hulse, University of Nevada, 34.
With nearly a decade of teaching experience behind her at various levels, it is likely that Wier was not troubled by the same teaching insecurities that had affected Martin. In fact, shortly after her arrival at NSU, she eagerly embraced opportunities to share and improve her teaching skills. In October 1899, Wier represented the university in a local teacher’s institute and in spring 1900, she accompanied President Stubbs as part of the Washoe delegation to the Lyon
County Teacher’s Institute in Dayton, Nevada. She even added to the existing curriculum that Martin had set in place, and at the end of her contracted period at the university in summer 1901, Dr. Stubbs described her as “apt and inspiring as a teacher” and “one of the very best teachers of History either in the field of college or of high school teaching whom I have known.”

There is little documentation available regarding Wier’s first two years in Reno beyond the census and a few newspaper articles. None of it provides much evidence as to her initial impressions of Nevada or any indication of how deeply devoted she would become to her adopted state. Physically, the Nevada campus, with sagebrush crowding in at the edges and cows grazing not far from its gates, must have seemed a world away from the grandeur of the Stanford Campus (even in those early years), with its large quad of Mission-style buildings and Mediterranean landscaping. Owing to what she viewed as the temporary nature of her stay, it is not surprising that the 1900 census noted that she roomed in a boarding house in Reno with several other residents where she would have had her meals and laundry service provided. Continuing the pattern of earlier years, in May 1900, the Oakland Tribune (a local newspaper her parents would have taken in Hayward, California) reported that Wier was ill, this time with malarial fever. It must have been a lengthy illness as she was also listed on the “sick list” in the June 15 issue of the Nevada State Journal. Newspaper reports from summer 1901 suggest that she might have been using her free time to complete her fieldwork and/or finish writing her


59 Letter of recommendation from J.E. Stubbs, July 12, 1901, box 3, folder 1, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.


thesis on the Washoe Indians; the *Nevada State Journal* noted on June 23, 1901, that Wier had “returned from an outing in Nevada” and had been visiting in Winnemucca and would then go on to see her parents in Hayward.\(^{63}\) The visit to her parents must have been combined with her schooling as the *Reno Evening Gazette* of August 8, 1901, listed Wier’s name among those NSU faculty who had attended summer school at the University of California in Berkeley.\(^{64}\)

Correspondence in her personal papers suggests that Wier did not expect her two-year position at the University of Nevada to be extended. Martin’s leave was not indefinite after all, and once her travels to Europe had been completed, she returned to Reno in January 1901.\(^{65}\) By that summer, the pragmatic Wier was on the lookout for other employment to begin the school year. In addition to noting that Wier was attending summer school in Berkeley, the *Nevada State Journal* of August 7, 1901, remarked that she was to “engage in high school work in California.”\(^{66}\) Obviously she was not wedded to the idea of university work. In a lengthy application for the position of principal at Bakersfield’s high school dated July 30, Wier asked the President of the Board of Education if the supervision of the history work could be combined with the principalship. She referred the board president to her letters of reference from Howard and Stubbs that would speak to her “executive and organizing ability, and of my worth as compared with men in the same line of work.”\(^{67}\) The reference from Howard both puts Wier’s qualifications into perspective (“good writer and fine speaker”), and also provides evidence as to the nature of the history instruction she had at Stanford; he describes her as versed in modern

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\(^{63}\) “Personal Mention: Gossip About the Migrating Public as They Come and Go,” *Nevada State Journal*, June 23, 1901.

\(^{64}\) “Educational Thought as Promulgated at Berkeley,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, August 8, 1901.


\(^{66}\) “University of Nevada,” *Nevada State Journal*, August 7, 1901.

\(^{67}\) Jeanne Wier to President, Bakersfield Board of Education, July 30, 1901, box 3, folder 1, Jeanne Wier Papers MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
methods with the ability to put them into practice, and possessing the knowledge of “how to organize and conduct a thoroughly scientific department of history and allied branches.”68 Wier’s references were drawn solely from the men she had worked with at Stanford, and the University of California where she had taken summer courses. She did not appear to have many interactions with female staff or know them well enough to ask for references.

Wier’s study of the Washoe Indians also figured prominently in her life in 1901, and if she had not received a permanent appointment at NSU, it is likely that she would have continued her research in this area. Wier’s history training at Stanford was typical of the late nineteenth century, with its Germanic concern with sources and method, and is reflected in the description of her work on the Indians as “scientific” in nature. Her study of the Washoe did not involve trips to dusty archives to research original sources, however, but rather trips into the field to observe tribal members’ lives on the reservations and in the Indian Schools of northern Nevada. Correspondence from summer and fall 1901 indicates that Wier was actively seeking photographs of Indians from the Schurtz Reservation and accurate accounts of Indian words and language from the Indian School in Carson City. In September 1901, Wier was invited to observe an “Indian Dance” at Fort McDermit. Although it is apparent that she had quite a network of contacts in the Indian schools and reservations of northern Nevada, it is notable that much of her research was filtered through the eyes of school and reservation administrators. The extent of her contact with actual members of the various tribes is not clear. In July 1901 (at nearly the same time that she was applying for work as a high school principal in Bakersfield), Wier wrote a letter to Phoebe Hearst, at the time a great benefactor at the University of

California and its fledgling anthropology department and museum,\(^69\) to tell the latter of her research on the Washoe in the hopes of securing funding to continue her work.\(^{70}\) She wrote of how she had recently completed the rough draft of a history of the Washoe tribe and of her hopes that it would be accepted by the Bureau of Ethnology. Hearing of Hearst’s potential interest in such work, Wier asked delicately if “you might be able to help me to make plans for the continuation of this research work among the Nevada Indians who are so rapidly becoming extinct, or extinct with reference to ancient language and custom.”\(^{71}\)

At some point during late summer or early fall 1901, NSU’s administration decided to offer Wier a permanent position in the history department. The reasoning for the decision is unclear; as late as July 12, NSU President Stubbs made it seem inevitable that they would not be able to keep both instructors remarking, “If we were able to divide the Department of History Miss Wier would be our first choice for the position.”\(^{72}\) According to her biographer, Martin’s return to the NSU campus had not been a happy one, owing to the fact that Wier had so firmly established herself in the history department.\(^{73}\) As a more experienced instructor, Wier had obviously impressed the university administrators, and by fall 1901, it was she, not Martin who

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\(^{69}\) Phoebe Apperson Hearst (1842-1919), a Missouri schoolteacher before her marriage to the future senator and millionaire George Hearst, had a lifelong interest in education and philanthropy. She was the first woman regent of the University of California, and did much to improve the lives of female students at Berkeley, taking a particular interest in their lives and how they financed their education. In addition to providing scholarships, Hearst often corresponded with female students and their families. Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education*, 56-57. It is likely that Wier became familiar with Hearst’s work during the summers she spent doing coursework at the University of California in the 1890s.

\(^{70}\) It was typical of Wier that she showed no reluctance or timidity in writing to the rich and powerful in pursuit of funding—it was a quality that served her well in nearly five decades at the chronically impoverished Nevada Historical Society.

\(^{71}\) Jeanne Wier to Phoebe Hearst, July 20, 1901, box 1, folder 7, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\(^{72}\) Letter of reference, Joseph E. Stubbs, July 12, 1901. box 3, folder 1, Jeanne Wier Papers MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\(^{73}\) Howard, *The Long Campaign*, 49.
continued to teach classes in the history department. In the draft of a letter to Phoebe Hearst dated September 30, Wier mentioned that she had temporarily halted her studies of the Indians owing to the fact that the position of history chair fell vacant unexpectedly, and she was now tendered permanently the place she had held temporarily. Martin stayed on at NSU for a short time, but in a much-reduced role, teaching a small selection of art history courses. This reversal of fortunes—the usurpation of the history department (as Martin saw it)—was the beginning of what Martin’s biographer termed “a life-long battle between two former friends.”

In late September 1901, Wier finally received her long-awaited diploma from Stanford University. She took a deep pride in her time at Stanford; throughout her life she would refer to herself as a “Stanford woman,” and it signified to her a sort of exclusive, unofficial club that meant special favors could be requested of other Stanford graduates. Her qualifications complete, Wier was notified on November 9, 1901 that the NSU Board of Regents had officially elected her Assistant Professor of History in charge of the Department of History and Political Science with an annual salary of $1200. She would remain the only faculty member in this Department until 1913. Wier now set about making a life for herself in Reno; within three

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74 Wier’s draft indicated that Hearst had responded on August 17, but as there was no copy available in her files, so it is not known if she had answered in the affirmative regarding funding. However, as Wier would write to her many times in the future for assistance with the Nevada Historical Society, it appears that the women maintained a friendly relationship.

75 Howard, The Long Campaign, 52.

76 Her scholarly efforts were further rewarded in 1905 when she was named as one of 169 alumni and students to be elected a member of Stanford’s inaugural chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. Articles in the Nevada State Journal in March 1936 and 1938 show that even into her late sixties, Wier would attend Stanford alumni events held in Reno. See “Stanford Alumni Have Banquet,” Nevada State Journal, March 10, 1936 and “University Is Feted by Club,” Nevada State Journal, March 10, 1938.

77 Board of Regents to Jeanne Wier, November 9, 1901, box 3, folder 1, Jeanne Wier Papers MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

78 University President Joseph E. Stubbs sometimes taught political science classes during this period.
years the woman who started out as a stranger to Nevada would evolve into its strongest champion.

**Early Life in Reno**

After Wier’s position became permanent, it appears that she began to take on a more active role in the community, judging from the newspaper reports of her activities. She was, after all, still relatively young, without her family, and in a new town; if her work provided her with intellectual stimulation, it is not surprising that she looked to the community for her social contacts. She remained devoted to the idea of improving her pedagogy and/or helping other teachers of all levels improve their own teaching skills. For instance, in November 1901, shortly after she received her permanent position at NSU, Wier set up a conference for both Reno teachers and visiting teachers interested in history instruction. At the Western Nevada Teachers Association meeting in November 1903, Wier gave a talk on the value of history in the training of the mind.

She was also more than happy to give lectures to the membership of the Twentieth Century Club, the recently formed Reno women’s organization, although there was no indication that she was a member. And if she was later more closely associated with western history subjects, Wier’s early lectures for the Club showed her topical range, including as they did a November 1901 lecture entitled “Florence the Flower City, Festivals, Guilds, Arts and Crafts” and a March 1902 lecture on the very contemporary subject of the Isthmian Canal. At

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80 “Teacher’s Institute: Name Changed to the Nevada Teacher’s Association,” *Nevada State Journal*, November 25, 1903.

81 The Twentieth Century Club was founded in 1894 as “an association of the women of Reno for purposes of broader cultivation and the promotion of the public welfare…,” in *Golden Anniversary History and Year Book of the Twentieth Century Club, 1894-1945*, 17.


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the turn of the twentieth century, Reno was a small town (4500 residents at the 1900 census), and
the faculty at NSU even smaller still in proportion to the town’s general population. One could
imagine that a small group of educated and cultured individuals in a town only a generation or
two removed from its frontier origins would socialize together frequently, and Reno newspaper
accounts of the early twentieth century bear this out. In April 1902, Wier attended a dinner
given by the Delta Rho fraternity with several other faculty members including the university
president, Dr. Stubbs, and later on that year, the energetic Wier, described as “among the most
enthusiastic mountain climbers” was part of a group of faculty members who had reached the
summit of nearby Mount Rose.83

It is doubtful that Wier had much time for mountain climbing within a few years of her
arrival. She was soon absorbed by her teaching work at the university,84 and at the end of the
spring semester 1903, she wrote of her hospitalization from “a tedious illness occasioned by the
care and over work of the year” in a letter to her friend, anthropologist Alfred L. Kroeber at the
University of California.85 It is likely that Wier met the pioneering anthropologist Kroeber during
her summer sessions at the University of California; his studies of the American Indian and in
particular, the California Indian tribes and their languages were of great interest to Wier, and
their correspondence shows that she had not let her university workload interfere with her

83 “Crumbs of Information,” *Daily Nevada State Journal*, April 4, 1902 and “University

84 The *Nevada State University Bulletin for 1902* listed Wier as teaching the following classes:
Mediaeval History, History of Europe in the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries, History
of England to 1485, History of England Since 1845, Constitutional and Political History of the United
States, 1775-1840, Constitutional and Political History of the United States Since 1840, specialized
courses for graduate students, and thesis work. *Fifteenth Annual Register of the Nevada State University
for the Year 1902 with Announcements for the Academic Year, 1903-1904*. (Carson City, NV; State
Printing Office, 1903), 64.

85 Wier’s “illness due to overwork” and the delays it caused in her work were to become a
familiar refrain in her correspondence over the years. Whether the frequent ailments were due to
hypochondria or a weak constitution, it is clear that illness was a constant companion in her life.
research interests. Of greater interest still is her correspondence with Kroeber in June 1903 on establishing a folklore society in Nevada that would serve as a means to further the cultural anthropology studies of Indian tribes of which he was a leading proponent. It is noteworthy that the thirty-three year old Wier did not show any enthusiasm for taking the reins of such an organization at this time: “All that is needed is an enthusiastic leader who has time to devote to organization and planning of work. Unless I can be relieved of some University work it will be impossible to devote any time to it.”

Within a year of this letter to Kroeber, however, Wier would be firmly ensconced as secretary of the newly established Nevada Historical Society, a position she would hold for nearly half a century, and one that would eventually result in her greatest legacy to the state.

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Early Twentieth-Century Nevada

Wier had arrived in Nevada barely thirty-five years after it had achieved statehood on October 31, 1864 as part of a political maneuver on the part of Lincoln and other territorial officials who wanted the state’s support for both the presidential election of that year and the passage of the 13th amendment banning slavery. In addition to Nevada’s political value at this early date, the discovery of the silver and gold ores that made up the famed Comstock Lode in Virginia City in 1859 had brought about widespread investment from capitalists that resulted in “sophisticated monopolies of financial and industrial wealth” in the northern part of the state.¹

These mines could not produce indefinitely, however, and after over twenty years of near total dependency on the mining industry and a failure to increase agricultural production, Nevada fell into a severe economic depression during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

Major mining discoveries in central and eastern Nevada in the first decade of the twentieth century helped draw the state out of this depression, and Reno itself benefited from serving as a supply center for the newly created towns of Tonopah and Goldfield. Its location as a distribution point for freight on both the Central Pacific and Virginia & Truckee Railroads also meant that it was not wholly dependent on mining. The development of the federally funded Newlands Reclamation Project on the Carson and Truckee Rivers after 1902 also had a positive effect on Reno and the desert areas just east of the city.

¹ Russell R. Elliott with the assistance William D. Rowley, History of Nevada, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 123.
Reno had always set itself apart from other cities in Nevada. One Nevada historian has noted that “almost from the beginning, Reno presented a second, urbane face to the world to counterbalance its appearance as a wild frontier outpost.”\(^2\) It was the commercial center of the state, had the best connections to San Francisco and the East, and after 1886, it had the only institution of higher education in the state. Beginning in the late nineteenth and continuing into the early twentieth century, the city of Reno also benefited from having its own personal champion in the form of Francis G. Newlands. As an attorney and son-in-law of Comstock mining magnate William Sharon, Newlands had settled in Reno in 1888 and would later become a lifelong promoter of the interests of Reno and western Nevada as first as a US Congressman and later US Senator from Nevada. Determined to see Reno develop and grow into a “city beautiful,” Newlands supported city planning and the beautifying of the Truckee River along with his namesake water reclamation project.\(^3\) As a classic politician of the Progressive Era, “Newlands had grand visions for Reno as the hub of an expanding agricultural and industrial development in western Nevada. Not only would the city nourish commerce, but also education, the arts, civic pride, and beauty.”\(^4\)

Looking at the city from this perspective, it makes perfect sense that city fathers would request funding for the construction of a Carnegie library in late 1901, as Reno itself had no library except for a small one at the University of Nevada that was not open to the public. After Reno city officials promised to provide a building site (on Virginia Street and Mill Street near the Truckee River), and a regular yearly sum for its support, Carnegie provided $15,000 for the


\(^3\) Ibid., 197.

construction of the library in 1902, with an opening scheduled for 1904. This was just one of the many significant cultural developments that characterized Reno in the early twentieth century, and it was into this heady atmosphere of civic and community progress that the kernel of an idea for the Nevada Historical Society was born and would develop under the watchful eye of Jeanne Wier.  

**Founding of the Nevada Historical Society**

Wier’s correspondence with the young University of California anthropologist, Alfred Kroeber, in late January 1904 indicated that the organization of a folklore society was paramount in her mind, even if she was unsure of the support that she might receive from the University or the town. She advised him that she would “canvass the matter” before Kroeber arrived in Reno to “effect the organization.” Noting that the University faculty had recently organized an Academy of Sciences, which was to be divided into two sections—natural and social science—Wier suggested that she would be pleased if the folklore society could be affiliated with the latter, although she believed it would be “a somewhat more popular organization, including citizens rather than faculty members.”

The following month saw the initial meeting of the Social Science Section of the Nevada Academy of Sciences on February 11, and those in attendance sought to outline the nature of its work. Although Wier may not have indicated enthusiasm for the section in her letter to Kroeber,

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5 This chapter will reflect the fact that at some point in the middle of the first decade of the 1900s, Wier left behind the family name “Jennie” and began to sign her professional correspondence as “Jeanne Elizabeth Wier.”

6 Although there is little information available on its mission or how the Academy of Sciences came to be organized, it appears that it was primarily a vehicle by which University faculty attempted to create a community of intellectual engagement on issues relating to natural and social sciences. Contemporary newspaper articles only discuss the lectures and the respective speakers presented before the two sections of the Academy and do not provide insight into its makeup or if and how it was funded.

no doubt as history faculty, she was tasked with presenting a report on the scope of the work to be pursued, the materials needed, and a partial list of topics to be investigated. The discussion that followed revealed the two main challenges of such a task: the scope of topics (ranging from what was termed physiography and aboriginal life to the history and economic, political, educational, religious, and social development of the state) was exceedingly vast, and gathering and providing access to the historical material needed for such studies would prove difficult as they were scattered throughout the state. As Wier had predicted, the organization took a popular turn when committee member Dr. Romanzo Adams (professor of economics and sociology at the University of Nevada) suggested that such work might be more easily accomplished via a historical society—"an organization which, by its nature, would appeal more strongly to the people at large than could the Academy of Sciences." Interestingly, there was no mention made of the earlier attempts at creating a society—namely the Society of Pacific Coast Pioneers.

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8 Although Nevada had had a state library in Carson City since 1865, it was originally intended only as a reference library for state legislators. It was later opened to the public, but it did not collect historical records or archives.

9 Dr. Romanzo Adams, a sociologist by training with an emphasis in education, had arrived in Nevada in 1902 to teach at the University and received his PhD from the University of Chicago in 1904. He was described in a history of the University of Nevada as "one of the most imaginative and productive scholars in the first half century of the University," teaching sociology, education, and economics. Adams took an active interest in Nevada’s conditions and problems, publishing works on state taxation and federal land policy as it affected Nevada. A graduate of the Iowa State Normal School, Wier’s alma mater, Adams seemed to have a cordial relationship with her over the years, even if he did not appear to have taken on a role in the Society beyond his initial work in making the suggestion during the Academy of Sciences meeting. He later left Nevada and had a long and distinguished career at the University of Hawaii. James Hulse, University of Nevada: A Centennial History (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 1974), 114-115.


11 As Wier noted in a speech before the NHS membership in 1908, the Society of Pacific Coast Pioneers had its origins back in the 1870s in Virginia City, where John W. Mackay was reported to have been a member. For a short time, the Society collected mineralogical specimens, historical documents, and papers—items that were housed in a two-story brick building. According to her speech, "this
A letter to Kroeber dated February 14 revealed that Wier had not yet given up on the idea of a folklore society that would pursue the study of the indigenous tribes of Nevada and that she had even canvassed the field to come up with a large charter membership of Reno citizens. She complained bitterly, however, that there were not as many faculty members involved as she would have liked, stating that “[t]hey, for the most part, look upon the Indians as a degenerate civilization that ought to be wiped out as soon as possible…”12 Although her letter indicates that she was more than prepared to take on the administrative work needed to set up the folklore society, Wier was tasked at the February 25 meeting of the Nevada Academy of Sciences to chair the Committee on Organization for the historical society. With the exception of R.L. Fulton (successful Reno businessman and former publisher of the Nevada State Journal), the other committee members were university faculty and included Professors J.E. Church and G.H. True, and President J.E. Stubbs.13

Wier eagerly embraced her leadership role; only a few weeks later on March 11, she mailed a letter to twenty-six prominent Nevada citizens (primarily men, and largely businessmen, judges, and members of the Nevada legislature) on behalf of the Committee, describing the proposed organization and its mission:

A movement has recently originated among some of the members of the Nevada Academy of Sciences to found a State Historical Society, whose primary object shall be the investigation of topics pertaining to the early history of Nevada and the collection of relics for a museum. We realize that the pioneers are rapidly passing away and that if this work is ever to be done in satisfactory way it must not be longer delayed.14

undertaking was allowed to die for lack of interest and for want of means. We have faith to believe that the people of Nevada will not allow the same fate to overtake the present organization.” First Biennial Report, 1907-1908, 91.


14 Ibid., 18.
Keeping in mind the democratic nature of the proposed organization, the letter also noted that the organization would be governed by an Executive Council to be elected by correspondence and that the membership fee would not exceed one dollar a year. The real purpose of the letter, however, was to obtain the endorsement of these citizens so that a larger appeal to the Nevada public could be made using their names.

Nearly all of the recipients responded with enthusiasm, and with the written support of Nevada pioneers such as Sam Davis, E.D. Kelley, E.L. Bingham, and Hannah Clapp, Wier and the committee had plenty of glowing “ammunition” to use in an effort to attract membership from Nevada’s population at large. The responses revealed that these citizens were hungry to highlight and preserve what they viewed as Nevada’s valuable contributions to the historical development of the United States. Nevada politician and journalist Sam Davis, later author of a well-known two-volume *History of Nevada*, was most enthusiastic, proclaiming:

> Anyone in Nevada should consider it an honor to become a member of such an organization, and you can put me down as an active member and use my name in any connection whatever where you may think it can be of the slightest good. Nevada has innumerable rich and interesting pages of history. It was born when Columbia was in the throes of a civil war, and it has risen to a sturdy manhood with a record which should incite a commendable pride in the breast of every citizen. Its wealth saved the Union and it ought to be the favorite son of Uncle Sam.”

E.D. Kelley, Surveyor-General in the state’s capital of Carson City, was particularly attracted to the society based on his status as a pioneer, noting

> …I am decidedly in favor of the movement to found a State Historical Society and as one of the Pioneers of Nevada who came to the Territory “in the days that tried men’s stomachs” will assist you in any and every possible way.

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15 Ibid., 18.
16 Ibid.
Realizing the value of a positive and supportive press, Wier had sent the initial letter to a number of journalists. E.L. Bingham, editor of the *Nevada State Journal*, answered the call and recognized the need for timeliness in such an effort, stating, “[v]aluable data and relics could now be secured and safely filed away that a decade or two hence would be priceless because unobtainable.” The only woman contacted in this initial communiqué was well-known Nevada educator, Hannah Clapp, who had established the first private school and first kindergarten in Nevada and later served as one of the first instructors at Nevada State University. Although quite elderly at the time, she was effusive in her support of the organization, and declared, “I heartily endorse the movement of founding a State Historical Society of Nevada. Command me in any way to help the cause along to the extent of my ability.”

Wier and the Committee then composed a circular letter highlighting these responses, along with basic information about the proposed society and its mission, and sent this letter to over a thousand citizens throughout Nevada between April 24 and May 31. The missive also contained the society’s constitution, membership forms, and a ballot for the initial selection of officers. Articles on the proposed society and its mission were also published in newspapers throughout the state as a means to reach an even greater portion of the population.

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18 Whether Wier felt that the Nevada Historical Society would serve the same purpose as the folklore society she had favored for so long is unclear, but an April 14 letter to Kroeber indicates that it was still on her mind as she simultaneously prepared the initial membership materials for the Society. She informed Kroeber that she would “gladly” arrange for a meeting of the folklore society with the Academy of Sciences in the early part of May, but conflicting schedules meant that the proposed meeting did not take place, and by the end of the month, the first meeting of the NHS essentially pre-empted any work she might have done in establishing the folklore society. It did not end her interest in pursuing anthropological studies in Nevada, however, as she seemingly transferred this interest into her work with the NHS. Jeanne Wier to Alfred Kroeber, April 14, 1904, reel-frame 48:425, folder 14, A.L. Kroeber Papers, BANC FILM 2049, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
The Committee was undoubtedly pleased when this initial membership drive solicited a number of overwhelmingly positive replies. Although responses were naturally strong from Reno and Carson City, membership forms and dues came in from all over the state and from a wide range of citizens. From businessmen, attorneys, and newspaper editors to judges, state assemblymen, and senators, government officials and educators, there was widespread support for the proposed historical society and its mission. Geographically, the responses came from counties throughout the state—from nearby Washoe, Winnemucca, and Churchill, and as far away as Nye, White Pine, and Lincoln. Interest in the society often came from either long-time or pioneer residents of the state, who had arrived in Nevada prior to 1870. In this category were men such as Reno resident Walter A. Lang, Chief Clerk in the US. Surveyor General’s Office, who submitted his dues and noted, “I should greatly like to be counted among the Charter Members of the Nevada Historical Society if continuous residence since 1878 and a life of more than ordinary vicissitudes during that period entitle one thereto.”19 Or Carson City attorney Alfred Chartz, who responded to the membership circular with his own personal history: “I feel complimented by being invited to join in the organization of the Nevada Historical Society. I came to Nevada in 1863 (crossing the plains that year), bare footed, and without a rim to my hat, and could not speak English. It will be pleasant to me to render any assistance I can.”20

Other new members were eager to do more than just send in their dues and said that they would either promote the fledgling society or further its interests in any way possible. These included men as far away as Judge Peter Breen from the 3rd Judicial District of Nevada,

20 Alfred Chartz to Nevada Historical Society, May 7, 1904, box 1, folder 1904, Nevada Historical Society Records MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
representing Eureka, Lander, and Nye Counties, who declared that “any assistance in my power shall be gladly given in the furtherance of so worthy an object.” 21 Closer to home, there was G.F. Talbot, Nevada Supreme Court Justice, in Carson City, who described himself as “…pleased to join and assist in the formation of a State Historical Society for the object and purposes outlined in your letter…” In the tiny town of Stillwater in Churchill County, J.W. Freeman (profession unknown) informed Wier and the Committee that “[i]f at any time I can in any way serve you, in the society, kindly command. The movement is good and the instigators should receive thanks of all interested in welfare of our state.” 22 And even at this early date in the formation of the Society, some members were enthusiastic about helping to shape its collections. Dr. J.L. Garner, a health officer in the central Nevada mining town of Tonopah, heartily endorsed the organization of a state historical society, and believed that it could “be made very beneficial to everyone that will lend their help—no doubt I could be of assistance to you especially in securing of specimens and curios in this vicinity.” 23

At the Society’s first official meeting on the afternoon of May 31, 1904, in Morrill Hall on the University campus, Wier announced that the fledgling organization had received some fifty-seven replies to its initial membership circular, with another nine replies awaiting signature. As Chairman of the Committee on Organization, she gave a brief history of its efforts thus far and then focused on the Society’s future goals. The immediate goal, not surprisingly, was to increase membership, preferably before the winter. Wier spoke eloquently of the importance of

21 Peter Breen to Secretary, March 26, 1904, box 1, folder 1904, Nevada Historical Society Records, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
22 J.W. Freeman to Secretary, May 1, 1904, box 1, folder 1904, Nevada Historical Society Records, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
expanding the membership: “If this Society is to be a success it must win its place not with a class nor a party nor a creed, but it must find its place in the hearts of the people at large…” And even at this early date in the Society’s organization, Wier understood that the Society could not exist in a vacuum, realizing the need to recruit members from throughout the state so that there might be local societies organized for “systematic work each in its own territory.”

After Wier’s official report, a few other speakers participated in a lively discussion of the “early days,” and the members present then made nominations for officers. These included R.L. Fulton for President; E.D. Kelley for Vice-President; Wier for Secretary and Curator; A.E. Hershiser for Treasurer; and W.W. Booher, Gordon H. True, and Judge G.F. Talbot for Executive Council. The final order of business, and perhaps the most important, from an administrative standpoint, was the adoption of the proposed constitution for the Society. The six brief sections of the Society’s constitution dealt with its official title, objective, membership, officers and their election, Executive Council responsibilities, and its amendment process.

Of particular significance in the Society’s Constitution was Section III, which dealt with the Society’s membership and demonstrated the inclusive nature of its policy (notwithstanding the use of the male pronoun): “…Any person who is willing to collect data regarding the history of his district and endeavor to obtain relics for preservation, and is approved by the Executive Council may become an active member. Any person interested in the work of the Society shall be eligible for associate membership…” The “tiered” membership was similar to that of earlier historical societies in the East, but the concept of welcoming women members was a more recent phenomenon. This policy likely had as much to do with the need to build up

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25 Ibid., 140.
membership in a sparsely populated state as it did with societal changes that afforded women
greater opportunities in the early twentieth century.

Perhaps even more significant was what the Society’s Constitution did not say. One brief
sentence in Section II described the purpose of the Society: “Its object shall be the promotion of
historical studies, especially in the investigation of topics pertaining to the early history of this
State and the collection of relics for a museum.”26 It is unclear as to why it did not also contain
text about the collection of historical documents and records for a library, considering how much
Wier emphasized their importance in the future. In Section IV, which listed the titles of the
Society’s officers and the make-up of its Executive Council, there was no description of the
responsibilities and workload required of the Secretary (or any officer), and thus it appears that it
was Wier’s initiative and drive that made her role a transformative one.

As with any all-volunteer organization, events did not proceed with any particular speed,
especially with the organizing committee consisting largely of university professors. The
following month (June) saw Wier mail out a circular letter to all members reporting on the events
of the first meeting and a ballot listing the candidates for the four officers (President, Vice-
President, Treasurer, Secretary and Curator) and the two-person Executive Council. Some fifty-
four candidates—a “who’s who of Nevada residents—stood for office in this original ballot, and
among their number were university professors, politicians, judges, journalists and newspaper
editors, physicians, prominent businessmen. Still, the pool of candidates interested in serving the
new historical society was small, which meant that many candidates were nominated for multiple
offices, and only a tiny percentage of the candidates, fewer than 5 percent, were women.

26 First Biennial Report, 1907-1908, 140.
During the summer months, like many university professors, Wier left Reno to conduct research, in her case, at the Bancroft Library in Berkeley. With much of the Society’s fledgling membership away for the summer as well, the ballots dribbled in slowly, and it was not until well into the university’s fall term that the election results were announced at the September 19 meeting of the Committee on Organization. Clearly, the first blush of enthusiasm had not lasted as only Wier and two other members, R.L. Fulton and G.H. True, were in attendance. Not surprisingly, the slate of candidates nominated at the May 31 meeting received the largest number of votes and the results were as follows:

R.L. Fulton – President
E.D. Kelly – Vice-President
Secretary and Curator – Miss J.E. Wier
Treasurer – A.E. Hershiser
Council Members – W.W. Booher, G.F. Talbot

Its work complete, the Committee on Organization declared itself dissolved. As chairman of the Committee, and newly-elected Secretary for the NHS, Wier was responsible for notifying the other officers not in attendance of their election and their respective duties. The depth of her commitment to the Society at this early date is unknown, and certainly even she had no real knowledge of the burden that she was taking on, but it was only the beginning of a lifetime of duties she would perform on the Society’s behalf.

As the busy fall semester progressed, Wier attended to the fledgling Society as best she could with whatever time she had left over from her university duties. As Secretary, she was responsible for the day-to-day work of the organization, and in these early days, it was all about

27 Although it is unclear what Wier was researching at this time, it’s possible that the large amount of Nevada material held at the Bancroft was of interest to her. Throughout her life, Berkeley and San Francisco served as places of refuge for her, not only for research, but to escape what she considered the stressful conditions of her life in Reno. She also traveled to San Francisco for most of her major medical and dental care.
attracting additional members, trying to engage a larger degree of public interest in the Society’s plan of work, and on a practical level, keeping up with the Society’s correspondence. There were just ninety charter members of the Society at this early date, and there was little Wier could do with the small pool of membership dues that were the only source of income for the organization. It appears that the initial plans for the NHS did not address the question of funding beyond the membership dues, and this lack of planning was to prove a serious hindrance to the Society in its formative years; the continual financial struggle took away from the efforts that Wier could have put toward more substantial activities, such as developing the collections or gathering the histories of the state’s pioneer settlers. The Society’s financial difficulties were a source of constant frustration throughout Wier’s tenure, and she was not reluctant to emphasize this fact to anyone who would listen, from the officers to members to influential Nevada politicians.

Despite the setbacks, Wier was young and full of enthusiasm and had not yet been embittered by the financial struggles and state politics that would cause her great despair in later years. From the start, Wier was eager to develop the NHS in the most professional way possible and sought out information and assistance from more established historical societies to discover the procedures and protocols they were using. In March 1905, Wier wrote to Ruben G. Thwaites, Secretary and Superintendent of the Wisconsin Historical Society, to request publications about his institution; it was arguably the most successful of the “western” historical societies, and one that was widely seen as a model for its structure, organization and funding. Clearly, Wier had

28 Of this figure, the combined membership from Reno, Carson City, and Virginia City made up over half the organization and the rest were distributed throughout the state: nine women members, eight judges, five politicians including Newlands, and two former governors.

29 It is not mentioned in the first biennial report, the most complete record of the founding of the NHS, nor in any newspaper accounts of its first meeting, nor in the constitution that served as the organization’s founding document.
done research into existing historical societies if she had selected Wisconsin as a model, and it was the beginning of many years of correspondence between the two organizations.

Wier’s First Speech: The Mission of the State Historical Society

At this early date in the Society’s development, there was little funding, a modest membership, and virtually no collections, so one of Wier’s first real accomplishments as Secretary/Curator was crafting a lengthy and passionate address on the nature and importance of historical society work for an invited speech in front of the semi-annual meeting of the Academy of Sciences in May 1905. It reveals the extent of Wier’s vision of the Society’s mission and how her views had been influenced by recent scholarship on the nature of the Western frontier, and the Progressive notion of historical work as a unifying and moralizing force in a community. Most specifically (and perhaps radically) for the Society, Wier used this speech to focus on the lack of activity and finances that were hindering the organization and argued for it be recognized as a state institution and given an appropriation for the historical work that needed to be done. It also appeared that early on Wier was the driving force behind the mission statements of the institution, and it does not appear that the other officers had as much of an intellectual investment in the society as did she. As Wier’s speech was composed early on in her role as secretary (just one year into the Society’s founding), it is worth considering in some detail as an illustration of the philosophy that lay behind Wier’s work and lifelong dedication to the Nevada Historical Society. It also reflects the optimism that she felt at this early stage of the Society’s development. If her speech sometimes drifted off into the grandiose, it should be noted that all of her arguments were designed to persuade the audience in attendance of the importance of providing tangible support for the fledgling society.

At its core, Wier’s speech was designed to highlight the purpose of the historical society’s work—”saving the records of the past for future generations.” She emphasized that the
work would involve a “well-organized system of field work” to conduct archaeological investigations and study Nevada’s Indian tribes (clearly she had not given up the studies that she promised Kroeger and planned to integrate them into the NHS). Other essential work would involve gathering manuscripts and materials that might form not just a library and museum, but a “warehouse from which to draw materials for the writing of the true history of Nevada.”

How Wier defined “true history” is unclear, but it almost certainly involved the study and use of the recollections of pioneers. In fact, at this early date, she felt that capturing the personal stories of Nevada’s pioneers was of utmost importance to the Society’s work, and perhaps even more essential in studying the early days of the state.

Her near obsession with capturing these “living memories” was perhaps born out of a desire to recognize historical research methods of the era, which had moved away from the chronicling the deeds of kings and princes (“higher-ups,” as she called them) and focused instead on the records of “the masses, the events which have to do with human nature, human hopes and ideals.” She was determined that there be an emphasis in this new history upon “heroism, self-sacrifice, and the patriotism of the truly great individual.”

After describing the basic duties of the historical society, Wier went on in some detail to explain what she felt was the deeper purpose of the Society and its work—its use as an “educational force” that would act as an instrument in “the fostering of that historic consciousness among our people which is the basic of civic patriotism.”

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31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 62.
discussing the present condition of the State, the reasons for that condition, and the possibility of changing it from its current state.

Wier assured her audience that she spoke on this topic as a “Nevadan” and illustrated her conversion into a Nevadan by way of an anecdote of how the university president declared that her views would be changed within two years of arriving in the state. In fact, she noted that “two years was none too long a period in which to grow into citizenship… to become acclimated to these strange new conditions” that included the desert wastes, the sparseness of population, the meagerness of developed resources as well as “the hardy, determined spirit with which these conditions are being met.” Poignantly she professed her love of Nevada as an “adopted child of the State…”:

True it is that I have come to love the mountains and the valleys and even the desert wastes of this State. For in few places on the earth’s surface have Nature’s gifts and her withholdings been equally complete. Nowhere are there broader and more majestic mountain ranges, nowhere better climate, nowhere broods an atmosphere more pure and exhilarating, yet nowhere are the deserts more appalling in their extent or the winds fiercer in their sweep.33

Although Wier spoke quite poetically about her love for Nevada, describing it in dream-like, almost flowery terms, she was equally firm in acknowledging the state’s primary faults. She characterized these as a “poverty of ideals in social and intellectual life” and in political life as well, suggesting that perhaps to some degree the state has merited the criticism.34 In comparison to neighboring states she asks “has not our development… been in the main a materialistic one,

33 Ibid.

34 She is likely referring to press coverage of Nevada’s reputation for political and corporate corruption in the nineteenth century, when both the mining industry and the Central Pacific Railroad had great influence over the state legislature and Nevada politicians.
so materialist in fact that when men even to-day accumulate a competency they go elsewhere to enjoy a richer, more inspiring life?”

In considering the nature of Nevada’s development that led it to be a late starter in studying its history, the historian in Wier could not resist providing a detailed historical and geographical explanation for the state’s deficiencies that made use of contemporary historical theories on the frontier. Her textbook like pronouncement that “[t]he ever-changing frontier of the United States is, without question, the most vital topic in American history”… and how within it could be “found the key to American characteristics: energy, ambition, and the power to do” was followed by recitation of Nevada’s deficiencies. These scars in Nevada’s development—the sparseness of its population, its retarded growth, the lack of home-building instinct, the absence of an agricultural stage in its proper time and place—were due, in her estimation, to the fact that the country had moved west around Nevada and not through it. Ultimately, she included Nevada within her catalog of “vacant spots” that existed within the “ragged frontier” as it moved westward.

Despite these challenges, however, Wier felt that there was hope for the state, that there were “ethical forces” at work in Nevada that would be beneficial to its growth and the

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36 Wier never references Frederick Jackson Turner’s by name, but it is clear from this speech that she was familiar with his seminal work on the frontier. It is likely that she would have been introduced to his essay during her time at Stanford as she had taken a course on the “Pacific Slope” in the late 1890s or that she would have read it in attempts to keep current with historical literature after graduation in 1901. She may also have come into contact with Turner’s work through her continued connection to the history department at Stanford which Turner’s friend Max Farrand joined in 1901. That she was influenced by Turner work can be seen in the fact that her course offerings at the University of Nevada by 1912 included “History of the Pacific Slope” and “Westward Expansion of the United States.” The latter was described in the University of Nevada Bulletin as “a study of the westward movement from the Atlantic to the Pacific and of the continuous influence of the West upon national and international affairs.” University of Nevada Bulletin 6, no. 2 (Reno: University of Nevada, April 1, 1912), 115.

development of its population. Beyond such institutions as the church and the school, she characterized “the Historical Society as an active assistant in this educative ethical work” and proceeded to impress upon her audience the deeper meaning of history—her philosophy of history no less. Although Wier provided the familiar, prescriptive chastisement that the past must be studied in order to understand the future, she was even more determined to emphasize the notion of history as moral knowledge: “By its study, conduct is shaped and the intellect is disciplined.”

Wier was even more emphatic in her emphasis on the importance of local history in this regard, describing the study of local history as possessing even more value as an “ethical and intellectual force.” The justification for local historical work was not only because of its close relation to community affairs, but because it provided the basis for the “proper comprehension of all history.” Wier also suggested that historical insight depended on human sympathy, and that if one could develop a historic association with our locality by thinking and feeling with the people under study, the richer would be “the daily life of our people in human friendships and affections, as well as accuracy of thought and judgment.” She implied a religious value in the study of local history as well: “if to think and feel the truth be indeed to know God, than shall this local historical work be for us a religious and ethical influence…” Ultimately, Wier felt strongly that local history work was most valuable in accomplishing two things: placing a community’s history in context with the “general historic process” and conversely, bringing a

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38 Although the work of its major proponents such as Charles Beard and Carl Becker would be a few years after her speech, Wier’s “theorizing” could be viewed as a product of the Progressive Age. Her views of history were also shaped by her Stanford mentor, George Elliot Howard, who had similar thoughts on how knowledge of the past could be used to consider present-day problems.
“remote historical movement” into the present and rooting it “in the concrete life of our people, enriching, thereby our civic institutions.”

After her philosophical discussion of the Society’s mission, Wier admitted to her frustration at the organization’s lack of activity since its inception: “If the Society is to be put on a secure basis, someone must take it out to the people and personally enlist their sympathies in behalf of it.” She pointed out the actions of the previous spring and summer in which many expressed an interest, but few were willing to offer financial support for the organization. Frustrated, she declared: “It is not that our people are unwilling to aid in the work, but that they need to have its importance impressed upon them.” Noting the Society’s failure in obtaining funds from the Carnegie Institution for a building, Wier presented the main argument of her speech: that the Society’s only hope was for the legislature to grant it recognition as a State institution and provide funds accordingly: an appropriation for the next two years so that the pioneer work could be done and a place for the deposit of museum and library acquisitions be secured.

Despite her impassioned speech, those gathered at the meeting, reflecting the libertarian persuasion of most Nevadans at the time, did not favor the idea of asking for state aid, and so the society continued on, impoverished. Although she was speaking to what one would guess was an educated audience, it is possible that Wier’s rather intellectual and philosophical take on history and its importance as a moral authority (as well as her finger-wagging tone) may have been somewhat overwhelming to the assembled throng.

40 As the Carnegie Institution had already funded a public library in Reno, they did not feel it necessary to fund the construction of another building in the same town.
The Lean Years: 1905-1906

Her hopes for state recognition dashed, a disappointed Wier went about the business of planning for the Society’s second annual meeting scheduled for May 29, 1906. Although the Society’s president R.L. Fulton signed the membership letter, it is highly likely that it was actually Wier (with her university connections) who engaged the speaker for the evening—Dr. Bernard Moses of the University of California. President Fulton earnestly described the forthcoming Moses lecture—“Colonial Affairs as a Field for Historical Research”—to be “as interesting an occasion as the people of Nevada have ever had offered them….” Perhaps more importantly, Fulton’s letter outlined the summer work of “our efficient secretary,” noting that Wier expected to travel over Nevada during this time on behalf of the Society “gathering historical data and organizing the work with a view to future effectiveness.” Describing it as a “noble ambition,” Fulton declared that she should receive ample support from the Society and the citizenry at large.42 The day of the scheduled meeting, the Reno Evening Gazette publicized the speaker and his topic as well as the musical selections to be played.43 Despite this publicity, the business portion of the meeting could not be convened for failure to reach quorum. This did not bode well for the future of the society.

Indeed, so perilous was the financial state of the Society that spring (only slightly alleviated by three small gifts of $5) that on May 17, Wier sent out a letter to ten prominent members asking them to register as lifetime members so that their $25 dues might fund what was described as the first “active organized work” of the Society that summer. Shortly afterward, Wier was much heartened to receive a check for the Society’s first life membership from then state senator Tasker L. Oddie (later Governor and US Senator), who, like most Nevada

42 First Biennial Report, 1907-1908, 23.
politicians, declared his support and vowed to be of assistance to her at any time. She later wrote of her deep gratitude for these early gifts, which arrived in what she characterized as the Society’s “darkest hours” in its struggle for recognition.

With an admirable sense of pluck, Wier also wrote a slightly more ambitious letter that month to businessman and philanthropist J.D. Rockefeller requesting money (between $10,000 and $15,000) for the construction of a building for the Society, acknowledging that “under the present conditions in the State we cannot ask the Legislature for the aid so much needed.” Of particular interest in her letter to Rockefeller is Wier’s description of the Society’s work and her motivations for pursuing historical work in Nevada, noting that “there is no better missionary field in America than there is in this State.” Following on the heels of her speech before the Academy of Sciences, there appears the same self-consciousness about Nevada’s backwardness and how its primary industry had affected the state’s growth: “doubtless the criticisms of our social life have been exaggerated, yet there is no denying the fact that the peculiar conditions of our early years, the physiographic features of this section, etc. —have produced an unusually materialistic type of development.” Again she emphasized the larger role that the Society could play in the community, and comparing it to the university which aided in the formation of higher ideals, she described the historical organization as serving as a “great ethical and religious influence which must eventually help to bring to our people a true freedom of spirit.”

The lack of a response from Rockefeller did not deter her, however, and throughout her time at the Society

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44 Tasker Oddie to Jeanne Wier, May 19, 1905, box 1, folder 1905, Nevada Historical Society Records MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

45 First Biennial Report, 1907-1908, 24.

46 Jeanne Wier to J.D. Rockefeller, May 16, 1905, box 1, folder 1905, Nevada Historical Society Records MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
she continued to write to the rich and famous in hopes of obtaining financial support for the organization.

Wier did indeed travel to many parts of Nevada that summer, but on behalf of the University and its extension work, rather than for the Society as the latter lacked the funds to pay for her travel despite the earlier appeal. But with her typical efficiency, Wier also managed to use these visits to interest the residents of many small Nevada towns in the Society and its potential work. She obtained thirty-eight new members, gathered a few artifacts for the proposed museum, and was promised papers in some areas. There were even discussions about creating local branches of the Society in some of the old mining towns to hold meetings during the coming months, but as she would later write, “lack of time and funds kept the promoters in a state of passive waiting.”

It was an unfortunate portent of things to come for the organization in its formative years, especially for Wier as she struggled to juggle her University duties with the enormous amount of work needed to make the Society active and viable.

Little other Society work was accomplished in 1905, but Wier continued on with her community activities by giving a lecture entitled “God of the Golden West” (accompanied by lantern slides) for the ladies of the Twentieth Century Club on September 29.

No doubt building on her relationship with Reno’s most formidable women’s organization, Wier wrote to its president a few weeks later of her desire to have the Club recruit new members for the NHS in Reno and Sparks. The ever-practical Wier was conscious that as long-standing residents of...
Nevada, the ladies of the Club would be better at recruiting members from their wide network of contacts than she would be, having only arrived in the state six years previously. Within a few years, however, Wier would have the acquaintance of a large group of like-minded people across the length and breadth of Nevada.

The following year saw little respite from the challenges that continued to hamper the Society, namely the lack of financial resources to fund travel for collecting purposes, and to provide funds for basic administrative expenses associated with the annual meeting and routine correspondence. The Society only functioned at a very basic level because Wier continued to labor on its behalf for free. Still, she resolutely organized the only major event on the Society’s calendar—its annual meeting at the end of May. In the circular announcing the third annual meeting of the Society sent out on May 18, 1906, Wier noted that the evening’s speaker would be T.D. McClelland of Stanford University, who was to give a lecture entitled “The Makers of History Should Be Its Preservers” (a topic likely to have been suggested or approved by Wier!). It was a mark of Wier’s ardent desire to engage the public’s interest in the Society’s work that she “cordially and urgently” invited the members to be present. The circular also noted that the secretary was planning to release her first biennial report listing the Society’s current members and providing a chronicle on the initial history of the Society that summer. The *Nevada State Journal* publicized the upcoming meeting in its May 22 edition, but perhaps showing the crucial lack of understanding that plagued the Society early on, referred to it as a “historical club.”

As was custom in those early years, the NHS Council held its meeting in the afternoon just prior to the annual meeting. The four council members in attendance approved Wier’s work

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51 *First Biennial Report, 1907-1908*, 24
and expenses incurred as Secretary, and there was some discussion on the needs of the Society.\footnote{53}

The highlight of the evening’s meeting that followed was the lecture by speaker T.D. McClelland. As a Stanford man, he may have been an acquaintance of Wier’s (in these early years she frequently asked her friends in academia to act as speakers), and the description of his lecture sounded suspiciously like her speech before the Academy of Sciences the previous year. It focused on history as a “live study of people, their manners, customs, habits, and their mode of thought” as opposed to a mere summary of dates and events. Another Wier-ism could be observed in how he connected the development of patriotism with history as an inspiration:

“Next to loyalty to kin this sentiment of patriotism was shown to be the loftiest of sentiments, save that of religion…” McClellan’s closing assertion on the sensational element of history—”If everyone in the house would join this Society, that would be a sensation”—obviously struck a nerve, as Wier later reported in the Biennial Report that several persons present enrolled as members that same evening. The meeting closed with what would become familiar elements at the Society’s annual meeting: a memorial address for its deceased members and musical entertainment.\footnote{54}

Wier was not entirely alone in her work on behalf of the Society. As memberships and dues straggled in that summer, Society President E.D. Kelley indicated in June that he had been scouting out new members, but like those of the overworked Wier, his efforts had their limits: “If I had time to do some missionary work, I think I could get more applicants. Only one of those I

\footnote{53} It appears from surviving documents at the Nevada Historical Society archives that either no minutes were kept from these meetings or they were later destroyed. The Biennial Reports, an official record of the Society’s activities required by the State after the organization became a state entity in 1907, serve as something of a substitute for the minutes typically kept by other historical societies, but unfortunately, they leave little record of the actual discussion that took place at meetings. The vast correspondence files of the Society’s archives have served to illuminate the biennial reports.

\footnote{54} First Biennial Report, 1907-1908, 25.
submitted the case to put me off, but then, to be candid, I only asked those whom I knew could afford the expense.”55 With a paucity of funds, Wier attempted no collecting activities. Instead, she focused upon soliciting dues from new and continuing members. The Society thus continued its pattern of inactivity throughout the summer and fall 1906, and Wier would later reflect on this depressing period in its history by noting, “[m]en were too busy getting rich to give thought to past history…”56 Still, she could take some comfort in the sentiments of members such as T.J. Lawrence, a former Nevadan residing in Mexico, who enclosed his dues in a July letter that graciously acknowledged her efforts:

I also take this opportunity to express my pleasure and satisfaction in the interest being shown in the Society, and the spirit in which the work is being carried on, due largely, to the untiring efforts of yourself with other, and to whom we strangers owe a debt of the fullest appreciation and gratitude: I trust, that while we cannot actively assist you, financially and morally we may be able to make our influence felt.57

State Funding At Last

It may have been as the result of Wier’s repeated requests or the realization that the Society had little real power to affect any type of collecting activity, but in the opening weeks of 1907, the Society finally held an Executive Council meeting to discuss the question of State aid and recognition. At the January 28 meeting, Wier pleaded the case for state recognition, arguing that it would be “impossible to hold the Society for another two years without substantial financial aid making active work possible.”58 A lengthy period of discussion followed before Council members unanimously agreed that Wier, as Secretary, would be allowed to use Society

55 E.D. Kelley to Jeanne Wier, June 1, 1906, box 1, folder 1906, Nevada Historical Society Records, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
56 First Biennial Report, 1907-1908, 26.
funds to bring the matter before the legislature then in session in Carson City. The Society’s President, R. L. Fulton, stepped down at this time, believing that it would be beneficial for the President to reside in the capital during this crucial process, and General E.D. Kelley was declared President for the remainder of the term. Judge G.F. Talbot, a council member, was appointed to fill out the Vice-President’s term, and would provide Wier and the Society with wise and dedicated service for many years to come.

In the first twenty years of its existence, the most hardworking member of the Society next to Wier was Nevada Supreme Court Justice George Talbot who served first as an Executive Council member, Vice-President, and then as President beginning in 1908 and continuing until his resignation in 1926. Unlike the first two Society presidents, the Elko-born attorney was far more than a figurehead and worked constantly on Wier’s behalf to use his influence in Carson City to obtain sufficient appropriations for the Society. Despite the fact that he held a demanding position with long hours, numerous pieces of correspondence with Wier indicate that he was not above discussing even the minutest details of Society business such as arranging for the shipping and transport of collections and the printing and binding of the biennial reports. Perhaps his more valuable contribution to the Society was his ability to take a larger and more objective view of the Society and its potential. He was a good counterpoint for Wier (who was prone to obsessive worry), and it was obvious from her letters that she had a high regard for his opinions and advice. Talbot, in turn, valued Wier’s work for the Society, was aware of her tendency for overwork, and tried to lessen her burden when he could. Theirs was a relationship based on mutual respect and letters between the two, while mostly formal, also show evidence of a
genuine friendship. Wier described him in one letter as “about the only man in the State that gives a warm support to my work.”

It was Talbot, in fact, who was instrumental in calling a joint meeting with the committees on Ways and Means from both Nevada legislative houses on February 6. At this time, Wier, emboldened with statistics from her research into the work of other historical societies, made her plea for State recognition and support before the assembled committees. Events, for once, were moving rapidly. On February 21, another great supporter of Wier and the Society’s work, Frank Williams, assemblyman from Lincoln County and Chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means, introduced the original bill “An Act to Encourage the Nevada Historical Society” requesting state recognition and an appropriation of $4,000 for the biennium. The monies were to be used by the Society’s officers exclusively in “defraying expenses, collecting and preserving, and for keeping and exhibiting historical matter, data and relics for the benefit of the State…” The bill also required that the President and Secretary of the Society make a biennial report to the Governor like all state institutions, and that publication of this report was to be at the State’s expense. Half of these reports were to be distributed as official reports, and the other half provided for the Society’s use and distribution as needed. Although Wier wished to speak in front of the assembly on behalf of the bill, Williams shrewdly advised


60 Williams was described in a highly complimentary article titled “Most Attentive Member of the Assembly is Williams” in the Nevada State Journal, March 17, 1907.

61 First Biennial Report, 1907-1908, 26-27 and 137.

62 Wier’s research into the workings of other historical societies had undoubtedly found their way into the text of the bill, as it required that a set of all of state publications issued be deposited in the Society, and that sixty copies each of these state publications be donated to the Society for the purpose of exchanges with other societies and institutions.
against it, noting that “there was a strong sentiment developing against this practice.”63 Instead, he suggested that she make herself available in Carson City while the bill was under consideration so that she could meet some of the members personally if any serious opposition were to develop.64

By March 15, Williams wrote Wier that the Bill had passed the Senate, and was on its way to the Governor for his signature. Williams tempered her excitement, however, by revealing that the bill’s appropriation had been amended to $2000 because of a misunderstanding with the person drawing up the bill.65 It was only the first of many financial disappointments Wier experienced on behalf of the Society and frustration she experienced at the hands of the legislature. Her disappointment was somewhat mitigated, however, by the fact that a few members of the legislature joined the Society at the end of the deliberations and offered their support for its mission. Governor Sparks signed the bill on March 20, 1907, and it was filed in the Secretary of State’s office, officially making the NHS a state institution.66 The gold pen used to sign the bill was fittingly deposited with the Society.

**Annual Meetings and Early Supporters of the Society**

Filled with a renewed sense of purpose, Wier made plans for the Society’s annual meeting, which was to be held in June. On April 11, she penned a carefully crafted a letter to

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63 It was more likely the idea of any individual advocating for funding before the assembly for a particular institution rather than the idea of a woman requesting funds that was unpopular here.

64 Frank Williams to Jeanne Wier, February 22, 1907, box1, folder 1907, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

65 Frank Williams to Jeanne Wier, March 15, 1907, box 1, folder 1907, Nevada Historical Society Records, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

66 *First Biennial Report, 1907-1908*, 27.
multi-millionaire Clarence Mackay, son of Nevada mining legend John Mackay, in the hopes of luring him to both attend and speak at the Society’s meeting. Like most of the men whose families had made their fortunes on the Comstock, Mackay had long since left Nevada and resided at a fashionable New York City address. She gave a brief synopsis of the Society’s history thus far, noting of the recent appropriation, “[t]hough this is a small sum, we hope to accomplish such in the way of collecting the data for the writing of the true history of the State.” Appealing to his status as one who had been associated with the “pioneer of the pioneers,” Wier stated that it would be an “unspeakably great gift” if he and his wife were to attend the Society’s meeting and speak on the early days of the Comstock.

Although Mackay declined the speaking invitation, he demonstrated his support in a more practical fashion by donating $500 to “advance its work.” The Daily Nevada State Journal of April 23 heralded the donation under the headline “Bonanza King’s Son’s Gift to the Historical Society.” Wier herself was so overwhelmed with the donation and its affirmation of the Society’s mission that she was nearly speechless: “I was so stunned yesterday by your letter enclosing check for $500 that I could not find words in which to express myself sooner. As nearly all benefactions previous to this time have gone to mining or other strictly scientific pursuits in this state, those interested in literary or historical work do not know how to behave.

67 John W. Mackay, probably one of the most famous names in the history of Nevada mining, was responsible with his partners for discovering the Big Bonanza, the richest ore body on the Comstock Lode, within the Consolidated Virginia and California Mine in 1873.

68 Jeanne Wier to Clarence Mackay, April 11, 1907, box 1, folder 1907, Nevada Historical Society Records, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

69 Clarence Mackay to Jeanne Wier, April 11, 1907, box 1, folder 1907, Nevada Historical Society Records, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada. Mackay obviously had a soft spot for the state that had provided his family with such largesse, and he gave even greater riches to the University of Nevada in the form of a large donation that resulted in the creation of both the Mackay School of Mines, and Mackay Stadium.

70 “Bonanza King’s Son’s Gift to the Historical Society,” Daily Nevada State Journal, April 23, 1907.
when such a windfall comes their way.” It was the beginning of Mackay’s long-standing relationship with Wier and the Society. Although he never held a formal place on the Society’s Executive Council, Wier clearly valued his opinion and corresponded with him (almost reverently) on frequent occasions, seeking his advice when she felt the Society was financially troubled or in the midst of a controversy.

Perhaps emboldened by Mackay’s donation, Wier wrote another letter to J.D. Rockefeller a few days later asking for money to support the construction of a building, noting his interest in “all phases of intellectual endeavor.” On this occasion she suggested that $25,000 would be an adequate sum “until such time as the State can give us more generous aid.” Again she impressed upon him the difficulties in attempting such work in a pioneer state and “especially a state which is largely materialistic as Nevada is to-day.” Prophetically, she noted that “[o]ur Society is attempting to do a work which will be better appreciated fifty years hence. If we can carry on our work for the next five years its final and permanent success is assured.” There is no evidence that Rockefeller replied to this letter.

Although Clarence Mackay was unable to speak at the Society’s annual meeting on June 3, 1907, his name was still prominent on the agenda as those assembled voted him in as an honorary member as a mark of gratitude for his generous donation. The rest of the meeting followed what was then a familiar template for the Society in those early years, with local notables (often hastily and frantically recruited by Wier) making brief remarks on Nevada history topics and framing the lecture of a prominent speaker, in this case, Dr. William Rader,

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71 Jeanne Wier to Clarence MacKay, April 23, 1907, box 1, folder 1907, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

72 Jeanne Wier to J.D. Rockefeller, April 29, 1907, box 1, folder 1907, Nevada Historical Society Records MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

73 In order to do so, the Executive Council amended the Society’s constitution at this time to enable the election of honorary members by the Society upon the Council’s recommendation.
described by the *Reno Evening Gazette* as “the eloquent San Francisco clergyman and writer.”

In addition to vocal performances, a small amount of Society business generally rounded out a typical meeting.

Neither the Society’s biennial reports nor local newspaper accounts reveal how many people were in attendance at the annual meetings, but in these early lean years, the meetings played an essential role for members in serving as the only public manifestation of the Society at a time when there was no building filled with artifacts and documents to inspire confidence in its mission. Interestingly, a small private beacon of support for the Society was evident in the *Nevada State Journal* of May 28, which reported that the Southern Pacific Railroad was offering discounted rates from May 17–June 6 on its lines so that state residents could attend the NHS meeting in Reno as well as the University’s commencement.

Following the June meeting and university commencement activities, Wier scheduled a variety of collecting trips to gather both books and artifacts for the fledgling Society and its library. No doubt she was heartened by the new appropriation and energized by the personal triumph of her appointment as head of the University of Nevada history department that year. Owing to the nature of Nevada’s close economic and political ties to its neighboring state, Wier focused her initial efforts toward bookstores and libraries in California. Although the San Francisco earthquake and its corresponding fire had destroyed much historical material, she still

74 “Nevada Historical Society Meets at Home of Miss Weir,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, June 3, 1907.

75 Strangely enough, the *Reno Evening Gazette* of June 3, 1907 (“Nevada Historical Society Meets at Home of Miss Weir”) reported that the multimillionaire steel magnate Charles M. Schwab had sent his regrets to the secretary about not being able to attend the evening’s festivities; he was described as “one of the most enthusiastic supporters of this noble work” who had made “several helpful donations.” Although this was not borne out by surviving correspondence in the NHS archives, it is indeed plausible, as Schwab had invested heavily in the Montgomery Shoshone Mine near Rhyolite in central Nevada as well as in the infrastructure of the town itself.

managed to locate a number of volumes related to Nevada history and shipped these, along with “relics secured from historic spots in California” back to Reno.  

Returning to Nevada after her collecting adventures in California, Wier continued to search out more “relics” from points closer to home, traveling to the Carson Valley and Virginia City. In Genoa, she was particularly grateful to acquire relics from the old Mormon Station, considered by many to be the oldest settlement in Nevada. So successful were these collecting trips that by the end of the summer, the amount of material accumulated for the Society finally necessitated an actual space for storage and exhibition. At the time, Reno was exceedingly crowded, and it was nearly impossible to find available houses or rooms to rent. Thus, in what was to become a fateful decision, the Society’s “Committee on Rooms” determined that the collected material be housed in Wier’s own newly constructed house at 844 North Center Street, just opposite the south side of the university grounds. As reported in the Society’s *First Biennial Report*, this arrangement was deemed favorable because “the Secretary could thus spend her time when free from University duties in the arrangement of the collection.”  

By the 1920s, these housing arrangements were to cause considerable dissension between Wier, the Society’s Executive Council, and Nevada’s governor, but in 1907, the members thought it was a useful solution for the perennially busy Wier, who continued to labor on the Society’s behalf for free in her spare time from teaching and university duties. In another show of efficiency, Wier saved the Society money by constructing shelves and museum tables herself to store and exhibit the newly collected materials. As the fall semester commenced, Wier continued with her collecting efforts, but focused on work that could be done by correspondence during the busy

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78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.
school year, diligently writing to newspaper editors throughout Nevada to beg copies for the Society. By the end of the year, she reported that the Society was receiving some fifty newspapers and journals.80

Heartened by the progress made in 1907, the Society seemed poised for continued success the following year. There was great sadness, however, in March 1908, when the Society’s president, E.D. Kelley, passed away after a long illness. Although he had not been a vigorous leader by any means, his genuine support for the Society and its work were emphasized in a resolution passed at a special council meeting held that month. As a Nevada pioneer, Kelley represented what Wier saw as the Society’s greatest resource—the memories of its pioneers. Ironically, Kelley had died before he could share his memories with the Society, a situation that was undoubtedly a disappointment to Wier.81

At the regular council meeting held that May in preparation for the Society’s annual meeting in June, the membership decided that Judge Talbot would take over the presidency for the remainder of the year, with US Senator George S. Nixon serving as Vice-President.82 With its appropriation and the support of such high-ranking officials, Wier must have felt the Society was finally in a position to succeed in its mission to collect and preserve Nevada history in all its forms. Notably, it was at this same meeting that Samuel Clemens (a near legend in Nevada at

80 First Biennial Report, 1907-1908, 28-29.
81 Ibid., 29.
82 George Stuart Nixon was a Californian by birth but had moved to Nevada in his early twenties to work as a telegrapher. In 1886, at age twenty-six, he organized the First National Bank of Winnemucca and was later active in the central Nevada mining boom as one of the founders of the Goldfield Consolidated Company in partnership with the infamous George Wingfield. Although Nixon was one of the organizers of Nevada’s Silver Party in the early 1890s, he was later elected as a Republican to the United States Senate in 1905.
this time for his exploits in Virginia City and writings for the *Territorial Enterprise*) was nominated for honorary membership in the Society.\(^8^3\)

The Society’s annual meeting was held on June 8,\(^8^4\) and followed the familiar structure of previous meetings with music, a religious invocation, brief addresses from notables such as U.S. Senator F.G. Newlands and Colonel George Harvey, editor of *Harper’s Weekly* and Mark Twain expert, and announcements from President Talbot and Wier. Mrs. Abram Cohn (the noted basket collector from Carson City) gave the main lecture on the arts and crafts of Nevada Indians, perhaps at the urging of Wier, who had never lost interest in the subject. Harvey was most likely in attendance in order to say a few words about Twain during the portion of the meeting in which the Society conferred honorary membership upon him, or rather Samuel Clemens.\(^8^5\)

In his brief but enthusiastic speech, Senator Newlands, only a few years removed from his reclamation act triumph, acknowledged the “one-sided development” of the state but then spoke glowingly of Nevada’s recent progress and how it had entered a period of “fuller, freer growth which includes the development of mining, agriculture, commerce and public opinion.”

Most importantly to Wier, he praised the Society, noting that it had “a great work to perform, for

\(^8^3\) *First Biennial Report 1907-1908*, 29.

\(^8^4\) Wier had tried desperately to convince the noted author Charles Lummis, Los Angeles City Librarian and founder of the Southwest Museum, to speak at this meeting: “As you are so conversant with the history of the Slope as well as with the need of Societies for preserving that history I am especially desirous that the Nevada people should hear you at this time.” Jeanne Wier to Charles F. Lummis, May 18, 1908, Nevada Historical Society Records, Box 1, Folder 5, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada. Although Lummis admitted that he had “a strong desire to do anything I can to bring about the right feeling for history all over the West” and would be “glad to see cooperation between Nevada and California in this kind of work,” he was ultimately unable to come. Charles F. Lummis to Jeanne Wier, May 23, 1908, box 1, folder 1908-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\(^8^5\) *First Biennial Report, 1907-1908*, 30.
a State is only great when public opinion has been awakened along moral lines as well as material.” 86

It was also an evening of two notable firsts for the Society, both of which were quite meaningful to Wier. She distributed the Society’s first bulletin, fresh off the press, to attendees, and included a list of Society officers and members, its constitution, a partial list of donations, and a statement regarding its organization and development, as well as its activities and financial needs. The first in a series of publications released by the Society, it symbolized her hard-fought battle to represent the Society as a professional organization to both existing and potential members. Acknowledging the briefness of the pamphlet, she promised that there would be much more information in the upcoming biennial report (the Society’s “official record”), noting “[b]ut for the present we ask you to take the pamphlet home with you, to read it, and then to consider whether there is not some way in which you can add to the work of the organization.” 87 Perhaps even more thrilling to Wier was the fact that the Society’s great benefactors, Mr. and Mrs Clarence Mackay, were in attendance at the annual meeting for the first time, which she felt “contributed…to the success of the occasion.” 88 In the Society’s First Biennial Report, Wier later noted that there was a “large crowd in attendance” but did not provide any actual numbers. 89

**Collecting Trips to Remember – Southern and Central Nevada 1908**

Wier had little time to dwell on the success of the meeting, however, as she busied herself with preparations for another major collecting trip that summer—a journey of about a month and

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86 Ibid., 89.
87 Ibid., 90.
88 Ibid., 30.
89 First Biennial Report, 1907-1908, 30.
half through central and southern Nevada. It was the farthest she had ever traveled on behalf of
the Society, and had she known of the numerous challenges she would face in the form of the
extreme temperatures and terrain, she may have changed her mind. A collecting diary kept by
Wier provides a remarkable chronicle of the journey, warts and all, and serves as an interesting
contrast to the official version of the trip that she described in the state-sanctioned biennial report
later that year. As distances in Nevada were formidable, and travel at the time was difficult or
next to impossible in very remote areas where there were no trains, few or no stagecoaches, and
early automobiles struggled through sagebrush and cacti on dirt roads washed out by summer
rain, the trip was evidence of Wier’s dogged determination to spread the “gospel” of the Society
and its mission to all corners of the state. The staccato-like entries also demonstrate Wier’s wry
sense of humor regarding her questionable surroundings:

Learn that lodginghouse which I was recommended has been closed. Got stage
driver who takes my baggage to drive me from place to place. Everything full.
Finally persuade old-time family, the Matthews, keep me, as rain is threatening,
glad of shelter. Given guest parlor. No screens on windows. Flies millions thick
and room so musty can not keep windows closed otherwise very comfortable.  

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90 For a more detailed look at this diary see Su Kim Chung, “‘Flies Millions Thick’: A Diary of
Jeanne Wier’s Collecting Trip to Southern Nevada, July-August 1908.” Nevada Historical Society
Quarterly. 26, nos. 3-4. (Fall/Winter 2013): 112-150.

91 Wier diary, July 23,1908, box 12, folder 9, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical
Society, Reno, Nevada.
Despite contemporary photographs that portray Wier as the idealized Edwardian woman-of-the-day with a high-necked white blouse and curls neatly piled up atop her head, the diary makes it clear that she was more than capable of roughing it. Entries from July 15 to August 28 document Wier’s experiences traveling from Reno to Goldfield and Las Vegas by train, and then onto a variety of towns in the Mormon strongholds of Meadow Valley near the Muddy River by both train, wagon, and automobile. Other stops included the mining towns of Pioche, Delamar, Searchlight, the camps of El Dorado Canyon, and the boomtowns of Rhyolite and Rawhide closer to central Nevada. For the most part, she stayed in small, rather primitive hotels, or if she
was lucky, in private family homes. A few times, Wier camped in tents, and on one memorable occasion, on the banks of the Colorado River:

...I slept last night within three feet of the steep bank of the Colorado. I went to bed with my head toward the river but dreamed I was going over the bank head first, so reversed my position and was repaid in the morning by watching the sun rise over the river. Truly the scenery here is magnificent. Cloud-burst up the canons have filled the banks with a torrent of muddy but sparkling water. I sit here and try to realize that this is the same river where of yore the Spanish Fathers explored and taught. What fairylike stories are associated with this river and this canon.92

The summer heat of southern Nevada was clearly unbearable as were the swarms of flies that seemed to be a constant presence according to her diary entries. In addition, she endured much personal discomfort from the extreme conditions, with sunburn and heat rash frequent companions during her journey.

...Have decided to give up Bunkerville trip. Virgin River too high and heat unendurable. I cannot understand how people live on the Muddy without ice. I would pay $5 to-night for a drink of cold water. My face and body are covered with prickly heat.93

Jostling over unpaved desert roads, riding on horseback over rough terrain, sleeping in the rough, only once did she appear fearful—when staying in a mining camp in Nelson near El Dorado Canyon. Recognizing the importance of mining to the history of Nevada’s development was one thing, but staying in close proximity to the actual miners with their drinking and swearing was quite another, and she was clearly repulsed by their vulgarity:

I said we were to “rest” at Nelson. We did not “rest”, we “Stayed.” About a dozen men are on a drunk; this was the third day and still there is more to follow. The only lodging in the camp was in a tent just behind the saloon. Until mid-night the air was hideous with oaths, vile language and song. I have seldom been worse

92 Wier diary, August 9, 1908, box 12, folder 9, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
93 Wier diary, August 3, 1908, box 12, folder 9, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
frightened. Fortunately Mr. Williams was with me during the early evening & later occupied a tent next to mine.\textsuperscript{94}

Despite these struggles, Wier never lost sight of her primary focus, and spent most of the journey, when not distracted by the traveling conditions and oppressive heat, gathering materials for the Society. Much of her collecting focus at this time was devoted to gathering newspapers from the various mining towns strewn throughout southern and central Nevada. After the initial tentative years of the Society’s existence, Wier was in the full flush of collecting and rapidly scooped up artifacts throughout her journey. Most of the items she collected were related to the mining industry or the daily life of pioneers. However, as her interest in Nevada’s Indian population had never dimmed, she was no doubt pleased to fit in a trip to the Moapa Indian Reservation, where she purchased several baskets for the Society. The most-valued prize of her collecting trip, and worth every bit of discomfort she had to endure that summer, however, was the acquisition of the papers of one of Nevada’s first senators, William Stewart. They would become one of the seminal collections of the Nevada Historical Society:

Drove to Beatty in the morning and received promise of file of the Beatty Bullfrog Miner. Editor also promised to hunt for relics of Death Valley emigrants. The greatest event of the morning was the inspection of Senator Stewart’s Office and deserted home. If the Society can acquire the papers and manuscripts left here by him, this treasure will alone repay me for the hardships of this summer trip to the South. The afternoon was spent with Prof. Show at the Bullfrog Miner Office hunting out files of that paper. It was a dusty job and we succeeded in finding only Vol. III and part of Vol. II.\textsuperscript{95}

Wier often writes of “we” in describing her travels but it is not clear who her traveling companions were at this time or if this was a writing convention of some sort. The only persons she mentions by name in the diary as accompanying her to some of these remote locations are

\textsuperscript{94} Wier diary, August 10, 1908, box 12, folder 9, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\textsuperscript{95} Wier diary, August 16, 1908, box 12, folder 9, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
Goodsprings miner and Lincoln County assemblyman Frank Williams,\(^{96}\) and Arley B. Show, a professor of European history who had been one of Wier’s instructors at Stanford University.\(^{97}\) Correspondence written prior to and after her trip does not provide any clues as whether she had made arrangements for traveling companions or their identity (other than Mr. Williams on occasion). One thing that is certain, however, is that she forged lasting relationships with many of the people she met on this trip; correspondence in the NHS archives shows that she was in regular contact with many of these individuals in subsequent years. Even in these very early years there did appear to be some residents of southern Nevada who realized the importance of preserving historical materials, although perhaps without the same degree of professionalism as Wier. Her diary also reveals encounters with a number of notable figures; from pioneer landowners and ranchers, newspaper men, miners, to businessmen and politicians, Wier met the “movers and shakers” of southern and central Nevada in its formative years. It is unlikely that many of these residents would have felt comfortable attending one of the formal structured meetings of the Society in Reno, but in her own way, Wier had made them feel a part of the Society’s mission.

During her stay in Las Vegas, for example, she struck up a warm friendship with Helen Stewart, a pioneer settler regarded as the “First Lady of Las Vegas” for her long residence at the

\(^{96}\) A pioneer resident of southern Nevada, Frank Williams had been a supporter of the Nevada Historical Society since its inception, and served as county vice-president for the Society, representing first Lincoln and then Clark County from 1907 to 1926. A miner and prospector by trade, Williams resided in Goodsprings, and served as an assemblyman and for many years a regent for the University of Nevada; in the latter role he also offered support to Wier in her position as history professor and department chair. Correspondence, both professional and personal, found in the records of the Nevada Historical Society and in the Jeanne Wier Papers suggests that he (and later his wife Edith) had a lifelong friendship with Wier.

\(^{97}\) She had remained close to the history department and its faculty after her graduation in 1901 and seems to have maintained a friendship with Professor Show. Although a professor of medieval history, Show demonstrated a strong interest in the activities of the Nevada Historical Society; he was a frequent correspondent of Wier’s and was mentioned on several occasions in the Society’s Biennial reports.
Stewart Ranch in Las Vegas, built on the site of the Mormon Fort, the oldest white settlement in southern Nevada. Stewart’s priceless Paiute basket collection and sympathies with the local Indian population would have also endeared her to Wier. During her discussions with this “pioneer of the pioneers” there was further evidence of Wier’s attempt to spread the gospel of the Society when she discussed plans to establish a branch “Society with a museum at the fort,” led by Stewart.\(^98\) Although there appeared to be great promise of a southern Nevada auxiliary society, the idea did not progress much beyond the planning stage. This was due as much to a lack of continuation in Las Vegas as it did with the numerous tasks that overwhelmed Wier on her return to Reno. In fact, it was not until 1982 that the Nevada State Museum and Historical Society in Las Vegas was founded.

Contemporary accounts of her trip from the *Las Vegas Age* reported on her travels and noted that she pronounced the people of the Muddy Valley and the northern parts of the county as extremely friendly and hospitable and helpful with her work. Humorously, the paper reports that Miss Wier was impressed with the “magnificent distances” of Lincoln County.\(^99\) Looking back, one marvels at the attention Wier gave to small towns like Caliente or Delamar, or mining camps like Searchlight or Nelson, but in 1908, many of these towns, now forgotten, had larger populations than Las Vegas, which in 1910 (two years after Wier’s visit) had but 945 residents. Some of those she visited were clearly not as enthusiastic about the Society’s mission as she, and the idea of a “historical consciousness” was undoubtedly lost on those infused with a “boomtown” mentality as she observed in this entry on August 18:

\(^98\) Jeanne Wier diary, July 21, 1908, box 12, folder 9, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\(^99\) “Nevada State Historian,” *Las Vegas Age*, August 8, 1908.
Experienced a hard day in Goldfield. People too crazy after gold to care much for history. Mr. Burnell of the Tribune told me in polite language that I was crazy to spend time for the State.\(^{100}\)

On August 28, an exhausted Wier boarded a train in Wabuska and headed back to Reno. As she would recount in the First Biennial Report of the Society later that year, it had been a successful trip, not only because of the newspapers and relics she had collected and the acquisition of Senator Stewart’s papers, but even more so for the personal contacts Wier had made in these remote areas of the state. Describing the importance of the personal touch with the people “who have made and are making the history of the State” she later noted,

No permanent success can be achieved by this organization until there is a least one person in each community who has a sympathetic knowledge of the work which we plan to do. Correspondence has failed to accomplish this end. But many a person who had been irresponsive to letters became interested and even enthusiastic when visited in person.\(^{101}\)

Beyond the collection of these physical materials and documents, Wier was also pleased with the “historic data” that she gathered in the form of pioneer settler reminisces. She clearly valued these materials as much as she did the other materials, noting that they would become a “permanent part of the historical library.”\(^{102}\)

Upon her return to Reno, Wier had little time to recover from her travels before the crush of the fall semester teaching work at the University fell upon her. Yet because of her feeling that further collecting work should not be postponed, Wier consulted with the Society’s Executive Council and made arrangements with her colleague Professor Show (then on leave of absence from Stanford) to take over her teaching duties at the University temporarily. A September trip

\(^{100}\) Wier diary, August 18, 1908, Box box 12, Folder folder 9, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\(^{101}\) First Biennial Report, 1907-1908, 31.

\(^{102}\) Ibid.
to Palo Alto to interview Nevada pioneer Hannah Clapp (and founding member of the Society) ended in disappointment when Wier found the former teacher too feeble to talk. Hurriedly, she journeyed to the Bancroft Library in search of materials relating to Nevada history, and made purchases in the bookstores of Oakland and San Francisco to add to the Society’s library. Notably, she made these trips despite the fact that the Society’s allocation from the state had run out in September, and all costs for subsequent travels in the fall were at her own expense.  

It wasn’t until early October that she found time to catch up with Society correspondence and follow up with persons she had met during the summer trip. Some of the letters from this period show that Wier was keen to build up membership in the remote mining towns of the south such as Rhyolite and Delamar, perhaps unaware that these boomtowns were unlikely to have populations large or stable enough to support continued membership in the Society. She also followed up on artifacts she had been promised, and made plans to retrieve and pack the Stewart donation for transport to the Society.

From October 16 to October 29 she went on a shorter trip to central Nevada to collect the Stewart donation and other material such as additional newspapers and relics from the mining camps as well as to obtain reminisces from pioneer settlers. Using the same red leather journal she had taken with her during the summer trip, Wier jotted down her experiences faithfully every day as she rode trains, wagons, and horses in her travels to Rhyolite, Goldfield, Beatty, and other smaller mining camps in the area. Again the climate and temperatures proved challenging, but this time, in the mountainous terrain of central Nevada in late fall, snow and cold were the primary obstacles. Shortly after arriving in Rhyolite on October 18 she noted, “[w]ind is blowing furiously and hotel cold. Heated only by stove in lower hall. Had to go to bed to get

103 Jeanne Wier to E.D. Adams, November 18, 1908, box 1, folder 6, Jeanne Wier Papers. MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
warm.” Still, nothing could dim her excitement as she packed the Stewart donation, and she exclaimed in one entry, “[w]hat a treasure we have obtained here! I can scarcely believe it is really ours.”

Although she rode trains and wagons to get to her primary destinations, this trip was characterized by a number of journeys made on horseback to remote mines and mining camps to retrieve artifacts and documents. As with her summer excursions, Wier’s determination to collect materials for the Society overrode whatever physical discomforts she experienced during this trip:

I am very sore and tired from the ride. My horse was not meant for riding. He refused to travel home except on a dog trot. I often walked in preference to such riding. The road over the mountains was so dangerous that we were often obliged to dismount to get past the dangerous spots.

And as with her first trip, Wier stayed in both hotels and in private homes as the guest of families who took the time to accompany her on journeys to very remote locations in search of both relics and pioneer settlers:

Shortly before noon, we saddled the horses & Mr Williams & I went over the mountains to Old Camp. Made coffee out of snow water at Anderson’s cabin took pictures, etc., then interviewed hermit and looked over the old Arrastra. After gathering relics we tied the packs on the horses & having watered them, started home at 2:30 and arrived there about sun down. Having eaten nothing since breakfast we were ready for a warm meal which Mrs. Williams had in readiness. Never did the fire feel better for the snow lay over a foot deep in places and a cold wind blew from the East. I am very tired & sore from riding and the bed will feel good.

104 Wier diary, October 18, 1908, box 12, folder 9, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

105 Wier diary, October 19, 1908, box 12, folder 9, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

106 Wier diary, October 28, 1908, box 12, folder 9, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

107 Wier diary, October 21, 1908, box 12, folder 9, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
Although the trip was certainly a success and resulted in her obtaining much new material for the Society, she was eager to return to her normal life. It is telling that in her final entry for this trip, she writes, “[a]rrived in Reno at 7:40. Back to Civilization once more.” Yet scarcely had she returned to Reno before she dashed off again to the eastern part of the state in early November, traveling to Elko, Wells, and Ely in search of additional newspapers for the Society’s collections. Additional stops in Winnemucca and Lovelock on the trip back to Reno completed her travels on behalf of the Society for 1908, which had totaled in the final six months of the year alone—a remarkable 3,805 miles, with some 579 of these by team.

**Accounting for the Society – The First Biennial Report**

The rush to return to Reno was due in large part to Wier’s need to begin work on the Society’s first biennial report, a document that was now required because of the Society’s status as a state institution, with its accompanying appropriation. With a mid-December publication date looming, Wier threw herself into writing the bulk of this important document, as well as soliciting articles from persons she had met in the course of her fieldwork in southern Nevada. As the Society’s first official report in its four years of existence, the document was packed with important content; it contained a detailed history of the Society since its founding in 1904, an accounting of all funds expended, a listing of all books, papers and relics that were either

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108 Wier diary, October 29, 1908, box 12, folder 9, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS.NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada. In both instances, Wier’s surviving correspondence from the months just prior to her journeys is sparse and does not seem to reflect the planning that must have taken place before each trip. In fact, it is not known why she kept a diary on these particular collecting trips; she had gone on previous collecting trips, and would go on others in the future, without leaving a written record. There is the possibility that this was the only one that survived. It may also have been something that she kept as a record for herself as a means to inform the NHS Council on her return but she does not mention the diary in the official biennial report of the Society that mentioned both trips. Sadly, photographs that she indicates were taken during both trips have either not survived or been mixed in with the general collections of the NHS to the point that they are not recognizable as having been part of these journeys.

109 First Biennial Report, 1907-1908, 47.
donated or purchased, the Society’s constitution, Wier’s 1905 speech on the Society’s mission, several historical papers and memorials of deceased members, and most importantly, a section entitled “Function and Needs of the Society,” which contained Wier’s assessment of the Society’s current state, and its future needs. She was no doubt keen to get the wording just right as the report was to be passed onto all state legislators, and it was the first opportunity she had to place the work of the Nevada Historical Society into a comparative context with the work and funding of other historical societies throughout the United States.

As she furiously composed the first Biennial Report, Wier’s correspondence in November 1908 also reveals her intense focus on obtaining outside funding to construct a building for the Society. No doubt the intense spurt of collecting in summer and fall and the resulting accumulation of artifacts and document made her realize the critical need for a fireproof structure to house the collections. The problem was funding – the legislature was not due to meet until the following year and even then, could not guarantee funds beyond the previous appropriation. Never one to shy away from a challenge, Wier again wrote letters to wealthy Americans such as William Randolph Hearst and Helen Gould in pursuit of funds to support construction of the building. In seeking Gould’s assistance, Wier pointed to her previous generous donations to worthy movements, and “especially to those which are headed by women.”

Both Gould and Hearst were unmoved by the appeal. Although she did not make this request of Society supporter Clarence Mackay— “I feel that you have already been called upon too often to trouble yourself about our little affairs in Nevada…” — she did seek his assistance in approaching another great Nevada mining magnate, Francis Marion Smith. Known

\[\text{\textsuperscript{110}}\text{Jeanne Wier to Helen Gould, November 4, 1908, box 1, folder 1908-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{111}}\text{Jeanne Wier to Clarence Mackay, December 11, 1908, box 1, folder 1908-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.}\]
as the “Borax King” for the vast amounts of borax he mined in western Nevada and Death Valley, Smith and his Pacific Coast Borax Company were also famous for their 20-Mule Team Borax trademark.¹¹² Although Wier felt his strong connection to Nevada (like Mackay’s) might inspire Smith to donate funds for the building, she was surely disappointed by the response of one of his assistants (via member Sam Davis), who insisted that Smith’s vast fortune had actually been made in “land and railroad enterprises in California and the East.”¹¹³

As she turned her attention back to the Biennial Report, Wier had not given up on the idea of soliciting private funding for the Society’s artifacts, but with the 1909 legislative session approaching, she saw an opportunity ahead in which to approach the state for funds. In the meantime, the remainder of 1908 was spent in soliciting (and editing) historical articles and memorial tributes that were to be included in the Biennial Report. It was an admirable first-time effort with tributes to deceased members Governor Sparks, Edward D. Kelley, and Hannah Clapp, and articles such as Mrs. Abram Cohn’s “Arts and Crafts of Nevada Indians,” “The Need of a Brief History of Nevada” by Mrs. M.S. Doten, “Battle-Born,” a poem by journalist Sam Davis, and Dr. W.P. Jenney’s “The Nevada Meteorite.” Wier’s travels to southern Nevada clearly left an impression upon her and were one of the reasons she also included the essay by Charles Gracey (her gracious host during the summer visit) on “Early Days in Lincoln County.” A more scholarly effort by her graduate student and protégé Beluah Hershiser (daughter of Society treasurer A.E. Hershiser), “The Adjustment of the Boundaries of Nevada,” concluded the report. All of the articles reflected Wier’s interests and hopes for the Society, and how its

¹¹² She also asked Mackay if he might assist her in requesting building funds from either the Floods or the Fairs, descendants of Comstock Lode millionaires James C. Flood and James Graham Fair respectively, both of whom made their fortunes alongside Mackay’s own father, John W. Mackay, back in the 1860s-1870s.

¹¹³ Mr. Zabriskie to Sam Davis, November 24, 1908, box 1, folder 1908-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
scholarship and activities might improve the community and spread a historical consciousness throughout Nevada: Indian artifacts, the need for a substantial Nevada history text beyond Bancroft, Angel, and Wren,114 creative literary efforts, natural history studies, regional studies, and academic scholarship based on historical research in the Society’s collections.

The Biennial Report was also timed to include Wier’s report to the Executive Council in early December, which described the work of the previous six months. On the heels of her most active collecting year, it contained the first detailed listing of the Society’s collections—books, documents, maps, photographs, newspapers, and artifacts—and showcased Wier’s collecting focus on mining and Nevada’s frontier history. Within the listing of museum artifacts, a separate section called “Indian Collection” illustrated her continued interest in the state’s indigenous population. A collection of artifacts that Wier had selected during her travels in California indicated that she was aware of the significant role that the Spanish had played in that state’s history, and the inclusion of burned opium pipes from the San Francisco fire in April 1906 also showed awareness, however slight, of the importance of the Chinese population in that city. Using the contents of these lists as evidence, however, it also appears that Wier’s collecting activities showed only a slight recognition that the Spanish had traveled through southern Nevada, but she seemed to have no awareness that the Chinese had played a large role in Nevada’s mining industry in the nineteenth century.

114 Hubert Howe Bancroft’s History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming: 1540-1888 (1890), Thomas Wren’s A History of the State of Nevada: Its Resources and People (1904), and Myron Angel’s History of Nevada (1881) were the three histories of Nevada available in the early 20th century. On the whole, Wier was not impressed by them and frequently wrote of these volumes in dismissive terms when responding to reference queries asking for suitable historical texts on Nevada. They were not, in her estimation, “true” histories of Nevada: they were mostly biographical sketches of notable men (the mug book histories of the day), and did not represent the kind of “scientific” histories (based on the use of primary sources) that she held up as “true” history. This was one of the primary reasons she was anxious to build up the collections of the Society—to make it possible for the “true” history of Nevada to be written.
The report also contained a brief but detailed section on the Society’s finances and clearly revealed the depth of the organization’s impoverishment in its early years. Income and expenditures from 1904-1908 show that the Society had a mere $476 (from dues and gifts) on hand to support its activities prior to the $2000 biennial appropriation awarded in 1907. The Mackay donation of $500 was also included in this report, as were the expenses incurred by Wier ($681) during the fall of 1908 after the appropriation had been exhausted. All amounts were accounted to the penny, and only the state fund had a balance—a mere four cents.115

Wier concluded this report to the council, knowing that it would be presented to the Governor and legislators, with a forceful and detailed statement of the Society’s functions and needs, suggesting that she had done quite a bit of research on the work of other historical societies and archives throughout the United States. Although she stated that the Society’s essential purpose was “the gathering together and preservation of materials for an historical library and museum” and “the investigation of topics pertaining to the history of the State and the publication of the results of such investigation” Wier also suggested additional functions that might require legislative action. Noting that the Society had become something of a de facto information bureau for statistics and other state-related topics, she argued for legislation that might make the Society a permanent bureau for the census and vital statistics, and even more significantly “the official custodian of such State archives as may not need to be kept in the Capitol or the county court-houses.” Pointing to the examples of eastern states such as Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Rhode Island, Wier also suggested that a law was needed that would provide for the state supervision and proper care and custody of public records (state, county, town, and court records). Wier was also forceful in asserting the Society’s

115 First Biennial Report, 1907-1908, 42.
right to copies of state reports for their library (as defined in the original founding act of the organization), as well as “no less than a thousand” copies of its own reports for distribution in exchange programs with other societies and institutions.  

In the next section of her report, Wier illustrated the Society’s impact upon the community by describing its relationship with two other institutions in the state: the press and the University. She was quite pleased, for example, with the Society’s relationship with the state’s press, characterizing it as “most helpful.” Although in the early years their main problem was that few people knew of the organization’s existence, the state’s newspapers had helped to change this. Whatever small errors had occurred, Wier was quite certain in fact that “items copied from one paper into another have frequently paved the way for my work in a new community.”

In these early days, Wier also wrote positively of the Society’s unique relationship with the University. Emphasizing the advantages incurred by the fact that the Society’s Secretary (herself) was also the head of the Department of History at the University, she noted that the Society’s collections made possible original research and instilled “the spirit of such work in the minds of advanced students” and suggested that the Secretary’s work in the field on behalf of the Society also served as a means of advertising for the University. The Society itself was helped by what she referred to as the “moral support of an older and well-established institution” and much dearer to her heart no doubt, the “assistance of University students in working out local topics.” Wier also saw these students as future ambassadors for the Society who would “aid in the work of collection throughout the State.” This did indeed become reality in a few instances with Beulah Hershiser and then Clara Beatty assisting Wier at various times and the latter even

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116 Ibid., 43-44.
117 Ibid., 45.
taking charge of the Society after Wier’s death. With regard to her own work at the University, focused as it was on the wider scope of national and international historical events and studies, she viewed it as a means to keep the Society from becoming too “narrow and isolated in its work.” Wier was quite emphatic in her feelings regarding this relationship and did not wish that the work of either should be lost in that of the other: “cooperation and not consolidation” was her motto.¹¹⁸ These feelings of camaraderie with the University did not last long, however, and she was to grow quite frustrated with the University, distrustful even, in the near future.

Wier ended her report to the Executive Council with a lengthy statement on the Society’s financial needs for the coming years. If her speech before the Academy of Sciences in 1905 had broadly defined the Society’s mission, Wier’s fieldwork in the succeeding years and her correspondence with other historical societies and archives now enabled her to provide a more detailed outline of the tasks and resources that she felt were needed to achieve this mission.

At the top of her list was the need for a fireproof library and museum building. Noting the ongoing efforts to obtain private funding, she declared that if they had not proved successful by the middle of the following January, the Society would then approach the state for these funds. They would need, in Wier’s estimation, not less than forty or fifty thousand dollars to construct a building that would contain a library room, as well as museum rooms and a portrait gallery. Although Wier herself viewed the library as the “chief strength of the Society,” she realized that much of the public would care little for the library, and that it was the museum rooms featuring the popular collections that would attract visitors. Shrewdly, she noted, “[i]n a state institution it is not only necessary but highly desirable and justifiable that, while avoiding political interference, we should cultivate the arts of popularity.” Wier also offered her opinion

¹¹⁸ Ibid.
as to where the building should be located and considered a spot in Reno near the University as ideal for “beyond doubt it should be easily accessible to students and scholars.”

If funding for a proper building was the Society’s most pressing financial need in 1908, money to purchase books and artifacts was its second most important priority. Regarding the purchase of books, Wier was unmoved by the argument that as so little had been published on Nevada, little money would be needed to purchase books. Indeed, she felt strongly that “because so few books are devoted entirely to our State it is the more essential that we procure all other works which have either direct or indirect reference to us.” Wier also thought it essential to obtain books and papers pertaining to the history of the surrounding states as the roots of Nevada’s history were “intimately intertwined” with these states. With proper financial support, Wier optimistically proclaimed that the Society might “gather together for this State the best historical library to be found between the Sierras and the Rockies.” She also thought that proper funding would allow the Society to compete with other institutions for the purchase of particular artifacts.

Third on her list of financial priorities was funding for an editorial or publishing department which she felt would demonstrate the importance of the Society’s work and draw to “our assistance the aid of many citizens who will be willing to collate material if assured that it is to be preserved in permanent form.” Here she provided figures from other states to show the costs of editing and binding these types of works. She suggested that in Nevada it would be necessary to provide funds for the publication of at least one volume per year.

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119 Ibid., 45-46.
120 Ibid., 46.
121 First Biennial Report, 1907-1908, 46.
Although Wier’s focus had largely been on the building of physical collections of books, documents, and objects, she listed funding for the purchase and preservation of historic sites and buildings and the marking of historic sites as a fourth important financial priority for the Society. What led Wier to add this task to her list of the Society’s priorities is unknown, but may have resulted from her fieldwork in various parts of the state. Again she pointed to the appropriations of other states in this area, using Rhode Island’s $1500 expenditure as an example, and asked why Nevada should not “take steps toward the marking of its overland trail along the Humboldt, the Carson, and the Truckee”?\(^{122}\)

Financial support for fieldwork (both in Nevada and elsewhere) was next on her list of funding priorities for the Society. Wier’s desire to obtain pioneer memories was again foremost in her mind here, and she noted that many settlers had moved out of state. Remarking about the failure of her correspondence to achieve these aims, she pondered quizzically, “I leave it to some of you to figure out what the influences in the West may be that render citizens here averse to replying to kindly letters of inquiry. And in nearly every instance these people, who will not yield to appeals by post, become interested and even enthusiastic when approached in person.”\(^{123}\) She also felt that fieldwork served an essential purpose in advertising the Society’s work to the wider population of Nevada, and could result in unsolicited donations in the future. In speaking of the necessity of funding for fieldwork, Wier did not let the opportunity pass without slipping in an aside about the difficulty of her travels during the past summer: “Under the present arrangement I was forced to spend my summer vacation traveling in a semi-torrid region, which was not only a personal hardship but a serious disadvantage to the work.”\(^{124}\) Still, fieldwork was

\(^{122}\) Ibid., 46-47.
\(^{123}\) Ibid., 47.
\(^{124}\) Ibid.
essential to the Society, and she concluded that once they had made up for the neglect of the past years and gathered a significant number of collections, it would be easy enough to add to the collections from year to year.

Of the seven financial priorities Wier listed for the Society’s work, it is telling that she listed funding for salaries near the bottom. She made no mention of the fact that she had worked for the Society’s first four years without compensation. Yet it may have been a desire to emphasize to the Society’s Executive Council the amount of work she had done in the past that made Wier suggest that “at least one person must be able to give the larger part of his time to the work for the next few years.” Clerical assistance was also essential, and just in case the council hadn’t been convinced of the massive amount of work awaiting the Society’s attention, she added emphatically, “[i]n fact, so rapidly is the work growing, so great is the demand for immediate effort, that the help obtained will be limited only by the money provided.”

Wier concluded the report with a request for the monies she had expended during her fall collecting trips and an estimate of expenses for 1909-1910, which totaled some $11,960. Of that sum, the largest line items were budgeted for the purchase of books and artifacts ($1000), marking historic sites ($1000), fieldwork ($2000), and salaries for the Secretary, a curator, and assistants ($5000). Admitting that the budget was large, she nevertheless argued that it was “commensurate with the greatness of the work which we aim to accomplish.” In justifying her request, Wier cited the annual budgets for fifteen other states (from America’s oldest, most well-funded historical society in Massachusetts at $48,000 per year to the modestly-funded Oregon Historical Society at $7500 per year) and also noted where their respective historical societies were housed. Appealing to the Council’s (and the state government’s) pride, she asked,

125 Ibid., 47.
“[s]hould Nevada with her rich resources fall behind in this important work?” Revealing something of her unfailing honesty and perhaps naïveté, Wier refused to ask for more funds than needed in order to get the required amount, stating “I therefore recommend that we ask for the least amount with which we can do successful work and that we then strive to obtain all for which we ask.”\(^{126}\)

In reflecting on the vastness of the work to be pursued, Wier confessed in a letter to Clarence Mackay (written the day after her presentation) that after making her report to the Executive Council, she was “greatly discouraged and depressed” but that there came to her upon her return home that evening “as in a vision the thought of your Father’s courage and persistence and determination and I arose this morning with a resolve to follow his example and make this institution succeed at any cost.”\(^{127}\)

**Progress Deferred – The Legislative Funding Debacle of 1909**

Wier would need every ounce of that resolve in the coming year. Having used her own funds for the Society’s activities from the preceding September onward,\(^{128}\) she was no doubt anxious about the upcoming legislative session both for the appropriation, and the possibility of extra funding for the construction of the Society’s desperately needed building. The year began auspiciously enough with the *Nevada State Journal* of January 8, 1909, reporting favorably upon the *Biennial Report* and its contents, and providing an even more glowing report of Wier’s efforts for the Society, and the “great accomplishments to its credit,” which were the result of the “indefatigable efforts” of its “efficient secretary.” The article also alluded to the urgent financial

\(^{126}\) Ibid., 48.

\(^{127}\) Jeanne Wier to Clarence Mackay, December 12, 1908, box 1, folder 1908-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\(^{128}\) Figures in the *Biennial Report* indicate that Wier spent over $681 of her own money from September to December 1908 in the performance of Society business. *First Biennial Report, 1907-1908*, 43.
needs of the Society and spoke hopefully of the future—"what it has already succeeded in doing under untold difficulties is but a suggestion of the possibilities before it."

The resolve of the Society’s efficient secretary (and indeed the entire Council) was soon to be tested by a severe disappointment. With private funding not forthcoming for the needed building, the Society prepared to make this important request in Nevada’s upcoming legislative session. The January 21 edition of the *Nevada State Journal* wrote that Wier was to travel to Carson City that morning to appear before members of the Legislature in order to make the building request. Letters flew back and forth between Wier and President Talbot as they strategized for the best approach to ensure passage of the legislation. So great were the Society’s needs that a total of four bills were actually proposed during this session. The first to pass (after some initial grumbling from the legislature and governor) was the so-called “relief bill” which reimbursed the Society for the money that Wier had had to expend in the fall after the Society’s funds had been depleted.

A request for less than $700 was easy enough, but successfully guiding the building bill through the 24th legislature was to be a much more difficult endeavor. Although the original

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130 Correspondence between Wier and President Talbot on January 18 indicates that they were still trying to secure funding for a building from yet another Nevada mining magnate, Dutch-born Captain Joseph Raphael De Lamar, who had made a large portion of his fortune in southern Nevada in the mines surrounding the Lincoln County town that he had named for himself in 1894.


132 *Second Biennial Report of the Nevada Historical Society, 1909-1910*, 16. A letter sent from Wier to Senator Nixon on March 19 indicated that the kind-hearted politician had secretly lent to Wier, unbeknownst to the other council members, the funds she had expended on the Society’s behalf in the fall. She was to pay him back out of the relief funds. Jeanne Wier to George Nixon, March 19, 1909 box 1, folder 1909-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
building bill requested $30,000,\textsuperscript{133} some members of the legislature saw the benefits of collaboration, and owing to the cramped conditions in the University library, proposed that the University be given use of the main section of the building, and the amount requested be raised to $55,000. Talbot and Wier (as President and Secretary) were tasked with meeting the University Regents to discuss the possibility of a joint building on campus, and the plan, designating the use of a portion of land on the southwest corner of campus, was approved. It was described as “a piece of ground 125 by 175 feet located on the north side of Ninth Street and midway between the University gates and Virginia Street.”\textsuperscript{134} The bill describing this joint project was written to guard “the rights and prerogatives” of the State, the University, and the Society.\textsuperscript{135}

To Wier’s immense joy and relief, it passed both houses late in the session (with one dissenting vote). In a letter to Senator Nixon, Wier expressed her happiness at this development along with her gratitude for his help: “I can scarcely realize that at last, after ten years of bitter struggle, historical studies in this State have at last been placed on a firm basis.” Referencing his secret loan, she noted “[w]ithout the work of the fall months made possible by your kindness we could have made no able stand before the legislature.”\textsuperscript{136}

Within days of this news, however, the Society was dealt a bitter blow when acting Governor Dickerson (who had replaced Governor Sparks after he died in the middle of his term) vetoed the bill. It was reported that while the Governor recognized the Society’s need for a


\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{136} Jeanne Wier to George Nixon, March 19, 1909, box 1, folder 1909-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
building, he felt that the dire economic conditions of the State in 1909, created by the “extraordinary appropriations” of the previous legislative session,\textsuperscript{137} combined with a reduction in the state tax rate, made it imperative for the State’s revenue to be conserved in order to avoid a deficit in the treasury. However much a “spacious fireproof building might facilitate the Society’s work,”\textsuperscript{138} its current cramped quarters would have to make do until the funds could be provided without depleting the State’s reserve.

Almost simultaneously, another disappointment was to be heaped upon this one when a catalog of errors within the legislature resulted in the loss of the appropriation (some $11,960) that was to have funded the historical society during the 1909-10 biennium. The Ways and Means Committee had suggested that instead of pursuing their own bill (Assembly Bill No. 186), the Society include their request into the general appropriation bill. The request was left out of the final copy of this general bill by mistake, but ultimately the error was discovered too late to be corrected. A desperate attempt to correct this reversal initially met with success when the original bill was redrawn and quickly passed by the assembly. Unfortunately, when it reached the Senate, the members present mistakenly thought that the Society received its funding from the University, and the measure failed to pass. It was a heartbreaking loss, primarily because it had not been deliberate, but was rather the result of a series of unfortunate errors.\textsuperscript{139} Reading of the Governor’s veto and the failed appropriations in the morning’s paper, a devastated Wier wrote to Talbot on March 28 of the “greatness of the calamity” and how her first thoughts upon

\textsuperscript{137} These appropriations were to support state institutions such as the state prison, mental hospital, the University and others.


hearing the news were “I will give it all up, and this is the end of it right here.” She later remarked on the shared grief of the Society during this period, “[w]hen the catastrophe was complete, many a member viewed the wreck and mourned with us over the shattered hopes.”

Desperately searching for a solution, Wier wrote to Senator Nixon, who advised her that the federal government was in no position to help and that he doubted that Mr. Carnegie, who had already provided assistance to Reno, would be willing to help. With its financial resources stripped, the Society would have remained at a standstill, but for the generous donations of a few notable members who saved it from certain decline. The first of these donors was F.M. Smith, the “Borax King,” who presented the Society with $250. President Talbot shared Wier’s disappointment, and in his confidential letter of thanks to Smith, revealed something of his true feelings for Governor Dickerson, declaring that the latter had “exhibited more interest in prolonging the era of gambling than in such educational and preservative work as that of the Historical Society” and had “vetoed this and some other bills carrying appropriations, which may give him a record for economy…” It was not much, but helped to pay for some of the Society’s administrative expenses that had been incurred early in the year. Of course, the hope that Smith would donate an even greater amount for the construction of a proper building was always in the back of Wier’s mind, but she was to find no satisfaction from Smith on this account.

142 Jeanne Wier to George Nixon, April 8, 1909, box 1, folder 1909-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
143 George Talbot to F.M. Smith, March 30, 1909, box 1, folder 1909-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
In the meantime, Wier decided to make one last appeal to the State on the Society’s behalf. In a letter to the State Board of Examiners on April 19, she admitted to being in debt on account of the Society some five to six hundred dollars for expenses incurred in the new year; as a result, Wier noted that she had been advised by a member of the legislature about the possibility of running a deficiency, “on the grounds that if the State is to hold us responsible for the collection, it ought also to provide for us in an emergency.” As April turned into May, and then June, with no response, the Council agreed that a circular letter be sent to the membership throughout the State in the hopes of raising emergency funds for the Society. After a second letter, the State Board of Examiners finally responded at the end of June, and in very strong terms, denied the request, with the stern warning to not involve the State “under any circumstances.”

At the Society’s annual meeting in early June, the atmosphere was suitably subdued owing to recent events, and President Talbot spoke of the need for donations to help support the organization. In addition to the severely shortened program, the evening’s annual address (given by United States Attorney Sam Platt of Carson City) was intriguingly titled “The Negative Quality in Nevada History,” but neither the Biennial Report nor local newspapers provide any clue as to its content. Despite the somber tone of the meeting, Wier’s inclusion of a brief lecture on the Santa Clara Historical Society as an example of a regional historical society indicated that she was still keen to promote the importance of such institutions, and suggested that she remained hopeful for the Society’s future.

Responses to the circular ($93) did little to resolve the financial crisis nor did the addition of four lifetime memberships ($100). Additional private funding was urgently needed if the

145 Ibid., 19.
Society was to survive the eighteen months until the next legislative session. In July, the Society received a reprieve when Senator Nixon generously offered to provide the organization with a monthly stipend of $50 as a means to keep it functioning until the next legislative session.\(^{146}\) Wier expressed her deep gratitude for the support, noting that a “relief from financial worries will greatly aid in husbanding the strength which ought to go to this work” and that “the expression of your confidence in the Society will do as much to aid us in securing help elsewhere as it will directly benefit us in a financial way.”\(^{147}\)

As a result of these financial woes, Wier’s collecting efforts for the Society during the summer were severely curtailed. Correspondence shows, however, that she was successful in her efforts requesting free transportation privileges from the Southern Pacific Railroad over their Nevada lines in support of her Society travel. As many of her collecting activities were done via correspondence, she also requested free shipping privileges from Wells Fargo that would cover any materials sent to the Society by donors throughout the state. Although stung by the year’s disappointments, Wier simply got on with the Society’s work as best she could. Her prolific correspondence that summer included (among others) letters to philanthropist Phoebe Hearst requesting her opinion of a profile Wier had composed on her late husband’s work in Nevada (and Mrs. Hearst’s own life story), to the California estate of pioneer Hannah Clapp seeking her papers, to the Pacific Borax Company in pursuit of the miniature Twenty Mule Team Borax statue for the Society’s museum collections, to various newspaper editors around the state in pursuit of continued donations, and to the widow of Senator Stewart in search of missing books from his donation of the previous year.

\(^{146}\) In total, Senator Nixon would donate some $900 to the Society during this critical period.  
Still, Wier’s correspondence from that summer reveals her continued concern with the Society’s welfare. In a letter to the editor of the Goldfield Daily Tribune on July 13, she expressed her gratitude for his editorial that described the Society’s work in glowing terms and compared it to the work being done in Wisconsin, as she felt it could be used to good effect in seek the assistance of “moneyed men outside of the state.” Wier was indeed fortunate that the Tribune and other newspapers around the state (including the local Nevada State Journal) wrote favorably of Society’s work as she confessed in a letter to a supporter later that month. In another July letter, responding to a query from Iowa reporter J.S. Woodhouse, Wier indicated her bitterness at the Society’s current situation, noting that it was responsible for “the only real philanthropic work being done at the present time in the State” and one that was “working against an intensely utilitarian influence.”

As Wier prepared to go on her annual trek to the “coast” later that July (Berkeley and San Francisco), she received some timely advice from her Stanford colleague Arley B. Show in a letter that reveals something of Wier’s driven and impatient personality. Although much of the letter addressed the Society’s troubles, it concluded with Show advising Wier: “Do give yourself a moment’s rest this summer, before you must plunge into the work of a new year. Some day – when perhaps it is too late – you will learn to let things wait. Be good to yourself for a while and let things wait.”

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151 Arley B. Show to Jeanne Wier, July 18, 1909, box 1, folder 1909-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
toward overwork, and the need for her to seek rest during her summer vacations; it was a constant refrain directed toward her from both professional and personal correspondents over the years.

It is unlikely that Wier took Show’s advice as the Nevada State Journal reported on July 23 that she was off to the Bancroft Library to do research in Nevada-related records.152 Upon her return to Reno a month later, the NSJ noted that her summer travels had also included a journey to the Pacific Northwest, where she visited the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle, and met with the “men in charge of historical work” in Oregon and Washington. Just what was accomplished in these meetings is unclear, but the paper noted that “plans for interstate help” were worked out.153 Although Wier had frequently requested the guidance of Wisconsin State Historical Society officials in organizing the Society’s work in these early years, this was the first time she had sought advice from her western counterparts. In October, Wier wrote a note of thanks to Oregon Historical Society founder and long-time curator George Himes, thanking him for his courtesy and helpfulness during her recent visit to Portland, telling him that the Society had “already profited here very much by your suggestions as to methods of work.”154 Despite the friendly letters that passed between the two, it appears that Himes declined Wier’s request to speak in front of the Society later that month.155 Wier also promised the Society’s moral support to Washington State Historical Society founder Ezra Meeker in his long-standing pursuit to mark


154 Jeanne Wier to George Himes, October 14, 1909, box 1, folder 1909-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

155 George Himes to Jeanne Wier, October 24, 1909, box 1, folder 1909-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
the Oregon Trail, and was confident that once it had been accomplished, similar efforts in marking portions of the California Trail in Nevada would be possible.\footnote{Jeanne Wier to Ezra Meeker, November 29, 1909, box 1, folder 1909-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.}

**Building Struggles**

The lack of a proper building to house the collections continued to weigh heavily upon Wier and the Society’s officers. Although President Talbot’s entreaties to Captain De Lamar in April had failed to secure the desired funding,\footnote{The fabulously wealthy Dutchman Captain Raphael De Lamar, who, beyond his Nevada mining ventures, had become one of the leading financiers on Wall Street, and owned a luxurious mansion on Madison Avenue in New York, showed himself to be strangely parsimonious in response to the Society’s requests. Reading between the lines of Talbot’s reply to De Lamar’s letter of April 13, it appeared that the latter had queried the judge as to why the state’s existing buildings could not house the historical society. Talbot also had to explain to De Lamar that it was unlikely that Carnegie would donate funds for another building in Reno, and that it seemed unfair to ask Mackay who had already donated some $200,000 to the University. Remarking that there were “very few wealthy people in this state,” Talbot concluded that “we may be able to find some who are sufficiently interested to aid in the gratuitous work sought to be carried on by the Society.” Diplomatically, Talbot added that “regardless of any donation” he would be glad to see De Lamar when he came to Nevada. George F. Talbot to Captain DeLamar, April 13, 1909, Box 1, Folder 1909-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.} and no other private donations were forthcoming as the year progressed, there was a brief flicker of hope at the end of the summer.

One of the Society’s major challenges was to find a suitable location for the building, and some preliminary steps were taken at this time to secure a site in Reno. Strongly-worded editorials in Reno’s newspapers that November showed that the editors of both major journals (*Reno Evening Gazette* and *Nevada State Journal*) were supportive of the Society’s efforts to collect the state’s history and their need to secure a site for the collections. The *Reno Evening Gazette* was particularly frustrated by public apathy in the Society’s work and in a November 4 editorial declared “lamentable” the lack of interest and failure of support, noting that that Wier (and a few faithful workers) had “succeeded in collecting data of inestimable worth, which will increase in value to the State as the years roll by…” It was, the paper declared, “the duty of the State and of
its inhabitants to extend aid to the society in its mission,” and the editorial suggested that “one of the best appreciated gifts at the present time would be a museum building situated in Riverside park [sic] or some other desirable location.” In a departure from the usual justifications for the Society’s work, the REG also made specific reference to the importance of the Society as holding a body of public records for practical purposes as opposed to purely historical ones, noting “…there is a growing worth in that it becomes a record of the past that may be consulted with material profit whenever questions arise in commerce or in courts of law regarding events of the past.” An article in the Nevada State Journal shortly afterward revealed that attorney H.W. Huskey was to make a presentation before the city council asking the city to deed land just south of the city park across from the Riverside to the state as a building site for the Society’s collections. It also noted that Wier was planning to obtain funds for the building project by public subscription.

This promising idea failed to take root, unfortunately, as an editorial in the Reno Evening Gazette two weeks later indicated that public sentiment was generally against constructing a building in a park that many regarded as the “breathing place of the city.” Still, the editorial argued that if public opinion was against this location for the building, “other provision should be made for it.” Describing the Society’s cause as “an excellent one” and singling out the work of Wier in particular as “earnest and hard working,” the editorial urged that the city or State make provision for a site in a desirable location. It may have been the first time that the city of Reno was urged to take responsibility for the Society as opposed to the State. While the editorial noted that there were two differing opinions regarding its potential location—one that

viewed a site near the University as ideal, and another that viewed such a location as “too far removed from the passing throng” —the paper gave no evidence of a preference. It also suggested that another objection to the University location was that the Society was not an adjunct to that institution, but Wier later reported in the *Biennial Report* for 1909-1910 that the Riverside Park idea had been dropped owing to a request from “interested parties at the University that would give the latter institution another chance to provide a site for the society.”

Although the ongoing building problems had made November a difficult month for the Society, a generous donation from benefactor Clarence Mackay brought Wier some temporary joy. Senator Nixon’s monthly stipend had been keeping the Society afloat since July, but the receipt of Mackay’s letter of support with its $1000 check provided an even greater degree of financial security. The *Reno Evening Gazette* of November 17 reported glowingly of Mackay’s “magnificent gift,” declaring it a “Godsend to the work” of the Society that would insure its continued existence until the next legislative session. Wier again declared herself speechless at Mackay’s generosity, and in an usually emotional letter of thanks, proclaimed that his “expression of confidence” had awakened in her “an intense desire to become the best that I am capable of being” so that she might be “worthy and competent” to help another person as he had helped her. Although Mackay’s generosity was directed toward the Society as a whole, it was frequently Wier’s entreaties that brought about his generosity, and she therefore could be forgiven if she responded to them in what might be viewed as a highly personal fashion.

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In the midst of the Society’s many difficulties that year, the finalization of a design for its official seal showed something of their confidence in the future of the institution. The elements of the design had been suggested by various members of the Society and executed by A.V. Buel of Reno. As a potent representation of the Society’s role as preserver and defender of Nevada’s history, the seal had as its focal point, Clio, the muse of history, surrounded by the snow-white peaks of the Sierras, and a variety of items that symbolized the State. Although not clearly visible, the mountains and canyons carrying streams to the valley below are “suggestive of the natural resources awaiting exploration and development, which are the basis of mining and agriculture, the paramount industries upon which depend the growth and welfare of the State.” Wier described the other symbols as covered wagons representing pioneer life, a teepee “that reminds us of the progress of civilization and the passing of the Indian whose history should be chronicled as well as that of the white man,” sagebrush as representative of the desert, and the skull of an oxen suggesting “the waste of animal life” and the hardships of the overland trail. Underneath Clio’s feet is the Society’s motto Servare et Conservare, representing its twin duties of serving the public, and the “equally great work of preserving and conserving the records of the past and present.”¹⁶⁴ Wier’s description of the seal in for the Biennial Report clearly showed that she viewed it as a powerful visual representation of the Society’s mission.

Personal Life

If her experiences with the Society and the University had been a frequent cause of professional disappointment in 1909, Wier’s election to the Executive Council of the Pacific Coast Branch of American Historical Association that November represented a personal triumph. To someone with Wier’s preoccupation with professionalism, it no doubt helped to reinforce her reputation as the face of historical studies in Nevada. As the year and the decade drew to a close, Wier busied herself with preparations to attend the annual American Historical Association meeting in New York in the last half of December. Notably, it was within this meeting of the AHA that the first Conference of Archivists took place, but it is unclear whether Wier, who keenly understood the need to care for Nevada’s public records, attended this gathering, which saw the initial recognition of a group that would become the “locus of professional archival activity.” Correspondence with Clarence Mackay suggests that in

166 James O’Toole and Richard Cox, Understanding Archives and Manuscripts (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 2006), 62.
addition to the AHA meeting, she hoped to meet with him and possibly Captain De Lamar and Mr. Clemens (Samuel) to discuss the possibility of securing that elusive funding for the much-desired building. Whatever promise this trip held for professional reasons, however, would soon be overshadowed by the severe illness that Wier contracted during the journey and which left her nearly incapacitated upon her return to Reno in early January.

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Nevada in the Progressive Age

Nevada was slowly evolving in the first two decades of the twentieth century as Progressive politicians and their legislation worked to reform a state whose leaders had long had a reputation for political corruption. Historian Russell Elliott does not suggest that Nevada was a leading western Progressive state, but notes that “between 1900 and 1920 the state passed a substantial number of laws which reflected the Progressives’ concern to make government a responsive and effective instrument in relieving the social and economic distress of the people.”

Where the first decade saw the passage of Newland’s federal irrigation legislation, and progress on other statewide political reforms such as referendum, initiatives, and recall, the second decade saw the emergence of a large number of state regulatory boards and commissions in Nevada—typical of other Progressive states at the time. Even as it lagged behind other western states, another significant event to occur in Nevada during the Progressive Era was the approval of women’s suffrage in 1914, six years prior to its passage at the national level. Other more controversial Progressive reforms in Nevada attempted to legislate morality, and with gambling at the top of the list, the legislature of 1909 passed the first anti-gambling legislation that would take effect on October 1, 1910. Reformers also targeted the Nevada’s easy divorce laws which

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they felt gave the state a bad reputation, and in 1913, the state legislature, under the influence of Governor Tasker Oddie increased the six-month residency law requirement to a full year.²

As the representative of a state institution, Wier was cautious about involving herself in politics; however, she was certainly cognizant of the suffrage movement, and showed an eagerness to support the work of suffragists, even if she did not have the time to become fully involved. Perhaps more importantly, as we will see later, Wier’s connection to the Progressive movement could be viewed in her perception of history as moral knowledge—a tool that could shape conduct and discipline intellect. The Society would be the vehicle by which the state’s citizens could be made cognizant of their history, with this “historic consciousness” making them capable of understanding the present and ensuring “greater wisdom of decision and greater sanity of action.”³

The Great Building Saga

*By the erection of this building the dream of eight years has at last been realized – that of the safe housing of this nucleus of a future priceless library and museum.*⁴

Many issues weighed heavily upon Wier in the Society’s first decade, but perhaps none so much as the construction of a proper building to house the collection of artifacts and documents that she was rapidly accumulating. While collecting materials for the Society most gratified Wier, the constant financial struggle and the battle with public apathy toward her work was the most disheartening. The governor’s veto in 1909 had left her bitter and bruised, and

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² Of course, illegal gambling regularly took place in Nevada despite these laws, and it wasn’t long before the gambling regulations were eventually softened in 1915 to allow for some legalized card games. The divorce residency requirements also fell that year before the continued pleas of Reno businessmen who lobbied successfully to restore the six months residency law.


perhaps none too trusting of Nevada’s leaders, and more to the point, it had left the Society flat broke with no funds for everyday expenses, let alone a building. The personal donations from Mackay, Nixon, and Smith kept the organization afloat — just barely — in the lean years between legislative sessions, but Wier and the Executive Council were acutely aware that they would need to plan their approach carefully prior to the 1911 session.

Weakened by a painful attack of sciatica in the first half of 1910, Wier had had little time or energy to ponder the ways in which the Society might seek funding for collecting. By early April, however, she was on the mend and wrote to James Bertram of the Carnegie Library Foundation Fund asking whether a state institution such as the Society might be able to secure funding for another building in the same town (the Carnegie Foundation had funded Reno’s first public library in 1904).\(^5\) Forced to cancel the Society’s annual meeting that May, Wier shared a draft of the circular to be sent to its members with Judge Talbot, and confessed to him that for the strain of her regular work and “the anxiety of financing the thing” she would not have had this illness. She believed that the circular might make its members “realize that I cannot carry this on forever and that they need to help us with the legislature.”\(^6\)

Wier also used the circular to update the Society’s membership on recent events and to plead for support by appealing to their sense of pride in the state of Nevada:

We are therefore going to ask our members throughout the State to give us definite assistance in our next legislative campaign…will you not say to your Assemblymen and Senators that the Historical Society should be generously supported as it is in other States, so as to provide the carrying on and

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\(^5\) Jeanne Wier to James Bertram, April 10, 1910, box 1, folder 1910-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\(^6\) Jeanne Wier to George Talbot, May 14, 1910, box 1, folder 1910-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
the increased scope of its work, which is educational in its nature, and stands for
the present and future enlightenment of the people?7

The *Nevada State Journal*, always a great supporter of the Society, wrote enthusiastically of the
circular and its intentions in a May 23 article, noting that “[i]n spite of the fact that relief cannot
come except through action by the assembly of 1911, the society has thus early commenced its
campaign in order that it may not fail when the time comes.” The paper was typically emphatic
in its support of Wier, declaring under its main headline “Assistance for Historical Work” that
the letter was a “movement for state aid” and to establish a “fund for future.”8

Her public appeal appears to have been a futile gesture, and by late July, a letter to
philanthropist Phoebe Hearst revealed that Wier was once again seeking to issue a new circular
“with a view to gaining the appropriation for a building and current support which we need for
historical work in Nevada…” She wished to attach Hearst’s name to it in order to make a
stronger impression upon Nevada’s legislature and its Governor. Mrs. Hearst’s generosity on
behalf of similar causes in California, particularly in regard to the University of California, was
well known, and as she had donated an expensively framed portrait of her late husband to the
Society in April, Wier undoubtedly hoped that her good works on behalf of the organization
would continue. Illness prevented Hearst from responding to Wier’s request,9 and it is not
known whether or not the circular was actually distributed as no copy survives.

The disappointments of the previous legislative session made Wier particularly anxious
about funding prospects for the building, and as a result, she took every bump in the process very

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8 “Assistance for Historical Work,” *Nevada State Journal*, May 23, 1910
hard. In September, after Senator Newlands told her that the state could afford neither the building nor the other support that they wanted, she was particularly distressed. Writing to Talbot, she mused sadly that “it would not seem that one percent were a very large amount to be used for a work which has been neglected for so long.” She vowed to compile figures that would allow her to compare what the state and the federal government were spending for scientific research. Could Talbot not speak to Newlands, she asked, and “try to convince him that the State can afford it.”

Earlier in the year, correspondence with Reuben Thwaites, Director of the Wisconsin Historical Society, had convinced Wier of the suitability of merging the Society’s library with that of the University’s library (still in desperate need of a larger structure): “It will certainly be a great advantage to have your two libraries under one roof, with a reading room in common.” As it turned out, Thwaites’ caution that such a situation required a clear “line demarcation in the matter of administrative control” proved a prescient warning, Wier discovered, as the Society pursued such an arrangement in talks with the University president and Regents that fall.

It is unclear at what point the Society decided to pursue the idea of funding to support a joint building that would house the Society and the University Library. In October, Wier’s letter to Society supporter (and University of Nevada patron) Clarence Mackay indicated that he had wanted to handle these negotiations himself but was unable to visit Reno that fall. Feeling that something must be accomplished, Wier asked diplomatically if she or another designate might handle the campus negotiations. If not, other options might have to include dropping the idea of a building altogether, or working for a site away from the campus, presumably in Carson City.

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10 Jeanne Wier to George Talbot, September 25, 1910, box 1, folder 1910-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

She emphasized her strong desire that the building be near campus, and how the Society could just not go without a building for another two years.\textsuperscript{12} Although there is no record of his response in the Society’s records, the events of the following months indicate that he must have given his okay for Society officials to pursue the negotiations with the University.

With November approaching, Wier was certainly cognizant of the upcoming state election and its potential to bring in an administration more receptive to the Society’s goals. A letter to her from Governor Dickerson’s secretary, James D. Finch, asserted that the Governor was quite supportive of the Society and that his veto of the previous appropriation was made on the grounds of economy alone and not opposition to the organization itself.\textsuperscript{13} Still, she attempted to remain above politics. In a reply to Finch, Wier reassured him that, despite appearances to the contrary, she had not (in her position as secretary) “in any way sought to use my influence or that of the Society against or for any candidate.” She acknowledged, however, that others might not be so charitable, declaring that “it is not surprising that others who have witnessed the almost mortal struggle which I have made to keep the Society alive should have thus used it without my knowledge or consent. We are most emphatically not in politics. We shall seek to do the best that we can under any administration which may come into power.”\textsuperscript{14} Her neutrality in such matters notwithstanding, there is no doubt that she was happy with the election results that brought Tasker Oddie into the Governor’s mansion. He was, after all, the first life member of the Society, and there was every hope that he might view the organization more favorably in future budget negotiations with the state legislature.

\textsuperscript{12} Jeanne Wier to Clarence Mackay, October 18, 1910, box 1, folder 1910-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\textsuperscript{13} James Finch to Jeanne Wier, October 13, 1910, box Gov-0005, folder 006, Executive Records of Governor Denver Dickerson, Nevada State Library and Archives, Carson City, Nevada.

\textsuperscript{14} Jeanne Wier to James Finch, October 31, 1910, box Gov-0005, folder 006, Executive Records of Governor Denver Dickerson, Nevada State Library and Archives, Carson City, Nevada.
Politics were of a greater concern at a banquet Wier hosted for the Board of Regents and recently-elected Washoe County legislators in late November following the election. According to the *Nevada State Journal*, the evening was largely a social event, but those in attendance also discussed the future of the Society, including proposed legislation that might favor the Society, such as the building appropriation, and the idea of meshing the two institutions into one building. Oddie was not in attendance, but as Wier had hoped, he sent a telegram with his regrets and indicated his interest in the Society.15 It was, perhaps, a sign of the Society’s faith in Oddie that one of the first toasts at the banquet was offered up “To the Governor-elect, the first life member of the Society.”16 The luncheon brought the joint building idea in front of the Regents clearly for the first time, and a delighted Wier reported to Judge Talbot shortly afterward that she had been told by University of Nevada President, Dr. Stubbs, that four of the Regents seemed to favor the idea of placing the building on the University quadrangle.17 Her happiness proved short-lived, however, as efforts to mesh the two buildings soon brought Wier and the Society into conflict with President Stubbs that December.

Correspondence between Wier and Talbot throughout December 1910 indicates that they both shared a concern that Stubbs was determined to control the Society if the University Library was to share quarters with a building for the Society. It was a tricky political situation for Wier. As a university employee, she had to wade carefully and not be perceived as openly hostile to Stubbs or the Regents, even as she felt strongly, as did Talbot, that the Society and its work should not be placed under the management of the University. Recognizing Wier’s need for

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17 Jeanne Wier to George Talbot, November 29, 1910, box 1, folder 1910-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
discretion, a gallant Talbot wrote, “I will be delighted to accept personally any blame for opposition to the Doctor’s suggestions.”

Although the intrigues with Stubbs clearly left Wier’s nerves frayed, Talbot remained calm, suggesting to her that “…worrying will not help matters, and what terminated as a poor beginning two years ago may result in a good ending.”

In a New Year’s Day letter to Mackay, Wier explained the prickly situation with President Stubbs and his opposition to the Society’s desire to control its own affairs should a building be constructed on the university campus. The Regents had frankly admitted to her that Stubbs was jealous of what the Society had accomplished. Wier felt that Stubbs’ concern with the time and attention that Mackay was devoting to the Society and how it might interfere with his interest in the University was also a factor in his opposition to their plan. Acknowledging that the President might judge her “guilty of treason” if he knew she had written Mackay, Wier respectfully asked him to counsel for peace if the Society’s building plans were broached during his next visit with Stubbs. The conflict had clearly drained Wier: “Physically and mentally I am almost mortally tired but I am willing to stay on and work it out if this seems the right thing to do.” Still, she had not yet lost hope, declaring, “[t]here seems to be no question in the public mind but that we shall get the building. This I hear from the best of sources. The calamity of two

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18 George Talbot to Jeanne Wier, December 14, 1910, box 1, folder 1910-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.


20 One of Stubbs’ greatest accomplishments as President had been his ability to attract private funding for the University, and as Mackay had been one of his most generous donors, it was not surprising that he would be somewhat prickly in the face of what he viewed as interference from another organization that might draw Mackay’s attention and money in another direction. He needn’t have worried as Mackay’s contributions to the University, totaling in the hundreds of thousands, far outstripped any of the small sums he gave to the Society.
years ago together with your support of the organization has created a strong feeling in our favor.”

The following day, Wier, along with two other members of the Society’s Executive Council met with four members of the Regents of University of Nevada to hash out the final details regarding the proposed building, its location, and its management. They agreed upon a resolution that included the following provisions 1) a piece of land between Stewart Hall and the Chemistry building of sufficient size for the NHS building be leased for a period of ten years with assurance of successive renewals for the Society, 2) any building erected on said property would be the property of the NHS, 3) two members of the Board of Regents would become ex-officio members of the NHS Executive Council, and 4) the building should be used exclusively for NHS purposes, and no changes made at any future time on the building’s exterior without the consent of an authorized meeting of the Board of Regents. Perhaps most importantly to the attending Regents was the last portion which declared “that a specified portion of the building be reserved for the use of the University, for library purposes until such time when a new Library building be provided for the University Library.”

With the details hammered out, Wier admitted to Mackay that they had “conceded a great deal but for the sake of the future of the University, it was expedient to do so…” Still she felt hopeful that the “last word has been said and that everything will proceed amicably.” Somewhat more frank in her report to Talbot, Wier conceded that the meeting discussions had been lively and that the President has “completely bamboozled them with regard to his

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21 Jeanne Wier to Clarence Mackay, January 1, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

22 Nevada Historical Society Minutes, January 2, 1911, box 12, folder 1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

23 Jeanne Wier to Clarence Mackay, January 3, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
It was now time to draft the bill itself and guide it through both houses of the legislature, a task that was fraught with some difficulty.

Although Wier may have declared that the Society was “most emphatically not in politics,” she did not let this stop her from attempting to lobby a number of senators- and assemblymen-elect to support the historical society measures. Even the Governor-Elect was not immune to her campaign, and prior to the appearance of the bill, she asked Tasker Oddie if he might mention the Society’s work in his message as it would give their bills “something of a ‘government’ character” and make her own work much easier. The legal expertise of Judge Talbot ensured that by January 14 the Society had a workable bill draft (much of it a revised version of the 1909 bill) that included a provision for a lease of ten years with ten renewals, totaling 110 years in all. The lengthy nature of the lease obviously amused Talbot, who remarked dryly, “[i]f the legislature or some philanthropic capitalist has not provided a better building in the meantime, we may wish to use our good influences from the spirit land to have the legislature provide 100 years from now for the further renewals of the lease or for a larger or better structure.”

Talbot was more serious when considering the best time to introduce the proposed bill before the legislature, and after some debate with Wier, they agreed to delay it until they could also place the Society’s most recent Biennial Report in the hands of assembled members. The importance of this particular report was due to the fact that it contained both a detailed account of their recent activities, and an essay in which Wier had written of the work of the western historical society that featured a picture of the Wisconsin State Historical Society—

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24 Jeanne Wier to George Talbot, January 3, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

25 Jeanne Wier to Tasker Oddie, January 8, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

26 George Talbot to Jeanne Wier, January 14, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
the model of the historical society/university library that they wished to follow. It could significantly inform the decision-making of the assemblymen and senators.

Given the stress level that Wier was under this month as she worked with Talbot to put the building bill forward, it is surprising that she had energy for additional activities. Yet however much the anxiety of the building and funding questions weighed upon her mind, Wier was also moved to take on another task that January that for once made her part of a historical event as opposed to a chronicler of it. The suffrage movement, which had first raised its head in Nevada as early as 1869, spread rapidly across the Western states in the early twentieth century, and by early 1911, it was Nevada’s turn yet again. As an educated, middle-class professional woman, Wier’s support of the suffrage movement was not surprising. “I suppose you wonder what I am doing in the suffrage mix up,” she wrote President Talbot in late January. “I was dragged into it and could not help myself. I believe in it of course, but would have preferred postponing it till later.”

In a January 26 letter to Clarence Mackay’s wife, Katherine Duer Mackay (the couple were separated at the time), a prominent suffragette and supporter of women’s rights, Wier remarked on the enthusiasm shown in various parts of the state for the suffrage question and how many of the supporters were men: “We shall organize a Branch of the Equal Franchise here on Saturday evening at the Odd Fellows’ Hall, and I look for a considerable membership.” Querying Mackay as to how they should organize their branch, Wier appeared hopeful for the future of suffrage in Nevada: “Of course we shall have the saloon and the gambling element against us.

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27 Jeanne Wier to George F. Talbot, January 25, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
but I believe that we stand a good chance to win, even at this Session.”\textsuperscript{28} Despite her enthusiasm in calling this first meeting of the Equal Franchise Society, her involvement in the movement was actually quite limited after early 1911. There were a few additional letters to other professional women in Nevada and Mrs. Mackay, but the reality was that Wier was far too busy with her university duties and her work on behalf of the Society to devote the kind of extended time necessary to fully participate in the suffrage movement. She admitted as much in her response to Anna Shaw, President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, the following month: “I am doing what I can for the suffrage movement but am also trying to impress other people into the work who have not so many irons in the fire.”\textsuperscript{29} Although Wier later wrote a brief history of the suffrage movement in Nevada, it was her former Stanford classmate, Anne Martin, whose tireless work was most responsible for the successful passage of suffrage in Nevada.

Ultimately, delays in the production of the \textit{Second Biennial Report} meant that the Society’s bill went forward without it and was introduced on February 3 by J.A. Denton. As a result, Talbot and Wier had to plan other strategies to press their case before the legislature. Talbot suggested giving a series of dinners for the assemblymen and senators, but was also determined to speak before the joint Ways and Means Committee, and to bring Wier as well when the time was right. Wier herself was determined to bring members of that committee to Reno to see the collections as a visual means to influence their vote and convince them of the importance of the Society’s work. The uncertainty of the situation and her fear that Stubbs “will

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Jeanne Wier to Katherine Mackay, January 26, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
\item Jeanne Wier to Anna Shaw, February 14, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
“fight us” made Wier a nervous wreck.\textsuperscript{30} Talbot remained a voice of calm, however, advising her that “worrying will not help it, and I trust we can try to take results whether favorable or unfavorable with as little fretting as possible.”\textsuperscript{31}

Disappointment in her personal life at this time most likely added to Wier’s nervousness and melancholy over the legislative situation. After completing her bachelor’s degree in 1901, Wier had been absorbed with teaching and then her super-human efforts on behalf of the Society, but she still had hopes of pursuing an advanced degree. In December 1910, she submitted her PhD application to the history department at Stanford, outlining a research plan that would continue her studies of the Washoe Indians, the topic of her undergraduate thesis. In early February 1911, she received a response from Dr. E.D. Adams, chair of Stanford’s history department gently suggesting that the pursuit of the degree was untenable. The residency requirement was difficult in itself, but the even greater obstacle was the fact that there was no one capable of supervising her dissertation. Herbert Bolton was leaving for Berkeley, and his departure left no staff in the department knowledgeable on her chosen topic.\textsuperscript{32} For a woman like Wier, whose intellectual curiosity had always driven her ambition, it must have been a bitter blow. Responding to Adams, Wier remarked, “I really do not know what I shall do, except that I shall go on and prosecute the work here in the field anyway and trust that some University will in time give recognition to it.”\textsuperscript{33} Wier’s disappointment was also palpable in a letter to Bolton as

\textsuperscript{30} Jeanne Wier to George F. Talbot, January 30, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\textsuperscript{31} George F. Talbot to Jeanne Wier, February 1, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\textsuperscript{32} E.D. Adams to Jeanne Wier, February 3, 1911, box 1, folder 17, Stanford University, Dept. of History, Records, SC 029a, Stanford University Archives, Stanford, Calif.

\textsuperscript{33} Jeanne Wier to E.D. Adams, February 15, 1911, box 1, folder 17, Stanford University, Dept. of History, Records, SC 029a, Stanford University Archives, Stanford, Calif.
was her frustration at the apathy toward the Society’s work: “For the present I shall drop the matter altogether; the unsettled condition of historical matters here owing to the uncertainty of action by the Legislature favorable to the prosecution of the work makes me the more dubious as to the wisdom of marking out any course at present. Almost I am tempted to give up the struggle and go where work will be appreciated. Is that cowardly?”

Although she soon pushed her disappointment over the failed doctoral studies aside, the machinations of university politics continued to vex Wier, and she found that University officials were none too happy that a scheduled legislative visit to the campus might also include a visit to the Society. A far more serious threat to the possibility of funding, however, was the condition of the State treasury. The slowness with which the legislature was handling the bill was due largely to the fact that the Ways and Means Committee was awaiting word on the condition of the state’s finances before making decisions on funding. With the Society’s bill requesting $55,000 for the joint building, Talbot was concerned with the very real possibility that there simply was not enough money in the treasury to fund any new buildings, however desirable or necessary they may be. Gently preparing her for the possibility of disappointment, Talbot noted, “If we do not get the building it may be for the reason that the State cannot afford it. I shall not give up trying for the building as long as there is any chance to obtain it, and trust that in any event we will secure an appropriation for running expenses.”

Not surprisingly, Wier was distressed at the news of the state’s dire financial straits. She

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34 Jeanne Wier to Herbert Bolton, February 15, 1911, box 95, folder 29, Herbert Eugene Bolton Papers, BANC MSS C-B 840, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
35 Jeanne Wier to George F. Talbot, February 8, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
36 George Talbot to Jeanne Wier, February 14, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
half as much for one for our use only, and that if they cannot do that, to give us three or four or five thousands for a temporary structure to be covered with iron”… (like the one in Berkeley).”

Increasingly frustrated about the “indifference of the legislature” and annoyed that some of the state senators had not come to visit as promised, she declared angrily, “I am going to insist that they make some provision, however poor, and that they give the current expenses also or else repeal the act making us responsible for these things.”

Talbot was nothing, if not a realist in such matters. As a Supreme Court Justice, Talbot was positioned in Carson City and had regular conversations with the chair and members of the Ways and Means Committee. He was more aware than Wier of the precarious nature of the state’s finances and thought it best for the Society to prepare a contingency plan. If they could not give the Society more than $10,000, he asked her if it would be better for them to have all the funds for expenses and work, or half for a temporary building as she had suggested earlier. He professed his regret at the continual delays but remarked wryly that he did not know “how to expedite the affair unless by obtaining a derrick, lariat or installment of firecrackers for use with some of these statesmen.”

The Society’s Executive Council quickly decided that a temporary building would be the best option and introduced Assembly Bill 328—An Act to provide a temporary structure for the preservation and exhibition of the library, manuscripts, museum and collection of the Nevada Historical Society—on March 4. With the new bill in place, Wier once again began a lobbying campaign of sorts. While it appeared that many members were generally favorable to the bill, it was languishing “at the bottom of the pile with fifty or a hundred bills ahead of it,” and her

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37 Jeanne Wier to George Talbot, February 14, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

38 George F. Talbot to Jeanne Wier, February 18, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
efforts were aimed at bringing it “to the top” of the pile of bills that the legislature was considering by writing to as many legislators as possible. “Will it be possible to get it considered out of order?” she pleaded with August Frohlich, Speaker of the Assembly. Wier’s anxiety over the bill was compounded with disappointment over the rather paltry sum it requested. In a letter to state Senator J.H. Fulmer, she complained that had there been appropriate funding at the beginning, there would not have been such an accumulation of urgent work to be accomplished. When Senator Holmes (Chairman of the Society’s Building Committee) informed her that the bill was almost certain to pass, Wier was still melancholy at the sum and what it meant to her own workload:

…I cannot figure on $5000 so as to cover absolutely necessary expenses such as maintenance of the building, cost of collecting, insurance, etc., and salary of one competent person…this appropriation will therefore mean that I shall have to go on doing double work and it is questionable whether I shall last another two years at such a rate. Of course there is the possibility of private help but I dislike to go begging again to get money with which to plan for the work as it should be done.

Whatever Wier’s reservations, she was no doubt pleased when the bill finally passed through both houses of the legislature, and Governor Oddie signed it on March 28. Even if the funding was only sufficient to build a temporary structure, it was a momentous occasion—at long last there was to be a building to house the Society’s collections.

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39 This same letter was sent to many other legislators. Jeanne Wier to J.A. Denton, March 8, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

40 Jeanne Wier to August Frohlich, March 8, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

41 Jeanne Wier to Senator J.H. Fulmer, March 10, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

42 Jeanne Wier to Senator Holmes, March 13, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
The bill’s passage meant little in the financially strapped state, and throughout the summer and into the fall, there was little progress on the building front. By October, Wier’s response to a reference query revealed that the collection was still housed in a bungalow adjoining her house. It was not open to the public, but she expressed hope that “we shall before another summer have our temporary building up and the Library open during a part of each day.”

Wier’s hopes were premature, however, and as the winter of 1912 passed into spring, the Society was no closer to the construction of the building than they had been immediately following the bill’s passage the previous March. As they waited for the funding to come through, the Society’s Executive Council occupied itself with selecting the right location for the building. A sub-committee of executive council members—the “Committee on Lot and Building”—busied themselves in June and July with looking for suitable lots throughout Reno. They considered locations near the Carnegie Library on Virginia Street, as well as near the Riverside Hotel, and a lot on First Street opposite the post office and near the courthouse. All of these locations were central to much of the business and community activity of Reno but in the end, the Society could not afford to pay the rents charged at these locations. By July, having investigated these options, President Talbot suggested to Wier that:

the question would still arise whether we had better buy your lot with the little bungalow and put the building back of it, or move the bungalow back and put the building in front, and allow you and your brother the use of the building in taking care of the premises and exhibit, or if preferred that the bungalow be moved away and put whatever room is needed into the new building.44

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43 Jeanne Wier to Mrs. O.A. Moran, October 15, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

44 George Talbot to Jeanne Wier, July 17, 1912, box 1, folder 1912-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
The decision moved forward quickly and by August 2, the arrangements for the purchase of the lot were complete. It was a momentous decision—cementing the Society’s collection near Wier’s living quarters—and it would have a number of consequences in the future, many which reverberate to this day.

After the years of delay, the building’s construction was to become a reality at last. In accordance with the law, the Society’s building committee sent out a notice advertising for bids until October 15, 1912, when they would be publicly opened. Advertisements and articles in both the Nevada State Journal and the Reno Evening Gazette throughout September 1912 asked for “sealed proposals of bids for the construction of a building for the Nevada Historical Society.” On October 16, the Nevada State Journal declared that the bid had been awarded to builder E.K. Fowler for the sum of $2,527. The building was to be erected on North Center Street and construction work was to commence in a few days, although it was predicted the building would not be ready for occupancy until January. Notably, the paper emphasized the temporary nature of the structure: “While the building contemplated is not so pretentious as the one ultimately in view for the care of the exhibits and curios gotten together through the efforts of Miss Wier, the secretary and curator, it will serve to facilitate greatly the work of society.”

As described in the Society’s Biennial Report, the building was a brick structure with an iron roof, and featured a walled and cemented basement. It was 30 feet by 60 feet, and 18 feet high so as to provide space for an upper deck or balcony in the future. Windows on two sides and skylights in the iron roof provided natural light. Despite the fact that the building had not been funded at anywhere near the level originally intended, Wier insisted in the report, “In appearance it is not unsightly, though so inexpensive in construction. The artistic front gives a

pleasing appearance toward the street and, when the improvement of the walks and grounds shall have been completed, the property will be a credit to the State and to the city.”

The small bungalow in which she lived on the site had been moved to the east end of the property and would continue to be used as a residence.

The long journey finally at an end, the Society’s building committee formally accepted the building on December 12, 1912. In her chronicle of the building saga provided for the Biennial Report, Wier noted that the larger design behind the Council’s plan was not just creating a home for the collections, but to secure property that would have commercial value for the state when the Society’s growth would require its move to larger and more permanent quarters. Within the council there was a feeling of “pardonable pride in the securing of a brick building in so desirable a location and at so low a figure.” Wier also thanked those who had provided invaluable help during the long ordeal: the assistant curator (her brother Augustus William (Will) Wier Jr.), Senator Holmes, Chairman of the Building Committee, whose “technical knowledge” had greatly aided in the securing of a well-built structure, and lastly, contractor Fowler, for “his more than financial interest in the work.” With more than a note of triumph, Wier declared the building as marking “…the emergence of the Society from the semiprivate stage of its life while it was sheltered in a private dwelling to the fully public era which befits a state organization. By the erection of this building the dream of eight years has at last been realized—that of the safe housing of this nucleus of a future priceless library and museum.”

47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., 15.
With construction complete, Wier now turned her attention to filling the building with the thousands of artifacts, books, and papers that she had been gathering since the organization of the Society in 1904. She spent much of the early part of 1913 arranging the contents on shelves and cases within the building, and three months into this work it was obvious that the structure was straining to hold the collections. A balcony or mezzanine level was thus rapidly constructed and an office and bathroom added to the ground floor in June. With her typical devotion and ingenuity, Wier herself, with the aid of an undergraduate from the University and then a carpenter, constructed both homemade pine bookcases and museum cases. To the rather plain exterior of the building, Wier worked on adding a lawn, vines, and shrubs, so that it might look like “other more richly endowed state institutions.”

Image 5: Nevada Historical Society Building, undated, probably late 1910s or early 1920s
Courtesy of Nevada Historical Society

49 Ibid., 12.
The building was not officially opened to the public until June 10, 1913, as part of a special flag raising ceremony. As Wier soon discovered, however, a working building presented its own set of difficulties. The combined reports for the two bienniums (1913-1916) noted that the building had not yet been regularly opened to the public as the legislature had provided no extra appropriation for a building attendant or any type of guard against potential theft by visitors. Despite these problems, the Society had set aside special days for visitors, and most importantly, rarely had “anyone been refused who at another time has asked for permission to view the collection.” The visitors’ register, opened on June 10, 1913, had recorded nearly two thousand signatures by the time Wier submitted her reports for the two bienniums in early 1917.

**Documenting Nevada: Books, Papers, Artifacts and Monuments**

_We take anything and everything that is historical in its nature: “all is grist that comes to our mill.”_51

Wier’s collecting efforts on behalf of the Society did not always involve adventurous journeys across the state’s barren landscape. After her 1908 trips, the majority of the collections came to the Society via a far more prosaic method: a continual stream of correspondence sent far and wide throughout the state. Wier was relentless in seeking materials that documented the history of Nevada; her efforts continued in spite of the Society’s precarious funding situation, in the face of illness, crushing university responsibilities, and whatever family or personal crisis that popped up during her tenure. She frequently followed up leads in newspaper articles, but increasingly, collection suggestions came via a growing network of supportive members and contacts throughout the state that she would dutifully follow up on. Although the *Biennial* Secretary’s Report,” in *Fourth and Fifth Biennial Reports of the Nevada Historical Society, 1913-1916* (Carson City, NV: State Printing Office, 1917), 13.

51 Jeanne Wier to Mrs. E.P. Laughlin, March 31, 1913, box 2, folder 1913, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
Reports provide the most complete description of the materials actively collected and donated to the Society, Wier’s correspondence provides some of the most illuminating details about the collecting process. Even in her most desperate hour to obtain funding for the erection of a building to house the Society’s materials, the need to collect was always foremost in her mind. She indicated as much in a letter to Nevada state senator J.H. Fulmer: “Whatever is done to save the pioneer history must be done within a very few years and it seems a pity that for lack of a little money the opportunity should be forever lost. The exhibition of these things to the public may wait, if need be, but the work of collection must be done now or never.”52 And again in this quote from the Third Biennial Report (1911-1912) when she remarked, “[o]ther things being equal, the acquiring of new data is and must always be the paramount function of our organization.”53

Collecting 1910-1911

The crippling attack of sciatica that devastated Wier in the opening months of 1910 affected not only her work at the University, but left her behind in her efforts on behalf of the Society for months afterward. Although it was to become a pattern in her professional life—overwork followed by periods of debilitating illness—Wier proved to be exceptionally resilient and by early April, correspondence shows that her collecting work had resumed. Having missed the opening night of the Majestic Theatre due to her illness, she wrote to manager A.J. Aylesworth asking for mementos of the occasion.54

52 Jeanne Wier to J.H. Fulmer, March 10, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
54 Jeanne Wier to A.J. Aylesworth, April 9, 1910, box 1, folder 1910-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
A larger concern for her at this time, however, was securing the purchase and preservation of the old log cabin at Genoa (located just south of Reno in Douglas County), generally believed to be the oldest structure in Nevada. Throughout April, letters between Wier and D.R. Hawkins, who represented the Society’s interests in Douglas County, focused on how they might acquire the historic (and rundown) property despite the Society’s lack of funds. Time was of the essence because the structure was crumbling, and it was highly likely that the family who owned it, having little appreciation of its historic value, might actually disassemble it for firewood.55 Once they were informed of its value, however, they became determined to extract a good price for it, a price that the Society could not afford to pay.

Although the monthly gift of Vice-President George Nixon enabled the Society to function on a basic level through December, Wier was not able to pursue extensive collecting trips as she had in the past due to the lack of funds. Correspondence indicated that Wier was determined to combine her summer vacation with activities that would benefit the Society even as she continued to recover. A note from her Stanford friend and colleague Arley B. Show in early June revealed as much with the latter remarking: “I suppose you will go out in the field as usual. Well, you deserve a saint’s reward for keeping at it the way you do. I admire your pluck and devotion.”56

Wier spent some of her summer locally, attending the celebration of Carson Valley Day at Minden in June57 and then much of her time at the coast later that month and into July. On a brief return to Reno in early July, Wier turned her efforts toward obtaining “souvenirs and data”

55 George Talbot to Jeanne Wier, May 27, 1910, box 1, folder 1910-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
56 Arley B. Show to Jeanne Wier, June 11, 1910, box 1, folder 1910-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
pertaining to the “Johnson-Jeffries” fight held in Reno on July 4. The fight between the defending black heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson and the white former heavyweight champion James L. Jeffries had been heavily promoted in Reno, the state, and indeed the nation as the “fight of the century,” and it spoke to Wier’s recognition of the historical significance of current events that she sought out “souvenirs” of this match. She was fortunate in this respect to have supportive relationships with local newspapermen such as E.F. Gladwin of Reno, who saved what he could for her and recommended others who might have items of interest. Her time in Reno was short, however, and a letter to Senator Nixon on July 8 indicated that Wier was back at the coast, still trying to rid herself of sciatica, and a few days later Judge Talbot expressed his hopes that she was having a fine vacation and rapidly regaining her health.

Wier’s summer at the coast also included trips to bookstores around Berkeley and San Francisco, and in a July 31 letter to Society treasurer Dr. A.E. Hershiser, she wrote excitedly of a purchase that required her to put $500 cash down of her own funds “to get a lot of valuable stuff.” She declared, with more than a note of triumph, that she had acquired “things which cannot be duplicated even in the Bancroft collection and which will probably bring California students to Nevada to investigate.” Wier also made a trip to Los Angeles the following month and brought back with her a number of “valuable old books” prior to the start of the fall semester. Judging from invoices in the Society’s records for 1910, it is likely that she visited Dawson’s Bookshop while in Los Angeles. Long lists of books on Dawson’s letterhead were

58 E.F. Gladwin to Jeanne Wier, July 12, 1910, box 1, folder 1910-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

59 George Talbot to Jeanne Wier, July 14, 1910, box 1, folder 1910-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

60 Jeanne Wier to A.E. Hershiser, July 31, 1910, box 1, folder 1910-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

annotated with notes on which books she wanted to order for the Society. They included titles on Indians, California and Utah history, the Spanish in the West, whatever few volumes on women could be found, railroads, cartography, pioneers such as Kit Carson and John C. Fremont, and other texts such as prospectors’ manuals. Invoices show that she frequently turned to Dawson’s as a source for books on Western history over the years.62

Along with archives and public records, the marking of historical sites and monuments throughout the United States had become a focus of an AHA survey in fall 1910. Naturally, it was left to Wier to respond to a query by University of Washington Professor Edward S. Meany (representing the AHA’s Committee on Historical Sites and Monuments) regarding the nature of such efforts in Nevada. Typically she remarked that progress had been slow because of financial handicaps: “Of course we cannot hope to handle all these things at once as Nevada is neither a populous nor a wealthy State, but we will hope that we may at least make a beginning.” Commenting on a few sites of interest in the state, Wier noted with regret that Nevada’s oldest historical site—the cabin in Genoa—had burned over summer, and that the only monument in the state was the John Mackay statue on the University of Nevada campus. In her response to Meany, Wier showed herself to be longing for some sort of consensus from Western historical societies, and she suggested that he mention these things at the Pacific Coast Branch of the AHA in November: “Would it not be well for the Pacific Coast States to agree upon some uniform plan of action at that time?” Meany was curious as to how Nevadans could follow through with such work, and Wier’s reply showed that she was realistic about the public’s indifference to her

62 Box 1, folder 1910-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
efforts at developing a historical consciousness in Nevada. If such work was not too much trouble, and were it to be started, she felt it likely that Nevadans would “fall into line.”

Although far from a collecting triumph, the donation of Mark Twain’s pipe in August was a bright spot in an otherwise unimpressive year for the Society. Deprived of the funding to make her customary collecting trips, she spent much time in correspondence with potential donors and the county vice-presidents who advocated on the Society’s behalf in Nevada’s fifteen far-flung counties. Wier had been determined to get a “souvenir” from the estate of the esteemed writer (the Society’s second honorary member) since his death in April 1910. A pipe may not have been the artifact she dreamed of, but Wier nonetheless wrote a gracious letter of thanks to Twain’s daughter Clara Gabrilowitsch for the donation. It was not until October 16 that the *Nevada State Journal* saw fit to publicize the donation, remarking frankly that while the pipe was “not exactly a thing of beauty,” his daughter was pleased to send it on account of the fact that the late author was “very much interested in the Nevada Historical Society.” How much truth there was in that statement is debatable, but it made good copy for the Society toward the end of a challenging year.

With much of 1911 devoted to the battle with the legislature over funding for the building, Wier had far less time and energy to devote to her collecting work. And still smarting from the failure of the last legislature to provide an appropriation, there was simply no money to pursue collections. It was not until the late spring and summer months that she was able to make any serious efforts, and like so much of her work for the Society, Wier used her personal

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63 Jeanne Wier to Edward S. Meany, September 18, 1910, box 1, folder 1910-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

64 Jeanne Wier to Clara Gabrilowitsch, August 18, 1910, box 1, folder 1910-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

vacation time to take collecting trips throughout northern Nevada. Traveling through remote areas of the Mason, Smith, and Carson Valleys that June, she preached the gospel of the Society, receiving donations and promises of donations that would be presented upon completion of the building.

In July, Wier went on her customary vacation to the coast, which included time in Berkeley and San Francisco. As always, her time away was also spent in service to the Society. On this occasion, she worked on finalizing the purchase of the Remington Collection, a large collection of historical materials relating to the Pacific Coast, which she felt contained “invaluable items for the writing of Nevada history and material useful for exchanges in future.”\(^{66}\) An article in the August 13 edition of the *Nevada State Journal* described the purchase as consisting of “rare books and papers, including among other things Vigilance committee documents, old lithographs and oil paintings, cartoons, broadsides, maps and atlases” that would eventually “attract historical students from other sections than our own state.”\(^{67}\) Wier had been so convinced of the collection’s importance that she used $500 of her own funds to secure its purchase, but she was to find herself vexed in the coming months as she tried to obtain reimbursement from Nevada’s Board of Examiners, the body that handled all state funds.\(^ {68}\) A lengthy letter to Talbot on October 11 revealed that she still had not been paid as the Board of Examiners, lacking Wier’s perspective on the historical business and economic connections between California and Nevada did not see the usefulness of buying California materials. It was

\(^{66}\) *Third Biennial Report, 1911-1912*, 17.
\(^{67}\) “Rare Collection Comes to Nevada,” *Nevada State Journal*, August 13, 1911.
\(^{68}\) Jeanne Wier to George Talbot, July 21, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
extremely aggravating to Wier that they would question her judgment in such matters. The glacial slowness of the state’s reimbursement efforts meant that Remington was still awaiting payment in December.

A far more dramatic collecting escapade in 1911 occurred when Wier received notice in late November of a spectacular find of Indian relics in the guano cave in Lovelock northeast of Reno. Wier’s appreciation for Indian artifacts made her desirous of visiting the cave herself – it contained the remnants of a pre-historic Indian settlement. The Society’s chronic lack of funds and a lack of expertise at the University meant that the excavation was left to the University of California. Although they took most of the relics, Wier was later assisted by her friend Dr. Kroeber of the Department of Anthropology to purchase a third of the collection. Writing of the collection in the Biennial Report, Wier declared that “[w]hile the antiquity of the content of the cave is still in question, the materials thus acquired are without doubt very valuable from the scientific standpoint, since they illustrate admirably the primitive life of Nevada’s first inhabitants.”

As excited as she was with each new donation, collecting had always been something of a double-edged sword for Wier, owing to the fact that all accessioning, describing, and organizing of the materials was left to her due to the fact that the Society had no extra funds to pay for an assistant. She complained regularly in correspondence, and in the Biennial Report of the need for even the most basic clerical support that would free her to do this essential work. Toward the end of 1911, it appears that she got her wish in the form of her brother, Adolphus William (Will) Jr., when she convinced the Society’s Executive Council to hire him as assistant curator. The

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69 Jeanne Wier to Talbot, October 11, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-2, Nevada Historical Society Records MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

70 Third Biennial Report, 1911-1912, 17.
University of Michigan law graduate appears to have been between jobs, and Wier, ever dutiful toward her siblings, saw this as the perfect opportunity to help him while helping the Society.\(^{71}\)

It is notable that her brother received a salary (however modest) while she did not. Although there was little in the way of professional training for curators in those days, Will Wier was to prove a great help to her in the upcoming year as they struggled with the construction of the Society’s building on a very modest budget. If the hiring of her brother raised eyebrows, it is not apparent in any surviving correspondence. The *Biennial Report* makes note of an assistant curator but does not identify him as her brother. He unpacked, sorted, and accessioned collections, created a nearly complete inventory of the collections, and assisted with the design and construction of the building.

**Collecting 1912-1914**

In her report to the Executive Council in December 1912, Wier stated that although the collection as a whole had more than doubled in the past two years, their weak point had been in fieldwork. “Neither money nor time has been available for traveling and the most valuable materials can be obtained in no other way…” she observed sadly.\(^{72}\) Wier remained encouraged, however, by the growing number of residents who were interested in either giving or lending the Society “historical relics” that they owned, and who informed the Society about other potential items of interest not in their possession: “In the growth of such personal and public interest lies the hope of our work for the future.”\(^{73}\) She was especially hopeful that the housing of the exhibit

\(^{71}\) Jeanne Wier to George Talbot, November 15, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\(^{72}\) The fiscal report for the biennium 1911-12 showed that only $165.91 had been spent on traveling.

\(^{73}\) *Third Biennial Report, 1911-1912*, 18.
in the new building would make their work better known, and bring “voluntary contributions far exceeding in numbers those of the past.”74

In the absence of sustained fieldwork, however, there were still some collecting successes in 1912. Obtaining additional pioneer memories was always a collecting triumph in Wier’s eyes, as evidenced by her letter to a Mr. Riggs (now residing in Chloride, Arizona) in March which thanked him for his notes: “…they are our most valued possessions and become more so each year as the opportunity to obtain them becomes less…”75 Although in this case the notes were sent in by the individual, Wier had reported that gathering the reminiscences of the pioneers was something that could be accomplished by “the trained worker only.”76

The promise of the new building also added a degree of optimism to her collecting efforts that revealed itself in her correspondence throughout 1912. A letter sent in April thanking Las Vegas pioneer Helen Stewart for the mountain sheep’s head she had sent via Frank Williams (Assemblyman and University Regent from Goodsprings) declared that “[i]t will make a fine exhibit for our new building.”77 In an October plea to Assemblyman H.A. Comins in Ely asking him to solicit funds from the White Pine County delegation, and for him to dictate or write his reminiscences of Nevada, she was brimming with confidence at the materials that were coming to Society unsolicited: “There will be no trouble about ‘filling the building.’ We already have enough to make a good showing and scarcely a day passes that something or other does not come

74 Ibid., 35.

75 Jeanne Wier to Mr. J.L. Riggs, March 22, 1912, box 1, folder 1912-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

76 Third Biennial Report, 1911-1912, 35.

77 Jeanne Wier to Helen Stewart, April 1, 1912, box 1, folder 1912-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
in.”78 Wier showcased her diplomatic side in a November letter to the widow of Mr. Greeley French, who had promised the Society a manuscript he had written about the early Indian wars in Nevada. Sending her heartfelt sympathy, she asked if Mr. French might have some relics or souvenirs of the early days “which might fittingly find a place in our new building.”79

Wier’s sympathetic diplomacy would also serve her well in June 1912 as she dealt with the sudden death of Senator George Nixon, the Society’s Vice-President and one of its most generous benefactors who had supported the organization financially during its darkest hours. The Society’s memorial resolution dated just two days after Nixon’s death on June 5 described his passing as “a serious and irreparable loss.” Fittingly, the resolution stated that “the officers of this Society do extend to the family of Senator Nixon an invitation to place in the archives and museum of the Society such mementoes and records as shall speak to future generations of the worth and work of one of the greatest builders of the Commonwealth of Nevada.”80

Her excitement at the prospect of “filling the building” notwithstanding, the Society’s correspondence for 1912 revealed that little collecting actually took place. As always, Wier’s report to the Executive Council for the Third Biennial Report (1911-12) attempted to provide an explanation for the Society’s shortcomings, and in this case, as in the others, it related to questions of time and money: “We have failed to accumulate data which, because of this our failure, has forever passed beyond our reach” she stated frankly. Wier credited this situation squarely to the Society’s failure to convince the public, “and through the public the Legislature, that this work cannot be carried on unless much valuable time is given to it, and that ‘valuable


79 Jeanne Wier to Mrs. Greeley French, November 15, 1912, box 1, folder 1912-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

80 Third Biennial Report, 1911-1912, 43.
time’ means ‘money.’” In the early years of the Society, the Secretary’s weekend time and
cations had been sufficient to deal with most of the Society’s duties, but as the collections and
work had grown larger and more complex, and her own work at the University made greater
demands upon her time, she acknowledged that “during the College year 1911-12 every energy
was required for the maintenance of this scholastic work.” She also railed against the inadequacy
of the appropriation for that biennium.81

Moving forward to 1913, Wier busied herself with arranging the collections in the new
building to prepare for its opening, even as she accepted new materials for the Society and
prepared for the typical stress of the upcoming Nevada legislative season. She was thrilled to
receive a donation of six boxes of artifacts from Virginia City in early February because, as she
wrote to the donor, the Society had “found it unusually difficult to obtain things from the
Comstock.” As she did with most collection shipments, Wier offered to have the Society pay for
the freight charges to ship the materials from Virginia City to Reno.82 Although this was a
relatively short distance, the logistics and expense of shipping materials across Nevada both
short and long distances was no small matter to the Society. It often meant the difference
between obtaining a valuable collection or letting it sit idle and open to decay in a barn or remote
office or warehouse. For many years, the Southern Pacific Railroad Company generously
provided free transportation for the Secretary (Wier) and free freight shipment for materials
donated to the Society from distant corners of Nevada. It was one of the rare occasions when a
large commercial entity in Nevada saw value in the Society’s work.83

81 Ibid., 34-35.
82 Jeanne Wier to Mr. Conboie, February 3, 1913, box 2, folder 1913, Nevada Historical Society
Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
83 This generosity was made possible, no doubt, by the fact that in 1911, the U.S. Interstate
Commerce Commission had eliminated the infamous “back haul” shipping rates by which the railroads
The cold winter months in Reno were perfectly suited to spending time inside, and Wier made the most of them as she furiously arranged the collections in the new building. Writing to Assemblyman M.M. Gardiner, she noted that “the first floor is full to overflowing and when the Governor’s portraits are in place the walls also will be covered while many things are rolled up and put away for lack of room for exhibition.” With the Nevada legislature in session, it was a critical time for the Society, and Wier hoped that there would be “no hesitation…in giving us the necessary furnishings and assistance to enable us to open this building to the public and especially the school children.”

Despite Wier’s pleas in the Biennial Reports, which included a dutiful accounting of the Society’s accomplishments, and a rather more impassioned listing of the Society’s future financial and staffing needs, the Nevada State legislature as a whole remained unmoved. Even personal lobbying by Wier and Talbot did little to change the financial situation, and funding remained static, with the legislature of 1913 appropriating only $5000 for the biennium. With the Society’s money situation dim, it must have pained Wier to turn down an offer of assistance from a highly qualified applicant. Mrs. E.P. Laughlin, who had founded a historical society in New York, had recently moved to Carson City, and read about the Society’s appropriation and the building in the local paper. In response to Mrs. Laughlin’s inquiry about employment opportunities in late March, Wier wrote that there was no hope to take her on as an employee,

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84 Jeanne Wier to M.M. Gardiner, March 14, 1914, box 2, folder 1914-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

85 There was little room for extras. For instance, the transfer of the Pioneer Cabinet (a collection of early Nevada artifacts gathered by the Pacific Coast Pioneers) to the Society in 1915 led the legislature to appropriate a mere $125 in additional funding.
but that she would keep her application on file. As the *Biennial Report* for 1913-16 showed that her brother was no longer employed by the Society, it is not clear why Wier chose to turn down Mrs. Laughlin.

Burdened by her duties at the University, Wier sometimes failed to obtain desired artifacts or even worse, pioneer memories. As time was of the essence when gathering the recollections of aging pioneers, Wier was consumed with regret when any of these men or women passed away before she could solicit their stories. To the father of Mrs. I.G. Sharpe who had written a manuscript of his adventures, Wier noted sadly, “I cannot tell you how I regret that I did not learn more from him while he lived but my duties here have been so multitudinous that the pioneers have suffered at my hands.” Her sadness was compounded by that fact that the gentleman in question had been “…one of my best friends in the work.”

Such failures were balanced by numerous other collecting successes, some of which would have been typical of other western historical societies. An oxen yoke, symbol of the era when haggard settlers dragged oxen and cows across Nevada’s Great Basin into California, was donated to the Society from C. Gelling of the Reno Mill & Lumber Co. in late August. Notably, the donor was a business owner who was aware of the Society’s work, and who remarked in his letter to Wier that “this might offer something to your already valuable collection.” Donations such as this showed the small but potent impact that the Society had made in the local area. Still others came from further afield, and showed the wide-ranging nature of typical historical societies of that era which gathered books, documents, artifacts, and natural history specimens.

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86 Jeanne Wier to Mrs. E.P. Laughlin, March 13, 1913, box 2, folder 1913, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

87 Jeanne Wier to Mrs. I.G. Sharpe, April 11, 1913, box 2, folder 1913, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

88 C. Gelling to Jeanne Wier, August 28, 1913 and August 30, 1913, box 2, folder 1913, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
Such was the case with the two lemons presented to the Society in November by Mrs. J.D. Campbell of Pioche in southern Nevada—a donation meant to showcase the successful cultivation of citrus fruit in the desert soil of this region. If Wier was ever daunted by the varied nature of the donations, it never showed in her gracious replies to donors. In a letter of thanks to Mrs. Campbell she remarked that she would preserve the two lemons in liquor and display them in the new building. It was nearly full, of course, but “we are always glad to find a place for new things.”

Eccentric donations of live items such as lemons were something of a rarity, however, and Wier was generally much keener to find a place for more standard library items such as old Nevada newspapers. From the earliest days of the Society, Wier had valued newspapers for their rich historical content on Nevada’s transitory mining towns. Yet it was the same transitory nature of these towns that led her to approach their collection with such urgency. In a November 11 letter to Assemblyman Walter E. Pratt of Goldfield, the central Nevada boomtown, Wier requested files of the old Goldfield papers, declaring “I am anxious to secure the files before a fire destroys them as it so often does in the mining towns.” Corresponding with a legislator for whatever reason also offered the savvy Wier an opportunity to promote the Society’s work and to extend an invitation to visit the new building.

With the official opening of the building in summer 1913, Wier and the Society were justifiably proud to have a showcase for the collections and a means to inspire public confidence in their mission. Unfortunately, as public confidence had not translated into greater public financing in the 1913 legislative session, the Society was typically short of money for collecting

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89 Jeanne Wier to Mrs. J.D. Campbell, November 9, 1913, box 2, folder 1913, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

90 Jeanne Wier to Walter E. Pratt, November 11, 1913, box 2, folder 1913, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
trips throughout the biennium. Yet with 1914 marking the fiftieth anniversary of Nevada’s statehood, there was the advantage of a celebratory year to promote a sense of pride in the state’s history among its residents, and inspire them to donate historical documents and artifacts to the Society. As Wier was determined to use the anniversary to promote the Society’s work, much of her time this year was spent in planning the historical pageants designed to highlight the history of the state, and less was devoted to collecting activities.

The most prized addition to the Society in this anniversary year was the donation of a common article that had become a highly symbolic artifact of the state’s earliest days and its role in supporting the Union cause: the Gridley sack of flour. Named for Austin, Nevada, merchant Reule Gridley, who had originally carried the 50 lb. sack of flour on his back throughout the town after losing a bet, it was later auctioned repeatedly on behalf of the Sanitary Commission (precursor to the Red Cross) throughout Nevada in 1864, and had raised large sums of money for the Commission. Although such an artifact might have little research value, it was a highly appealing and patriotic acquisition during this anniversary year, and Wier was supported in this endeavor by Society President Talbot, and many other political figures. Governor Oddie offered his support declaring that “this famous relic of war times was a product of Nevada patriotism and should be preserved among its historical treasures.”

Beginning in June, Wier repeatedly contacted the sack’s owner in hopes of securing it for the Society, and by the time of the historical pageant in October, it had been donated to the Society by Gridley’s daughter, Mrs. Josephine Wood. Wier described the donation in the Biennial Report as “a treasure for which

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91 Tasker Odie to Jeanne Wier, June 8, 1914, box 2, folder 1914-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
more than one city in California had bid in vain and which the Smithsonian Institution in Washington would have been proud to receive."

Collecting triumphs such as this were offset by Wier’s frustration at losing valuable Nevada artifacts to California institutions. With funds for collecting trips constantly in short supply, it is not surprising that the Society might be bested by other institutions with more money and more manpower to scour the state. To the editor of the Virginia City Chronicle on August 27, Wier wrote of her distress in reading in the Nevada State Journal that the curator of the Golden Gate Park Museum had been in Virginia City gathering historical relics that he planned to add to his collection and exhibit at the Panama Pacific Exposition. She was forthright in her objection: “Please let me call to your attention that if those relics go out of the state they are permanently lost to us in Nevada.” She encouraged him to convey this information to the residents of Virginia City and neighboring Gold Hill, emphasizing that the Society “must use every effort to prevent the loss of single copies of originals.”

Enthusiastic citizens who were motivated by pride in their state’s history to donate items also encouraged others to place their artifacts with the Society, thereby aiding Wier in her collecting efforts. One such advocate was Herman Davis, described in Wren’s History of Nevada as “one of Nevada’s most prominent mining men” for his extensive Nevada mining holdings and the patents he held for mining extraction methods. In a November 11 letter to Wier, he provided a detailed list of his donation with the provenance of each including such exotic items as a pair of


94 In his presidential address reproduced in the Fourth and Fifth Biennial Report, 1913-1916, Talbot also highlighted this unfortunate trend: “Collectors from other states are taking away valuable materials because Nevada has not provided money for fieldwork necessary to gather them, nor for housing, cataloging or convenient of such as are obtained,” 7.
mountain sheep horns, shoes worn by workman in the drying kilns at the Northern Belle Mine, ox and horse shoes, and prehistoric samples from lake beds near Mina, Nevada. Perhaps more significantly, he noted in this letter the same concern Wier had with Nevada artifacts going out of state: “The University of California have taken many valuable and unequalled specimens from here to their museum and I hope to be able to obtain, this fall and next summer, some valuable finds for the Nevada Historical Society.”95 In another letter to a colleague, Mr. W. Raymond, (copied to Wier) Davis also showed his admiration and confidence in the Society’s work and advised the former about donating a historical firearm: “I have about the largest collection of pistols in the State and have loaned them to the Nevada Historical Society and would suggest you do the same with yours as there is little chance that any one will buy it of you, and it will be appreciated by Miss Jane E. Weir, [sic] who has charge of the Society property.” Describing the Society as possessing “…an already valuable and well cared for collection for the benefit of the State,” Davis advised his colleague to give or loan any other relics or curious he might have to the Society.96 Although public interest in the Society rarely led to huge monetary donations, advocates such as Davis demonstrated Wier’s success in using the Society to promote a wider interest and pride in Nevada’s history. In a letter to Davis the following month, Wier expressed gratitude for his help and that of his colleague, J. Holman Buck (newspaper editor and donor of numerous mineral specimens), noting that “[i]f everyone in the State took one tenth of the

95 Herman Davis to Jeanne Wier, November 11, 1914, box 2, folder 1914-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

96 Herman Davis to W. Raymond, November 13, 1914, box 2, folder 1914-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
interest that you and Mr. Buck do we would be out of all our difficulties and on the road to Heaven.”

The possibility that fire might destroy material that could otherwise be donated to the Society was a constant concern for Wier in the Society’s first decades. Newspapers were one of her main concerns, but old Nevada mining pamphlets were also of concern due to the “frequent fires in Nevada mining towns.” As a result of such a situation, the Society had only a partial collection of these pamphlets, Wier wrote to H.E. Spackman of Washington, DC in December 1914, and none to sell or loan. It must have pained her to refer Spackman to the California State Library in Sacramento, where the well-funded organization had much of this material and many library assistants to copy it for patrons. In some instances, fire was a more immediate and localized concern, such as when Wier discovered the InterHotel in nearby Virginia City had burned in early December 1914. Writing to J.W. Eckley in Virginia City on December 8, Wier asked him to inquire if the hotel’s register “of ancient date” had been saved from the flames, and if so, would he save it for the Society, and indeed anything “pertaining to the olden days.” Not surprisingly, Wier noted that she had been “too busy to go after it.” By the end of the month, it appears that she used her break from the university to explore the ruins of the hotel, as the December 30, 1914 edition of the Reno Evening Gazette reported that Wier had traveled to Virginia City the previous day to seek historical relics for the Society.

97 Jeanne Wier to Sam Davis, December 9, 1914, box 2, folder 1914-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.


100 “Comings and Goings,” Reno Evening Gazette, December 30, 1914.
Collecting 1915-1916

Although Wier was often the first to point out the Society’s collecting failures in the Biennial Reports, she did not take kindly to criticism of the Society’s work. When a January 13, 1915 editorial in the Reno Evening Gazette entitled “Passing of the Pioneers” suggested that the Society do more to obtain the stories of the remaining pioneer Nevadans before they passed, 101 Wier did not let this challenge remained unanswered. She responded with a lengthy letter of her own detailing just how much work the Society had done in the past, and how continual financial struggles from insufficient legislative funding had handicapped them. Throwing down the gauntlet, she declared, “Will the people who want this work done not help us to say to the incoming legislature that we wish them to investigate and see whether it is not possible to provide a way for this service?” 102

As always, Wier asked the Society’s previous donors for their assistance in prompting the legislature to support the society’s funding request. In a letter of thanks to regular donor Herman Davis for another trove of his “splendid stuff” (a large collection of photos of old mills and reduction works from around Nevada as well as Masonic lodges) she asked him to say a kind word to any of the legislators that he might encounter: “All I ask is for them to come and see.” 103 Thanking a Mr. Fisher of Wells, Nevada, for his donation, she wrote that it was “…encouraging to note that so many things are coming to us now unsolicited. This is sure evidence that people are coming to regard us as the natural depository for things they want preserved for all time.”


102 “What the Nevada Historical Society is Doing is Told,” Reno Evening Gazette, January 14, 1915.

Still, she respectfully asked if he could drop a kind word to any members of the legislative delegation that he might see.104

The “people” were not listening, however, as the legislative session of March 1915 brought Wier more of the same—another scant $5000 state appropriation for the biennium which meant once again that there would be little funding available for collecting trips.105 Still, whatever the funding situation, the pursuit of collections was truly the one constant in Wier’s work on behalf of the Society, and by 1915 she could rely on a friendly state press, and a network of historically-minded supporters and friends throughout Nevada who either sent her artifacts and documents directly, or pointed her in the direction of persons who might possess significant historical material. Indeed, much of the Society’s surviving correspondence from this period (1915-1919) reveals Wier’s more passive role in collection building, to the extent that it involved her responding to donation offers, rather than gathering collections through fieldwork. As Wier noted in the Fourth and Fifth Biennial Report, such donations numbered in the hundreds, with the Society’s “comparatively fireproof building” attracting a flood of historical treasures from “…Nevada citizens who are proud to exhibit their relics where all may see and enjoy.”106 Such donations generally focused on Nevada’s rich history but as Wier discovered, many of the materials related to national historical events. Still, she turned nothing away, telling


105 The legislature also appropriated a small additional sum ($125) for the packing and transfer of the Pioneer Cabinet from the State Superintendent of Public Instruction’s office in Carson City. The Cabinet held a small number of objects that had once formed part of the collection of the state’s earliest historical organization, the Society of Pacific Coast Pioneers, founded in Virginia City in 1872. Although the Pioneers’ original building and their collections were destroyed in the massive Comstock fire of 1875, they were later able to rebuild both the hall and the collections. However, with the decline of the Comstock, through the departure or death of the pioneers, the Society was eventually disbanded and its museum collection donated to the State. See Sam P. Davis, “Nevada Historical Society,” in The History of Nevada, (Reno, NV; Los Angeles, CA: The Elms Publishing Co., Inc., 1913), 657.

one donor, “We are making a specialty of Civil War relics because Lincoln was the godfather of this State. In our new building I hope to have a room for these things alone.”

Although collecting trips were generally out of the question because of finances, Wier did take the time and expense to travel to the Bancroft Library in November 1915 to copy manuscripts relating to Nevada history. Although she had frequently traveled to the Bancroft in the past, this was a diplomatic mission of sorts, so much so that no less a figure that Nevada’s Governor, Emmet D. Boyle, made the formal request of curator Frederick Teggart, who also served as an associate professor at the Academy of Pacific Coast History. Teggart was pleased to give his permission, noting that “the resources of this collection are freely at the service of the Nevada Historical Society, and that everything possible will be done to aid and facilitate the work proposed.”

Beyond the relics, documents, and photos of Nevada’s pioneer days, the Society also sought out or received donated material documenting contemporary aspects of the state’s development. One such donation came from Justus E. Taylor, secretary of the Socialist Party of Nevada, who wrote to Wier in February 1916 to tell her how their organization was entering “the most active year of its history” and would “witness a tremendous gain not only in the vote cast but in the general spread of ideas to a higher civic righteousness.”

108 Wier did not provide statistics on the number of Nevada materials at the Bancroft at this time, but clearly it was significant enough to interest her. In 2014, a keyword search of the Online Archive of California returned over seven hundred manuscript and photograph collections with the term “Nevada.”
109 Frederick Teggart to Governor Emmet D. Boyle, October 30, 1915, box 2, folder 1915-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
110 The Socialist Party in Nevada had entered politics in the 1906 election and gone from strength to strength in subsequent elections. In 1915, its leaders John Harriman and C.V. Eggleston founded the Nevada Colony, a socialist cooperative engaged in reclamation and farming, near Fallon in Churchill County. By the 1916 election, the party had polled some 28% of the vote against the Republican and
thoughtfully that it had occurred to him “that possibly the monthly bulletins that will be issued from this office might have some value to you.” Wier was of course grateful to receive any Nevada publications as gifts, but it may have been a sense of political diplomacy that led her not to mention this particular donation in the Biennial Report that she submitted to the state’s Democratic administration in early 1917.

As a college professor, Wier had a genuine interest in shaping young minds that led her to be particularly grateful when she received donations of historical materials from students of any age. They also indicated that her larger message of historical consciousness was filtering down to Nevada’s grammar and high schools. Such was the case with the donation of the Tuscarora newspaper files dating from 1881-1883 that were presented by the students of Elko County High School in late summer 1916. Obviously delighted at the donation, her letter of thanks rejoiced that “the young men and women of Elko County are alive to the worth of such historical documents.” Writing to schoolteacher Miss Brusso near Fort McDermitt on the Nevada-Oregon border, Wier expressed her appreciation for their gifts as the Society had little from that area, and asked her to thank the schoolchildren for their interest in helping to get relics.

Democratic candidates. Incorporated on October 12, 1915, the colony founded the town of Nevada City in 1916, but broke up after 1918 due to numerous pressures, not the least being their continued anti-war stance. Thompson, Nevada Events, 39. See also Wilbur S. Shepperson, Retreat to Nevada: A Socialist Colony of World War I (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1966).

Wier’s own personal interest in the contributions of Indians (the “first Nevadans” as she called them) to the state’s history led her to be particularly receptive to any donations related to the region’s native peoples. Archaeological artifacts from digs throughout Nevada were the most desired types of materials. In the *Fourth and Fifth Biennial Reports*, she noted the donation of an additional 230 artifacts from Humboldt Lake near the guano burial cave excavated in 1910-1911 that included items such as ice picks, rubbing stones, mortars, pestles and arrow points.\(^{115}\) Amateur archaeologists such as Grace Lamb from Death Valley, one of her most regular donors, also regularly sent in Indian artifacts from southern Nevada during this period. In June 1919, a letter from Lamb, now residing in Goldfield, Nevada, was enclosed with arrowheads and pottery found near the Kawieh Range in Nye County.\(^{116}\) Just as she put a high value on the collection of pioneer stories as each year saw more of them pass away, Wier viewed the gathering of such artifacts with an equal urgency as “the mementoes of a vanishing race.”\(^ {117}\)

Because of her various teaching and Society obligations (the pageant foremost among them in fall 1914), Wier was unable to complete the *Biennial Report* before the 1915 legislative session commenced, and she added it to the report in the following biennium. Thus, the report eventually featured information on the donations of the four-year period from 1913-1916. In the early years of the Society, the number of donations was small enough to list in their entirety in the *Biennial Reports*, but they soon grew so numerous that Wier chose instead to highlight the more important ones what might be considered a type of collecting essay in which special mention was made “of a few rare items and collections by way of illustration.” Her descriptions

\(^{115}\) The majority of these were taken by the University of California-sponsored archaeologists who had conducted the excavation. Careful negotiation on Wier’s part led some of them to come back into the Society’s possession over the years.

\(^{116}\) Grace Lamb to Jeanne Wier, June 17, 1919, box 2, folder 1919-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

provide insight into how Wier herself categorized and contextualized the donations and their place among the Society’s existing collections. The obvious focus was on pioneers with donations organized into categories such as “Nevada governors and state house souvenirs,” “educational souvenirs,” “the Comstock,” and “relics of the first Nevadans.” Like most historical societies, the Society received many donations that defied categorization, and which were lumped together under descriptions such as “large general donations.” Other donations were decreed as “things of national importance” if they connected Nevada to “the larger national field of interest.” The Captain Davis Loan Collection (a “motley array of firearms of all sizes,” Indian souvenirs, and “curios from the Orient”) was important enough to warrant a separate mention, as did the Gridley Sanitary Sack of Flour, which was considered “the rarest of all” in Wier’s eyes.  

Such a vast array of donations ranging from artifacts and documents to photographs, paintings, and books obviously made the proper organization and cataloging of the collections a challenging task. Although Wier (with some assistance from her brother at one point) had generally been able to accession collection items as they arrived, and had later organized them for display in the building, she was aware that proper cataloguing of the books in the collection necessitated a trained professional. Turning to her colleagues at the California State Library for recommendations, Wier was able to secure a cataloger, Miss Lillian Burt. In her letter to Burt offering a salary of $100 per month, Wier asked that the Dewey Decimal system be utilized as well as the classification scheme used in the university library. Being somewhat unfamiliar with the nature of the work required, Wier’s request for Burt to catalog some 3000 books in the space

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118 Ibid., 14-20.
of six weeks shocked the young cataloger. She had to gently inform Wier that she “could not catalog 3000 books in six weeks nor in twice that time unless it went quicker than any cataloging I’ve ever seen yet.” How many books Miss Burt eventually cataloged for the Society was not clear, but Wier did note that some progress had been made in the combined Biennial Report. In the section “Work of Arrangement,” she reported with some hope that with the cataloguer’s work “…a beginning has thus been made in reducing the collection to order.” Interestingly, her remarks about the Society’s efforts at arrangement revealed something of her feelings of uncertainty of the situation, “…our effort is concentrated upon the task of marking each exhibit in such a way as to make it self-interpretative to the public and to identify it in event of the sudden removal of the secretary who alone has knowledge of the entire collection.”

This same combined edition of the Biennial Report (1913-1916) contained Wier’s report to the Executive Council, submitted in January 1917 shortly before the start of that year’s legislative session, in which she again requested funds that would help the Society “push the work of collection and arrangement.” As always she attempted to explain the reasons why the money was needed foremost among them “the large traveling expenses” required in a state such as Nevada, and proper staffing that could put a skilled worker in the field soliciting collections and another in Reno managing the Society office. She was particularly concerned that provision be made for emergency circumstances when anthropological and ethnological

122 Ibid. 21.
123 At the conclusion of this report, Wier provided an estimate of the coming biennium’s expenses which totaled $8500 of which nearly half ($4680) was designated to fund salaries for assistants, and $1000 for traveling and “work with ex-Nevadans.” Fourth and Fifth Biennial Report, 1913-1916, 22. She also asked for an additional $5000 that would support the purchase of a lot adjoining the existing building and enable improvements such as the addition of a waterproof basement.
materials were discovered.\textsuperscript{124} Pointing to the sad example of Lovelock in 1911 she noted that the poverty of the Society had led California institutions to take the lead in excavating and taking possession of the Indian artifacts discovered there. As circumstances unique to Nevada such as the continued explorations of mining prospectors, and the construction of future irrigation projects were sure to result in additional accidental anthropological discoveries, Wier felt it essential that provision be in place for these contingencies so that the State not suffer such losses again.\textsuperscript{125}

Although such artifacts were always a priority, another request in the Executive Council report showed Wier’s determination that the Society assemble and make available a comprehensive collection of state publications and documents for “the use of students and business men as well as state officials.”\textsuperscript{126} It was here that she first remarked on the need for the Society to conduct a survey of public historical documents in county, town, and state archives. However, Wier had long considered the preservation of public records a priority. As far back as the \textit{First Biennial Report} covering the years 1907-1908, she had suggested that the state pass a law “providing for the proper care and custody of the public records, including state, county, town, and court records, and for the state supervision of the same.”\textsuperscript{127} She had continued to emphasize this in report after report, appealing to state pride in the \textit{Second Biennial Report}: “The foremost States in the Union either have a system of State supervision of the records or are looking forward to the adoption of such a plan. I earnestly commend this matter to your attention, since in Nevada the conditions for the keeping of the records are more than usually

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 21-22.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 22.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{127} \textit{First Biennial Report, 1907-1908}, 43
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State pride was a factor once again in the *Third Biennial Report*, as Wier pointed to the progress made by numerous eastern and Midwest states in passing such public record laws such as “she had suggested earlier” for Nevada. In that same report, she reminded the readers of Herbert Bolton’s speech the previous May in which he had also emphasized the importance of Nevada securing “an archiving law.” Her requests fell on deaf ears, however, and she continued to repeat her request for a state archiving law, and a statewide survey of public historical documents housed in the state, county, and town archives, over the next three Biennial Reports ending in 1919-1920.

**The Society and Collecting in Wartime**

*For us, as for all educational institutions, the war has been the Dominant feature of the biennium. It has modified all our activities and we in turn have sought to be helpful in achieving the great world purpose.*

The ink had barely dried on that year’s biennial appropriation in March, when war was declared the following month in April 1917. With a membership and an executive board consisting largely of men who were “above the age limit of the draft and even of volunteer service,” there was little chance that the Society would be impacted by any large-scale departures of personnel especially as Wier did the majority of the day-to-day work and collecting. However, wartime conditions affected the Society in other ways. Lack of funds had always handicapped the work of collecting, but the war only aggravated these conditions. Train


131 The Society received far less than the $8500 in general funds they had requested, instead having to make do with $6000, and no additional funds to support the planned expansion of the building. *Sixth Biennial Report, 1917-1918*, 10.

132 *Sixth Biennial Report, 1917-1918*, 5
travel, which had for years been covered by a generous free annual pass from the Southern Pacific Railroad, was effectively quashed when all passes were revoked at the start of the war. Wartime shortages also affected the regular donation of newspapers to the Society, one of the mainstays of its library collection, when the War Industries Board issued a blanket order prohibiting the distribution of free copies and exchanges. The Board later modified their order to account for institutions such as the Society, but not before it had resulted in serious gaps in some of the newspaper collections. Fortunately for Wier, her positive relationships with the state press ensured that some editors continued to donate newspapers “during this period of high prices and scarcity of papers.”

Wier’s collecting essay in the Sixth Biennial Report provides insight into some of the donations of note during the wartime period that managed to enrich the Society during a time when collecting trips were not possible. Foremost among these donations was the Society’s share of the anthropological specimens from the Lovelock Indian Burial Cave that had been excavated, processed and cataloged by a University of California anthropologist at Wier’s request. It was one of the largest donations of the biennium, filling three large cases in the annex storage and containing over 4000 separate exhibits. Beyond this, the donations were concentrated squarely in the pioneer realm and included artifacts that illustrated aspects of the social and material culture of Nevada’s residents in the state’s formative years, as well as mining, its chief industry. From the Mayers-Bangs family of Elko came items of early life in this small but significant town in northeastern Nevada (founded by the east end of the railroad tracks built by the Central Pacific Railroad during the transcontinental railroad days) including furniture from the Elko Depot

133 Ibid., 9.
Hotel, described by Wier as that “famous hostelry” of the 1870s.\textsuperscript{134} Items relating to Comstock history were a constant, and Wier acknowledged the personal efforts of Mrs. Clayton Belknap, another devoted citizen who had spent a month in Virginia City procuring the artifacts. Just east of Reno, a pioneer family from the small town of Fallon offered up items from their homestead, and more importantly an interesting mining artifact in the form of a “ten-pound piece of copper dug from Nevada mines over sixty years ago and smelted by hand before the days of the smelter.”\textsuperscript{135} There were visual materials too, including large oil portraits of important citizens such as Myron C. Lake, founder of Reno, oversize landscapes depicting important scenes in Nevada’s mining history such as the Combination Mill at Belmont, 1864, and “Jim Butler and the Mule Discovering Tonopah.”\textsuperscript{136}

In the library, as noted earlier, the regular transfer of newspapers to the Society had been affected but Wier acknowledged with gratitude “…those editors who have continued to donate newspapers during this period of high prices and scarcity of paper.”\textsuperscript{137} Her desire to fill the library with materials that would enable serious research work in Nevada history was aided by the donation of nearly a complete series of state publications (through the auspices of Nevada’s Secretary of State), and the loan of the large mining library of Society supporter Captain Herman Davis. As always, she aimed to build a comprehensive collection in the library, including materials that would document Nevada’s close relationship with California in its formative

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} Sixth Biennial Report, 1917-1918, 8.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 9.
years. As such, she reported proudly in this report on the growth of “the general Pacific Slope division” through books purchased via second-hand dealers in pioneer history.\(^{139}\)

The *Sixth Biennial Report* captured what Wier viewed as most important to share publicly, but the Society’s correspondence reveals information about her other dealings. Some donations came in surreptitiously. After she had received a Tax Commission envelope with an old document featuring election results from a district within the Nevada Territory, she wrote to F.N. Fletcher in Carson City who worked for the Nevada Tax Commission believing him to be the donor. Humorously, he reported back to Wier that he had found them on top of an old box in the state house, and “thinking the historical library a more suitable place for it, I borrowed it.”\(^{140}\)

Other ongoing donation negotiations in 1917 showed that Wier was concerned with obtaining relics unearthed from a Chinese joss house in Tuscarora in Elko County the previous year.\(^{141}\) Later that year, another donor offered to contribute a piece of a “Chinese Mandarin candlestick,” which had been dug out of the ground in the Pine Nut Mountains in Storey County in the Great Basin.\(^{142}\) How much she knew about the Chinese and their contributions to

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\(^{138}\) Wier’s focus on collecting California materials was ironic in light of this letter from DeWitt and Snelling Books in Oakland, specialists in Western Americana and Californiana. They often sold Wier books for the Society’s library, and in a letter to her in June 1918 they expressed regret that they had “no such organization as yours here in California.” Jeanne Wier to DeWitt and Snelling Booksellers, June 19, 1918, box 2, folder 1918, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\(^{139}\) *Sixth Biennial Report, 1917-1918*, 9.

\(^{140}\) F.N. Fletcher to Jeanne Wier, March 26, 1918, box 2, folder 1918, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\(^{141}\) Charles E. Mayer to Jeanne Wier, January 4, 1917, box 2, folder 1917, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada. Tuscarora had once been a vibrant area for silver mining in the 1870s and had attracted hundreds of Chinese who had been formerly employed on constructing the Central Pacific Railroad who then worked at placer mining.

\(^{142}\) Starke to Jeanne Wier, July 24, 1917, box 2, folder 1917, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
Nevada’s development is not clear, but all artifacts were game in her eyes if they provided documentation of the history of a particular region of the state.

It was not only a lack of Society funding that kept her from her collecting trips during this time. Wier struggled to balance her teaching and Society duties with the need to care for her elderly parents, who had moved to Reno in the 1910s, especially her father, who grew increasingly frail toward the end of 1917. Writing to donor and friend Mrs. Fannie Mayers-Bangs of Elko on August 8, she noted regretfully that she had been trying to travel there throughout the summer months “…but have not been outside of Reno for a day all summer. Besides the work that keeps me I have my father and mother with me and father is so feeble that I am afraid to leave him even for a day.” Still, such long periods at home during the less hectic summer months left with her more time to supervise the work of an assistant in arranging the collections: “…I am slowly bringing order out of chaos in the work here and that is something.” Writing of the upcoming academic year, Wier sounded almost hopeful, noting that her old assistant was coming back and “that will mean much relief during the College year, so you see God is good to me after all.”

The year 1918 thus began on a sad note with Wier mourning the loss of her beloved father, who had died just before Christmas on December 19 after a lingering illness. The war was in full swing and there was little to bring cheer in those cold winter months. Correspondence shows that collecting efforts were minimal this year, although there was a growing interest in materials that would document the war. Wier was determined to receive the free newspapers due to the society, and wrote to the War Industries board requesting a copy of the government ruling by which institutions like the NHS were permitted to receive newspapers free for filing and

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binding. Acquisitions that year included typical Comstock artifacts and other mining documents including an old stock certificate from the Sutro Tunel, as well as stock certificates of the Universal Mining Improvement Company of Goldfield NV. The donation of an “old Indian curiosity” — a mortar and pestle — was welcomed by Wier in November, but she was most likely more excited to be reminded of the magnificent basket collection of her old friend from Las Vegas, Helen Stewart. Rita Breeze of Las Vegas breathlessly wrote her of this “wonderful collection of Indian relics…” and noted how Stewart’s knowledge of Indian craft is most remarkable.” It was the beginning of a lengthy correspondence stretching over several years that focused on how they might obtain the valuable basket collection for the Society.

A rather more poignant donation was made by Edwin F. Faber, who had crafted much of the equipment and furniture in the Society’s building just prior to enlisting from Canada before the United States entered the war. Mindful of the Society’s collecting efforts, he had sent in a German helmet, cap, and numerous military buttons to Wier with the message “that if he ever returned he would properly record their history.” He would never realize this promise, sadly, as he was killed in France in the summer of 1918.

**Crafting a History of the War**

Documenting the lives of men such as Faber, Nevadans who had fought for their country, was only one part of the Wier’s larger plan to comprehensively collect the history of the war for the Society. She was determined that the Society’s contribution to the war effort would be to “preserve a faithful account of the war with a particular reference to the activities of our own

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144 A.E. Mayer to Jeanne Wier, October 14, 1918, box 2, folder 1918, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
145 Rita Breeze to Jeanne Wier, November 18, 1918, box 2, folder 1918, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
146 *Sixth Biennial Report, 1917-1918*, 5
Commonwealth.”" After a few initial collecting forays made during summer 1918, Wier realized that a “systematic and widespread effort” was necessary, and began to approach the task of collecting the state’s war history as if were a military operation itself, devising a plan for “finetooth-combing the State to obtain all the data pertaining to Nevada’s part in the war.” It was an ambitious plan, calling for a large-scale comprehensive collecting effort that involved the formation of a Nevada War History Committee and local county committees, along with numerous workers engaged to do the work throughout the state. She had written a pamphlet containing directions for these workers, which she intended to distribute widely once the legislature provided the requisite funding for its printing and general support for the plan itself.

The list of information needed and materials to be collected was as ambitious as the plan itself. As described by Wier in the Sixth Biennial Report, it was to be “not only that pertaining to military and official service” but also “that great host of activities which has contributed in this country toward the winning of the war.” They would form complete lists of every Nevada resident in the service, and gather photographs and elaborate collections of newspaper files detailing war activities as varied as Council of Defense work, arrests of enemy aliens and suspects, wartime industrial and labor conditions and patriotic celebrations. As with her obsessive desire to collect pioneer histories, Wier appeared to show a preference for the first-hand reports to be gathered from the various wartime organizations as the newspapers, pictures, and broadsides collected were considered to be “illustrative and supplemental only.” Wier had great plans for the data once it had been gathered in “scientific form.” It would be arranged to

147 Ibid., 5-6.
148 Ibid., 6.
serve as an immediate reference on the war, but also as a means to aid future historians who might want to write a history of the war efforts in Nevada.  

Post-War Challenges

There was undoubtedly a cloud of sadness that lingered over Wier throughout 1918 as she recovered from the death of her father, and war-related activities added a constant source of tension to everyday life. Another national calamity hit in October 1918, just before the end of the war, when the Spanish influenza epidemic that had spread throughout the United States reached Nevada. Institutions such as churches, schools, and movie theaters were closed, and public meetings postponed or cancelled by public health officials to prevent the spread of the disease. As a public institution, the Society was also affected, and in the 1917-1918 Biennial Report submitted in January 1919, Wier noted, “[a]t present, and until the plague has entirely passed, the general public is not urged to visit the building, but by special arrangement the rooms are opened when occasion requires.” Weir was never one to enjoy robust health even in the best of times, and numerous letters in the Society’s correspondence files from 1919 indicate that she was ill with influenza for most of January.

Wier’s busy schedule at the end of 1918 led to a much shortened Biennial Report, and the recommendations to the Executive Council that typically concluded the report were much more succinct. Once again she pressed for more funding to support the collecting of pioneer history: “If ever this State is to be generous in the support of this work, such generosity should come now before the opportunities are gone forever.” She also requested funds to support the collecting of war history she had detailed earlier in the report: “Not only as a matter of pride for Nevadans,  

149 Ibid., 6.
150 Elliott, History of Nevada, 258.
but as much that we may keep step with the other States of the Union and contribute our part to the federal history of the war…” She noted, with obvious frustration, that it was “needless to recount” her usual request for monies to fund more space and more assistance. Her weariness at submitting yet another budget request to the state is palpable here: “Yet while historical consciousness in evolving in this State, we seek to be patient in waiting for the coming of the financial assistance which is essential to final achievement.”¹⁵² Wier concluded this Biennial Report with yet another appeal to state pride, in the hopes that it might jar the legislature into action: “A study of the activities of other States will lead to the same conclusion. Our sister States are today spending many thousands each on the matter of war history alone. Shall Nevada, who justly points with pride to her war record, allow that record to be lost to future generations because of a mistaken economy now at this critical period?”¹⁵³

¹⁵² For the coming biennium (1919-1920), she submitted a budget requesting $10,000 for regular expenses, and $3000 for the collection of war history. Sixth Biennial Report, 1917-1918, 11.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 11-13.
CHAPTER 7:
OUTREACH: CRAFTING A PUBLIC ROLE FOR THE SOCIETY: 1910-1918

To gather the data from Pioneers, to record the conduct of public
affairs as also of the social and economic conditions of the early
days and at the same time to awaken an historic consciousness
throughout the state is no easy task.¹

Wier’s correspondence and her remarks in the Biennial Reports show that she was clearly challenged by the constant need to balance her University duties with her work for the Society. And such was the nature of her work on behalf of the Society—soliciting collections and pioneer memories, obtaining funding, writing and editing historical papers, answering reference queries, organizing meetings and lectures, and tending to regular administrative work—that it also pulled Wier into multiple and conflicting directions. Yet however much Wier fretted about the double burden of her University and Society duties in apologetic thank you letters to donors, and belated responses to reference queries on Nevada history, she also succeeded in her almost superhuman efforts to promote the Society’s work to the public. Her outreach efforts in these early years included organizing public lectures and historical pageants, publishing speeches and collections of historical papers, and of course, serving as a bureau of information for queries on Nevada history. Wier was also successful in establishing a friendly relationship with the state’s press, who never failed to mention the Society in a positive vein in their respective newspapers.

Speeches of Significance

In 1905, Wier had provided her first in-depth public lecture on the mission of the state historical society before a local audience—the Nevada Academy of Sciences. Although

passionate in her advocacy of preserving the State’s history, she had, at the time, little experience with the practicalities of the work involved. By 1910, another five years of experience under her belt led her to present a more finely-tuned lecture on the challenges of the work facing western state historical societies in a much more public forum before the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association (PCBAHA). As Wier thought of herself, first and foremost, as a professional historian, she regularly attended the meetings of the PCBAHA and viewed it as one of her most important professional obligations.

If Wier’s illness and her recovery had affected her contributions to the Society throughout 1910, her lecture at the annual meeting of the PCBAHA at the University of California on November 19 was the highlight of her year, outlining the characteristics of the western states and how their historical societies remained far behind as institutions and in their collecting activities in comparison to those in the East and the Midwest. By illustrating the common challenges of the Western historical societies using Nevada as an example, Wier made a plea for these societies to work together in a united front for future funding. It was an important meeting for Wier, and prior to leaving, she remarked to Reno newspaper editor Mr. Gladwin that she would be meeting with “the prominent workers of the other historical societies of the coast” and would have something to tell him on her return.

The Reno Evening Gazette

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2 Wier’s address was the first paper presented as part of the meeting’s panel session on Pacific Coast History. It was followed by the “The Attitude of Congress Toward the Pacific Railway, 1848-1862” by Professor A.M. Kline of the University of the Pacific, and “Oregon Pioneers and American Diplomacy” by Professor Joseph Schafer of the University of Oregon. Program, Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association, Seventh Annual Meeting, University of California, November 18 and 19, 1910, box 5, folder 31, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

reported (no doubt with a bit of prodding from Wier) just prior to her departure for the meeting at
Berkeley that:

The foremost matter to come before this session is to be a united action toward
the enlistment of the legislatures of each state in the great value of the historical
work of each, and a petition to them to make adequate appropriation to the work
that better facilities may be conducted in the gathering of material, which in after
years will be priceless to the state with which such is connected.**

One can see Wier’s voice in such a statement for sure, but it was the paper alone that pronounced
her as “one of the most enthusiastic and faithful workers in the interest of the preservation of
state relics and data, in the west, and in whose persistent efforts the Nevada society owes
practically all that it is today…” It was heady praise to be sure, but truthful in all respects, and in
it, one could see Wier’s efforts to start the groundwork to gain the adequate legislative support to
pass the appropriations bill the following spring.

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**“Miss Wier to Be Present at Session,” Reno Evening Gazette, November 16, 1910.
“The Work of the Western State Historical Society as Illustrated by Nevada”

Her people are not less gritty and strong and resourceful than the sagebrush which covers her plains and her mountains.  

Wier’s speech is an interesting snapshot of the western state historical society in the early twentieth century. At a time when some of the most revered eastern historical societies had passed the centennial mark, and many of the midwestern societies were leaving their antiquarian origins behind and transforming into professionally-run institutions, Wier laid bare the struggles

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of the western historical societies that were still in their formative years, as exemplified by Nevada. She classified American historical societies into three groups: the ones east of the Alleghenies, which were supported for the most part by large private endowments and gifts; those in the Mississippi Valley that were state-supported “in sentiment and money alike;” and lastly, those of the Pacific slope which she described as “seeking State support, but for the most part not as yet on very solid ground.” Nevada fell into the third category, of course, and if not an “average representative,” Wier nevertheless admitted to choosing it as an example not only because she was familiar with its work, but more significantly because of her feeling that western conditions were exaggerated in Nevada, and the “difficulties of western historical work are here most clearly to be seen and appreciated.”

Wier acknowledged that all state and local historical societies were similar in their mission to collect and preserve historical data, and publish materials related to their collections. Furthermore, all had to overcome various obstacles in their early years, as they were “regarded at first as a luxury rather than a necessity.” The similarity ended here, however, and she argued that there were significant differences in both the manuscripts and artifacts available for historical research and the facilities for handling these materials. In the West, for instance, the materials for historical research or data, as she preferred to call them, were challenged in “quantity, quality and location.”

Not surprisingly, there were fewer materials to collect due to both the relative youth of the western region when compared to the East and the Midwest, and because of the “migratory habits” of its people. Nevada was an extreme example of this phenomenon, she explained, with

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6 Ibid., 201.
7 Ibid., 202.
8 Ibid.
its records lost in mining camps that were frequently destroyed by fire or simply abandoned for the next great bonanza.\footnote{Ibid.}

In addition, in some of the smaller camps, there were no printing presses to record events in newspapers, and in others, not even a manuscript record had survived. Wier revealed here her disgust with the materialism that characterized the typical mining camp, noting cynically that “even in those more populous camps where papers spring up like mushrooms in the night, two or three at a time, even here the spirit of gain so overshadows the life of the community that its real history is seldom written or preserved.” Noting that little formal history existed in the state, she also directed her disdain toward the volumes that passed as Nevada history at that time, primarily mug books, which she described as schemes “to drag from the successful miner a goodly portion of his hoard of gold in return for a page of type and a full-page portrait of himself.”\footnote{Ibid., 203.}

With regard to the quality of the existing sources, she pointed out that while newspapers were a “proverbially unreliable source of historical knowledge,” the West was “totally dependent” upon them as well as travel books written by casual tourists. Publications such as magazines, which she considered to be more stable, were also neglected in states like Nevada where “mining pays better than literature.” Reflecting the nature of a scholar who had been trained in the scientific method of historical research, Wier pronounced the quality of “our western history” as compromised by the fact that much of it had been “written to sell.”\footnote{Ibid., 203-204.}

Beyond the low quality and the quantity of the State’s historical materials, Wier’s speech also pointed to the challenges regarding the location of these materials. In the East, there were numerous locales where such materials had long been collected or even several within a single
state, and in the central states, although collecting efforts were more recent, were nonetheless successful. In the West, similar collecting work had also been done in California,\(^{12}\) but in Nevada, as she had discovered, “the materials are still scattered far afield.” Comparing her journeys under “burning desert sun and midst winter snow” to the explorers of old during the Italian Renaissance who sought out antiquities, she consoled herself that they spared neither trouble nor expense, enduring winter cold, snow, length of journey and rough roads in search of these treasures.\(^{13}\)

Carrying the Renaissance analogy even further, Wier noted that the East had passed through the first stage of its renaissance – passionate desire, and then its second - that of collection and arrangement and the foundation of libraries, and was now comfortably ensconced in its third age characterized by the critical use of these materials and the creation of societies for critical study. The West, she felt, was only entering the first stage of this renaissance.\(^{14}\)

Even California, which Wier held up as the most advanced of the western states in its collecting efforts, was deficient in collections relating to Nevada, her neighbor to the east in which so much of California’s own history was intertwined: “What became of the manuscripts so carefully collected by Mr. Bancroft’s agents in Nevada we may perchance never know.”\(^{15}\) On behalf of the Society, she was thus determined to collect and/or duplicate those materials relating to the history of Nevada that California had seemingly lost.

\(^{12}\) She is clearly referring to the Bancroft Library here, as the California Historical Society was not a viable organization until 1922 despite several attempts from 1852 onward to hold regular meetings and gain state support. See Henry Byron Phillips, “California Historical Society, 1852-1922,” in California Historical Society Quarterly 1, No.1 (1922): 9-22.

\(^{13}\) Wier, “Work of the Western State Historical Society,” 204.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 205.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
Having established the deficiencies in quantity, quality and location, Wier then pointed to a second great difference between the societies of East and West—the means available to handle these historical materials—which she defined as the “equipment for gathering, housing, cataloguing, and making available the data and at the same time creating a sentiment for their critical use.” Here she claimed that the physical differences between the compactness of the East and the vast expanse of the West, as well as the differences between the agricultural, commercial, and manufacturing population of the former compared with the migratory one of the “diggings” and camps of the latter had profoundly affected the development of public institutions. Even more significantly, in Wier’s opinion, such conditions and the isolated nature of Western settlement meant that social consciousness was slow to mature. As a result, support for something as impractical as a historical society was not likely to be strong.\(^{16}\)

Ultimately, the West was still in what she characterized as an “era of struggle.” Unlike in the East, where the historical societies had passed through their days of struggle, pioneers now supported historical work, and a “distinctly literary and leisure class furnished leadership,” or even the Midwest, which had also passed through its time of struggle while social consciousness was forming, and where a state like Wisconsin now sported a $600,000 building for its historical society, the West remained challenged by its transitory and scattered population. The situation was critical in Nevada as the most successful pioneers had departed with their wealth, and others were scattered across the state or in neighboring states like California. Younger residents of the state were too busy with work to care. She concluded sadly that “[a]s a community, therefore we have not reached a stage where we conceive of historical work as a natural and necessity activity, either of the State or of the locality.” Nevada lacked both the large private endowments provided

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 205-206.
to societies in the East, and the generous state support given to those in the central region. Even as a state institution it had been left to “private charity.” Although the aid of individuals had kept the Society alive, “at what a sacrifice of historical data only those at the wheel may guess.” The precarious funding situation in the West made collecting efforts even more critical: “This work must be done now or never.”

After identifying the challenges faced by the western historical society, the final portion of Wier’s speech was something of a call-to-arms for these societies on how to inspire their respective states in another important, yet intangible, task: creating a historical consciousness. It was not the first time she had used the phrase in a speech, and as on previous occasions, she asserted that to develop a true interest in the past, the historical society also had to pay attention to the present. It was essential that residents of a State perceive it not as an artificial creation, but as a “real organic thing…something whose past history is precious because it has led to the present.” If less heavy-handed than in previous speeches, Wier nevertheless made the case for history’s role in promoting a particular type of behavior, with the historical society as the mechanism by which citizens were rendered capable of understanding the present. Its very existence would ensure that “the present generation will have greater wisdom of decision and greater sanity of action.”

Although she clearly felt that these bold actions were essential, Wier also spoke of the need for caution in carrying out said activities. The historical society had to tread carefully in securing the public’s support so that its actions would not be misinterpreted. Financially, it must prove that it is not “a mere scheme for the exploitation of State revenues.” Wise leadership was a must to develop confidence and trust and “it must transform what seems like private or personal

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17 Ibid., 206.
18 Ibid., 206-207.
interests into public policies.” Continuing on with her prescriptive words, Wier asserted that the historical society had to maintain a difficult balancing act in that it had to “keep out of politics, yet remain dependent upon politicians” as its connection with the State was “of the very essence of its life.” Thus, even as it sought out resources to further fund its activities, “it must, without regular funds, cover that field and show by example what may be accomplished in the future.”

This may have not been Wier’s wisest decision as her success in running the Society without a salary or a proper administrative stipend may have made it less likely for the legislature to grant the funding she desired.

The West proved even more problematic in this area. As an example, she pointed to her frustrating encounters with Nevada legislators, who had no problems with supporting scientific research but who failed to see the importance of devoting even the tiniest percentage of state income to support historical work, or others who thought that the funding would not be needed for collecting work after a few years. The challenge here was the “creation of historical consciousness which shall demand that present history shall be recorded as well as the past recovered.” Wier felt that the western states were in various stages of historical consciousness. California, with its large universities, was highly advanced in this area. Other states were not so fortunate, and she was surely describing Nevada when she characterized other sections as having universities that were “poor and unable to divide their attention and resources between scientific and historical research.”

Yet however evolved any of the Western states were in developing a historical consciousness, Wier acknowledged that they all had work to do in this area, and in collecting and preserving historical data as well. To this end, she argued that it was imperative for the Societies

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19 Ibid., 207.
20 Ibid.
to help each other in this work, and emphasized the need for unity in the future. Although not proposing a general repository for materials, Wier suggested that the Societies should have in common “a united purpose to use our mutual influence to aid in lessening the difficulties of our individual work.” Once these state collections had been “made and interpreted” by the historical workers of their respective states, she proposed that it was then the function of the Pacific Coast Branch to analyze these interpretations and develop a history that would characterize the coast as a whole. Her focus here was less on the idea of the collections serving as historical archives for their individual states, but rather as a source material for the members of the Pacific Coast Branch in interpreting the West to the East. One sees in all of Wier’s speeches, over and above any description of collecting difficulties in the Western states, a preoccupation with demonstrating just how very different the West was from the East: “to convey to the East as well some sense of the difficulties of our field and its richness alike.”

Despite the negative rhetoric, Wier claimed in her closing paragraph that she felt that there was still hope for Nevada: “Her people are not less gritty and strong and resourceful than the sagebrush which covers her plains and her mountains.” She described recent developments in the state that indicated the growth of more stable conditions and an increased social consciousness such as anti-gambling and electoral laws designed to reduce corruption, as well as the establishment of more permanent industries in conjunction with mining that might induce a less transient population. Ultimately, with such continued progress, Wier declared her hope that Nevada “may yet send her apostles to enrich other fields as in times past she has sent her bullion to build San Franciscos and New Yorks.”

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21 Ibid., 207-208.
22 Ibid., 208.
According to the Society’s second biennial report, Wier’s speech resulted in the PCBAHA adopting several resolutions regarding “the preservation and interpretation of the records of the Pacific Slope history” and a recognition of the importance of both pioneer and current records as well as the difficulty of collecting work in the West. Ultimately the branch resolved to urge the governors and legislatures of the various states of the Pacific Slope to give “serious consideration to the problems of such of their institutions as may be seeking to make such collections, to mark historic sites, or in other ways to record in permanent form the history of the past and of the present.”

Although the reason for Wier’s trip to Berkeley had been published in the *Reno Evening Gazette* prior to her departure, there was no mention of the speech on her return. The records of the Nevada Historical Society do not contain correspondence that reference Wier’s feelings about the speech or its impact, but certainly the legislature’s $5000 appropriation for the Society in 1911 meant that some state officials had recognized the importance of its work. Unlike Wier’s 1905 speech on the Society’s mission, this speech was not reprinted in the local newspapers, but perhaps more significantly, after its publication in the proceedings of the PCBAHA, the resulting off-print was made available for sale or exchange by Wier to other historical societies. She herself quoted from the speech in later biennial reports when in search of the words that might jolt the legislature into action.

*Herbert Bolton and “The Obligation of Nevada Toward the Writing of Her Own History”*

> If you want this work well done, do it yourself. When you have done it, then will Nevada, like Texas and the Middle West, historically come into its own.

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Beyond Wier’s two early speeches, the majority of lectures made on behalf of the Society were hardly memorable. Most were presented at the Society’s annual meetings, which typically took place in May. Consisting of musical selections and refreshments, announcements from Wier on the Society’s activities, short speeches, remarks and/or poetry readings from local residents, each meeting concluded with a featured lecture by an invited speaker on a historically-themed topic. Prior to the construction of the building, these social gatherings served as the primary means by which the organization was able to interact with its members and provided a haven for Reno residents starved for culture in a community scarcely out of its frontier era. The notoriety of these speakers has generally faded with time, as has the content of their lectures, with the exception of the May 1912 speech of one historian which was not only published by the local paper, but quoted repeatedly by Wier years afterward as she sought to promote the Society’s mission. Even in the early twenty-first century, Herbert Bolton’s speech on the “The Obligation of Nevada Toward the Writing of Her Own History” still proves relevant to those studying Nevada history, and it was reprinted in an issue of the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* as recently as 2007.26

Although Bolton was not yet a member of the faculty at Stanford when Wier completed her studies there in 1901, she had remained in close contact with the history department, and it is likely that she had met Bolton on subsequent visits or through their joint service on the Council of the PCBAHA. Certainly by 1910 she had been knowledgeable enough about his work to propose him as a dissertation advisor and had been left sadly disappointed when his departure for Berkeley made her studies untenable. A student of Frederick Jackson Turner, Bolton had achieved a degree of fame as a historian by 1912, but had not yet reached the pinnacle of his

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status in the historical profession. After leaving Stanford for the University of California in 1911, he attained his greatest prominence as a western historian with his studies on the Spanish Borderlands, and later as chair of the history department and director of the Bancroft Library. With his pioneering work in Mexican archives and writings on Texas history, he was an ideal choice to discuss the importance of archives and the significance of collecting and studying regional history. Wier was pleased to finally secure Bolton for this lecture, as she had been sadly disappointed when prior commitments kept him from making a planned speech at the Society’s annual meeting in 1910. Wier was fortunate that one of her former students, Beulah Hershiser (daughter of the Society’s treasurer, Dr. A.E. Hershiser) was doing graduate work under Bolton at the time and could make the request. “I know that he is busy but this is good missionary work,” Wier said succinctly in a letter of instruction to her former pupil on how to make this request of her professor.27

Bolton took the “missionary” nature of his address seriously, and queried his host as to the type of lecture he should present.28 In an April 29 letter to Wier, he asked her whether a “scholarly address” on a broad topic in Western history or a paper “designed to show the importance of the work of historical societies, not unscholarly, but less technical and academic than the other” would be preferable. Thoughtfully, Bolton asked for hints that would enable him to give Wier “more direct help that I otherwise could give.” Beyond the “general work of the historical society,” he was eager to promote any special policies or special organizations for

27 Jeanne Wier to Beulah Hershiser, April 4, 1912, box 1, folder 1912-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

While Bolton was her first choice, Wier was primarily interested in obtaining a professor who was a good public speaker, and felt that as a graduate student, Hershiser would be able to locate one at the University of California.

28 Although a copy of this speech can be found in Bolton’s papers at the Bancroft Library, there were no additional notes or drafts in the folder.
Wier. In her reply, Wier suggested that for the “kind of audience” he would have, the second topic would be best, and offered to show Bolton some of the Society’s work so that he could understand where emphasis was needed. If he could demonstrate the importance of the Society’s work and “its connection with that of other sections so as to help create public sentiment in favor of the moral and financial support of the work,” this would aid them the most and be of the most interest to the public in her opinion.

Bolton’s address showed that he took seriously Wier’s suggestions by writing a prescriptive lecture that emphasized the importance of “arousing historic consciousness” and the responsibility of each region for writing its own history. Beginning his address with the admonition “patriotism, like charity, should be begin at home,” Bolton connected individual self-respect to family pride—”pride in the worth and works of our ancestors.” He provided his own definition of historic consciousness, and declared, “an essential element of civic pride is pride and interest in our community’s past. This is historic consciousness.”

Perhaps unbeknownst to his audience, Bolton wove together his admonitions with a dose of historiography to illustrate his theme of the importance of regional history. He pointed out that New Englanders had written much of the history of the United States, and thus explained the neglect of the West in how they presented the story of the nation’s origins. “To them the West, new and crude, was interesting perhaps as the home of desperadoes and queer people, but

29 Herbert Bolton to Jeanne Wier, April 29, 1912, box 1, folder 1912-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

30 Jeanne Wier to Herbert Bolton, May 6, 1912, box 1, folder 1912-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

otherwise unimportant and negligible, except to illustrate the sins of one party and the righteous deeds of the other."\(^{32}\)

Bolton described in some detail the work of the Wisconsin Historical Society—its collections, its publications, and the work of the associated University history department in studying the history of the Middle West—marking it out as the premier example in the field of developing regional history and connecting it to the larger story of the nation.\(^{33}\) With regard to those persons writing about the history of the Midwest, he felt there was “a greater aptness of native sons than of foreigners for developing the history of a given region” and that it was notable that “nearly all of the men in it who have vitally affected the story of the West were born and bred in the region whose history they have been investigating.” These historians, led by Frederick Jackson Turner, have given to “pioneer and later days of the Old and Middle West a significance and a dignity which was never before dreamed of…”\(^{34}\)

Bolton also pointed to Texas, buoyed by patriotism and pride in their history, as another state that had taken control of the writing of its own history.\(^{35}\) Their accomplishments included the collection of materials housed at the State Capital, a well-supported historical commission, and a flourishing state historical society that had just published fifteen volumes of rare materials and valuable studies on the history of Texas and the Southwest. Noting that their state university had developed a vigorous school of history, Bolton listed significant graduates of the program

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\(^{32}\) Ibid., 63.

\(^{33}\) A Wisconsin native, Bolton had received his undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Prior to departing for the University of Pennsylvania for his PhD, he had done some initial graduate seminars with Frederick Jackson Turner, and these classes had often used the library and collections of the Wisconsin Historical Society. Albert L. Hurtado, *Herbert Eugene Bolton: Historian of the American Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 30.

\(^{34}\) Bolton, “The Obligation of Nevada,” 64.

\(^{35}\) Bolton had taught at the University of Texas from 1901-1909, where he had done extensive research in Mexican archives to uncover sources on United States history and had written an early textbook on Texas state history.
and argued that their discoveries had changed preexisting views of the state’s role: “The work of these societies and this group of students has turned the light on what has been regarded as a blot on our Nation’s history, and shown that the spot is not nearly so dark as it appeared to the imperfect vision of the New England historians.” Their work, he declared, was “another shining example of what native sons can do for their own State, and how in turn this service reacts upon the Nation at large.”

To jolt his audiences into realizing what might occur should a state or region choose not to take control of its history, Bolton also provided a negative example. Historian that he was, he carefully illustrated via census data and other evidence that while the southern states had supplied a large trail of overland immigrants to settle the Western states, their contributions had been largely neglected because much of the history of these overland trails had been written by Northerners. These historians, in his view, were simply not interested in “what was done by the South in the opening of the West…It has not been a matter of malice or wrong intent, but merely a fault due the point of view.”

It was obvious, he argued, how this could be applied to Nevada and her sister “states of the Rocky Mountain district” as this region presented a “development peculiar to itself.” Describing the old West and the Middle West as farming frontiers, he considered the mountain region as exemplifying “the formation and development of a mining and ranching frontier, with all its peculiar social and industrial features.” Pointing to the thousand or so mining camps that had sprung up in this region between 1859-1870, Bolton asked how the area might have developed differently than the Middle West. Looking at the situation as a historian, he wanted to

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37 Ibid., 69.
know “who has studied them seriously and on the basis of adequate materials? And who has gathered adequate materials?”

Bolton considered recent scholarship of the West and how it had failed to include Nevada, concluding that it was largely unknown to historians except as the location of the Comstock Lode. To the general public, Nevada was known for its divorce courts, and as the long desert region tourists drove through to get to California. Interestingly, he pronounced judgment on Wier’s own verdict on Nevada: “Even one of your own scholars has declared Nevada to be at the bottom of the scale in ideals, and has complained that its development has been almost wholly and solely materialistic. This, I believe, is too pessimistic a view, but it represents, perhaps, the righteous and permissible impatience of the zealous reformer.” All was not gloomy, however, and Bolton felt that history would ultimately find the story of Nevada’s past to be no “less interesting or instructive, or of less significance in the progress of the world than that of any other Commonwealth of equal population and strength.”

It was here that Bolton reached the heart of his speech, clarifying where the responsibility lay in bringing Nevada’s history to a more prominent place in the nation’s narrative: “the important thing for Nevada to realize is that the promotion of a study of its own history is an obligation that rests primarily on Nevada itself.” He pointed to the promising beginnings of historical work in Nevada—the formation of the historical society by patriotic citizens and energetic workers—and paid tribute to how they had kept it “alive under adverse and even disheartening circumstances.” Bolton particularly praised Wier, declaring, “[t]he energy which

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38 Ibid., 72.
39 Ibid., 74.
your secretary has displayed in bringing these things to pass, in the midst of a busy life as a college professor, is to the outsider no less than a marvel.”  

Bolton illustrated how a recent study by Beulah Hershiser was a shining example of how history graduate students from Nevada were contributing “toward the serious writing of your state’s history.” Hershiser had studied national mining legislation, and found that it had been driven by Nevada’s legislators, and in particular by Senator William M Stewart. Such a study showed, Bolton argued, “the influence of Nevada on a phase of life affecting fundamentally the whole mining region and indirectly the whole region.” This information would obviously spread, and were it to increase by many other studies in the future, “then would historians everywhere be forced to recognize, and have at hand the materials, for recording in due proportion, Nevada’s significance in the making of the nation.”

Bolton also pointed to other practical issues of importance regarding the preservation of Nevada history. There was the ongoing need to collect materials in the face of danger that such materials could be destroyed or culture and persons lost to time such as the Washoe Indians or early pioneers. There was also a desperate need for legislation to preserve public records. Providing examples of the serendipitous discovery of such records, he asked his audience, “[a]re there any old barrels or bundles of old papers in the refuse of some of your courthouses…and in danger of the application of the match tomorrow, to make room for tomorrow’s business?” Writing of both the accidental and deliberate destruction of public records present by ignorant officials, Bolton declared that that there was only one method to avoid such disasters: “to provide by state legislation for state supervision of all county and other local records.” Other needs to

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 75.
support historical work included financial support for both the publication of historical material “under proper editorial supervision” and its investigators.  

He concluded his lengthy lecture with a clarion call for state financial support. It was essential for the Society to have such public support, Bolton emphasized again, because the work of preserving its records and writing its history belonged to them: “Your Society is a state institution and its functions are public functions.” Noting how richly Nevada had rewarded some of her citizens, he asked why some portion of this wealth might not “be devoted in liberal measure by legislative appropriation and private gift to making possible the writing of the State’s history?” Bolton’s final remark was simple and to the point: “If you want this work well done, do it yourself. When you have done it, then will Nevada, like Texas and the Middle West, historically come into its own."  

How deeply Bolton’s words inspired the desired sense of historical consciousness in his audience is unknown, but Wier was grateful to the historian for his strong and inspiring lecture. She ensured its widespread distribution by arranging for its publication in both the local newspaper, and later in the supplement to the Third Biennial Report. It could now reach Society members who had been unable to attend the meeting, as well as a larger segment of the Nevada populace. And while the lecture may not have prompted a strong surge in the Legislature’s financial support in the upcoming biennium, Wier frequently quoted Bolton’s eloquent remarks in future Biennial Reports whenever she needed a dose of powerful rhetoric to support her requests for increased funding.

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42 Ibid., 77-78.
43 Ibid., 78-79.
44 Bolton remained on good terms with Wier after his lecture, and they had a pleasant, if not regular, correspondence in later years. As a conscientious mentor, he often sought to place his most capable graduates, and looked to Wier in her role as Chair of the History and Political Science
The Historical Pageants – “My Own Nevada, I Am Proud of Thee”

Miss Jeanne E. Weir, of this city, a professor in the University of Nevada
And secretary of the Nevada Historical Society, accomplished, almost unaided, an Herculean task when she staged the history of Nevada in Pageantry.45

If any public events defined Wier’s efforts to promote a sense of historical consciousness in Nevada, it was the public anniversary celebrations she organized in July and October 1914. Historical pageants were commonplace at this time, but this was the first time they had taken place in Nevada. In Mystic Chords of Memory, Kammen described the special appeal of American civic pageantry in the years between 1905-1917, which provided “visible manifestations of the past.”46 He suggests that their immense appeal was due to the fact that one could see them, celebrate them, and even participate in them. Such pageants were, in Kammen’s words, an inextricable “part of Progressive era culture,”47 and this is clearly evident in Wier’s description of these anniversary celebrations as a form of public service that would result in the “evolution of a stronger social consciousness.”48 Although the planning process proved exhausting to Wier, the pageants stood as two of her crowning achievements in nearly fifty years of service to the Society, and the pamphlet she authored on the first pageant later served as a model for this type of event throughout Nevada.49

Department at the University of Nevada, and in her role as Secretary of the Nevada Historical Society. It was a reciprocal relationship, as she sought to place her capable undergraduates in the history graduate program at the University of California. She also regularly looked to him for advice and sympathy with regard to her troubles with the Society in later years.

46 Kammen, Mystic Chords of Memory, 277.
47 Ibid.
Wier’s ability to focus on the myriad details necessary in organizing the pageants was perhaps motivated by her strong and even obsessive desire to connect the Nevada of the present to the Nevada of the pioneers.\textsuperscript{50} She had always had deep and even passionate feelings about the value of recording the stories of the pioneers for the Society. Whether presented as a memoir written in their own feeble hand, or dictated to an interviewer, it was the voice and experience of those who had actually experienced these historical events that seemed to connect with her most deeply. The pageants, in which descendants of these very pioneers reenacted scenes from the past, provided the almost visceral sense of historical consciousness that she longed to transfer to Nevada residents: “Directly by word of mouth and touch of hand are transmitted those vital feelings of belongingness, to a something that has become great through sacrifice…in this pageant with its hundreds of participants was found a civic community value which dollars and cents cannot measure.”\textsuperscript{51}

The historical pageants presented in “dramatic form” the history of the State from the earliest times of Spanish involvement in Nevada to the present day. Wier’s flowery prose described them in one contemporary Society publication as “a series of living moving pictures in which the romantic past is relived.”\textsuperscript{52} The first was held on the evening of July 2, 1914 on the Mackay Athletic Field of the University of Nevada campus in conjunction with Reno’s annual July carnival. As the planning had only commenced a few weeks prior to the pageant, Wier

\textsuperscript{50} Kammen has remarked on the phenomenon of pageantry of this era that focused “far more attention to early events, rather less to intermediate events, and not much at all to the recent past.” It thus gave the impression that early history was more important than later events, and inferred that “the past is discontinuous with the present.” He also pointed out that these pageants tended to create a “misleading, if not a false sense of solidarity and harmony” in which no one watching “would suspect that class conflict had ever occurred in the community.” Kammen, \textit{Mystic Chords of Memory}, 280.


considered the preparation as “very hurried and inadequate.” \(^{53}\) Society correspondence shows a flurry of activity throughout most of May and June 1914 as Wier worked furiously to obtain scenery, participants, costumes, and secure directorial assistance for the theatrical and dance portions of the program. Even President Talbot became actively involved in obtaining props for the pageant, and provided suggestions for the minutest details of the planning process, such as how she might go to the lumber mills of nearby Verdi to obtain pine trees as a backdrop for the outdoor stage. \(^{54}\)

At a time when there was little public entertainment in Reno and the surrounding area, it is not surprising that the historical pageant attracted an audience that the *Biennial Report* described as “the largest…ever assembled on the Mackay field and the third largest in the State’s history.” As an outdoor event in a large amphitheater, the pageant’s narrative depended on “pantomime, dancing, and symbolic costuming,” as well as lantern slides, megaphone calls, and banners, in combination with the printed program, to “interpret the scenes.” Although the pageant focused on the building of the state, Wier described it in her dramatic prose as spanning the “entire life of the Commonwealth…from its beginnings in the Spanish Territory and the Mexican Cession down to the throbbing living present.” \(^{55}\)

Despite the (relative) haste with which it had been planned, the pageant received favorable reviews. C.H. Asbury, a local Indian agent who had engaged a number of Indians from the nearby reservation to take part in the event wrote Wier the day after the event to tell her of the good reviews:

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\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) George Talbot to Jeanne Wier, June 26, 1914, box 2, folder 1914-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

I am sure you will be pleased to know that the people seem to have been pleased with the entertainment last night. I have heard expressions from several and all seem to think the pageant was a marked success considering the great number who took part in it and the time had for preparation. You are deserving of great credit for its success in the fact of some indifference, or not opposition, on the part of those who should have been your supporters.\footnote{C.H. Asbury to Jeanne Wier, July 3, 1914, box 2, folder 1914-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.}

In an editorial the day after the pageant, the *Reno Evening Gazette* lauded her efforts in an editorial entitled “A Woman Who Wrought”:

Miss Jeanne E. Weir, of this city, a professor in the University of Nevada and secretary of the Nevada Historical Society, accomplished, almost unaided, an Herculean task when she staged the history of Nevada in Pageantry. The spectacle drew one of the largest audiences ever assembled in the State. Elsewhere in this paper the pageant is described, but it is only mete and proper that here should be paid tribute to the intelligence and effort of the woman who conceived the idea and worked out its details. It was only because she lives the words of the State song so splendidly rendered by Mrs. Lunsford last night, “My Own Nevada, I am Proud of Thee,” that Miss Weir devoted herself so untiringly and so unselfishly to the cause. Efforts like these, if not recompensed, should at least be recognized.\footnote{“A Woman Who Wrought,” “Reno Evening Gazette,” July 3, 1914.}

As many residents had been unable to attend the July celebrations, the pageant was repeated in October as part of the three-day celebration honoring the Semi-centennial Celebration of Nevada statehood. It was typical of pageants of that era in that it was held in honor of a pivotal event in the community’s history. Wier, credited with authoring and managing the pageant, was assisted by other directors who focused on music, choreography, and scenery. She admitted that the pageant, with its carefully choreographed and costumed scenes featuring a cast of hundreds of local residents, was not original (with the exception of its local features) but was “based upon previous ones too numerous to mention.” Wier also conceded that following previous models was the only way that the pageant “could it have been struck off in a breath, as it were, in the pressing hurried life of the frontier.”
the October pageant in the first separate edition of the Nevada Historical Society Papers, she once again revealed her strong feelings on how such living history might engender a sense of civic and historical consciousness. All the sacrifices of the pioneers would not have been in vain if “through reliving the history of their State, the people of this community shall have revealed to them more clearly the significance of their past and come to glory in it, if they shall develop more deeply the idea of community betterment, if thereby they shall feel more strongly their debt to the country at large and experience a larger national pride…”

The Biennial Report noted that some five hundred persons, both young and old, participated in the pageant. Unfortunately, the weather was not conducive to an outdoor pageant in late October, and much of the audience retreated in the face of rain and wind. Still, Wier noted that the event was “pronounced successful” and like the first pageant, demonstrated the “growth of community spirit in the hundreds of participants from all classes and creeds.”

The highlight of the second pageant was the presentation of the Gridley Sanitary Sack of Flour, the much-acclaimed Civil War artifact that Wier had worked diligently to obtain throughout the summer of 1914. In addition to the pageant, the semi-centennial festivities included a costume ball featuring local residents in Civil War-era dress, a Pioneer Luncheon celebrating long-time residents, and a patriotic Sunday service. It is ironic, but perhaps unsurprising that Wier, overcome by the stress of the pageant preparations, missed all of the other events due to illness.

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59 Such mass community participation was typical of the outdoor festivals of this era, and Kammen notes that for many people “just being a part of the ‘cast’ enhanced their sense of civic pride.” Kammen, Mystic Chords of Memory, 281.
60 “History of the Nevada Pageant,” 15.
Raising Historical Consciousness

The two pageants, as vibrant representations of Nevada’s history come-to-life, were Wier’s most explicit attempts at imbuing the state’s residents with a sense of pride in their history—the historical and social consciousness of belonging to a community with a past. Yet historical consciousness is a fleeting thing, and the pageants, however carefully planned, would certainly fade from memory after the publication of the last celebratory newspaper article. Wier could therefore point to two lasting accomplishments that resulted from the work she invested in the historical pageants.

The first was the publication of a brief pamphlet entitled *Some Suggestions for Public School Celebration of Nevada’s Semicentennial of Statehood.* Published in early October 1914, Wier’s text was based on the work she had done for the first pageant in July. The twenty-nine-page booklet contained nineteen poems, seven prose selections, and two instructional articles “designed to inculcate national and state patriotism.”62 In it, she tried “to incorporate material suitable for the different grades of pupils.”63 As Wier had long wished to develop a Nevada history publication for schoolteachers, she saw the brief pamphlet as a “first compilation issued thus far for the use of Nevada schools, and is but an earnest of what we hope may be accomplished in the future.”64 Wier was also pleased with the pamphlet as it represented her first attempt at expanding the Society’s publications beyond the *Biennial Reports.*65

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63 Jeanne Wier to Clarence Mackay, October 9, 1914, box 2, folder 1914-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
65 Wier’s cordial relationship with the state printer made it possible for her to hastily assemble and publish the brochure on a shoestring budget in a matter of weeks. Will Mackey, the state printer, had always sympathized with Wier’s mission. He published 1000 of the pamphlets, and in a letter to Wier, noted that he was keeping 50 of them to give to his two school-age children and their friends, even offering to deliver them in Carson City if necessary. Willam Mackey to Jeanne Wier, October 14, 1914,
The other critical success to emerge from the pageant celebrations was the formation of the Society of Nevada Pioneers (SNP), an organization which was to be composed of only those persons (men or women) who had arrived or were born in Nevada before 1876 or prior, and who could claim a stake in transforming their state from a frontier into a community. Pioneer societies were commonplace in the West, and most had been formed in the 1870s and 1880s, prior to statehood in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. Nevada was unique in that its Society had formed nearly fifty years after statehood and only after the formation of the Nevada Historical Society. Prior to each pageant, Wier searched diligently for pioneer residents and former settlers of Nevada in other states so that they might attend the pageant as honored guests. The founders organized the SNP as an auxiliary to the Society during the Pioneer Luncheon on October 30 amidst the Nevada Anniversary Celebrations. Its founders declared that it would aid the Society in “perpetuating the history of those early days and bequeathing to later generations the traditions of courage and strength and perseverance and frankness and generosity which characterized Pioneer life.” The Society was designated as the custodian of the Pioneer Archives. Saddened by the absence of Wier, struggling with yet another illness at home, the Pioneers sent a resolution to her which declared her to be “the moving spirit in suggestion, initiative, and progress of the semicentennial…and acknowledged their “sincere

box 2, folder 1914-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

66 Fourth and Fifth Biennial Reports, 1913-1916, 10-11.

67 There had been a short-lived Society of Pacific Coast Pioneers in the 1870s in Virginia City, but little is known about the organization and its disposition beyond the materials that were later acquired by the Society in 1915.
appreciation of Miss Wier’s faithful and successful work and our deep regret that she could not
enjoy with us this pleasant part of it.”68

If ever there was a success story with regard to developing a historical consciousness in
Nevada residents, it was the Society of Nevada Pioneers, who viewed their early struggles in
founding the Silver State as a badge of honor. They were devoted to perpetuating these memories
and ensuring that all records and relics of their early history were valued and placed in the
Nevada Historical Society. A resolution passed by the SNP on March 4, 1915, and forwarded to
the governor and the legislature, demonstrated their strong support of the Nevada Historical
Society as a home for their history, and how they were motivated to inspire the growth of a
historical consciousness within the citizenry. The resolution asked that the state government
“formulate a plan looking toward the erection two years hence of a permanent and commodious
building for the housing of the rapidly growing collection…in order that this generation and the
children after them may learn to appreciate the State and to take pride in its history.”69

Historical Papers and Research Queries

As a history professor, Wier’s work often overlapped with her efforts on behalf of the
Society. In no case was this more apparent than in the historical papers published by the Society,
first as appendixes to the Biennial Reports, and later in their own separate editions. Beyond her
collecting work, she viewed the writing and editing of new historical studies on Nevada as her
most important work for the Society. How essential she viewed such studies in promoting the
sense of historic consciousness is not clear, but early on she declared that such publishing efforts
would be “a source of power in showing the importance of our work” and could inspire

68 “The Pioneer Luncheon and Organizations of a Nevada Pioneer Society,” in Nevada Historical
Society Papers, 1913-1916, 64.

69 Fourth and Fifth Biennial Reports, 1913-1916, 11.
assistance from citizens “who will be willing to collate material if assured that it is to be preserved in permanent form.”70 As each publication deadline approached, she struggled mightily to collect historical essays from a series of authors throughout Nevada, many of whom had experienced firsthand the events that they described. Sadly, Wier rarely had time to do any original research or writing of her own.

Although she always made efforts to fact check the historical essays submitted for publication, Wier still felt compelled to place a disclaimer in the introduction to the historical papers in the Second Biennial Report: “We are not responsible for personal opinions expressed in these papers. We print nothing which we have reason to believe is incorrect; but one purpose in the publication of these historical papers is to arouse criticism and thereby to gain more information on these topics.”71

A passage in the Third Biennial Report provides an explanation for this disclaimer and Wier’s larger concerns with the difficulties of editing and preparing content for the historical papers, much of which she felt was compounded by the “mechanical difficulties of a State like ours.” Emphasizing the challenging nature of such historical work, Wier noted that with “the verification of each important statement, to the end that it may be real history and not merely entertaining fiction, the hugeness of the work of editing but a few monographs will be seen.” She spoke to the diplomacy required to deal with the various pioneers:

…to draw from the timid and conservative their story of details and then to separate from the mass the items of real historic worth; to pin down to “facts” the loquacious storyteller without making him feel that his stories are unappreciated; to coax a careless one to substitute names and dates for his many generalizations…these are some of the constant problems of the Secretary.

70 First Biennial Report, 1907-1908, 46.
Describing her frustration at having to “write and write and write again for the verification of one little point,” she pointed again to the challenges that arose in “a mining country”: the difficulty of correspondence in the distant mining camps where mail was delivered infrequently or where a prospector might be working on another claim when a letter does arrive, not to mention the scarcity of paper, ink and pencils in such places. With her typical optimism, however, Wier noted that, in spite of these difficulties, the Society had indeed published valuable studies, and seemed hopeful that they would one day become more productive in this area.

Initially, a lack of sufficient funding meant that the Society produced no additional publications beyond those “papers” appended to the biennial reports. During the 1911-12 biennium Wier noted that the Society had “eked out of its current appropriation” the funding to publish two small pamphlets, reprinting both her PCBAHA speech, “The Work of the Western State Historical Society as Illustrated by Nevada” and Bolton’s lecture, “The Obligation of Nevada Toward the Writing of Her Own History.” Interestingly, Wier pointed to the fact that these pamphlets had a wider circulation than the Biennial Report (although it is not sure why she made this claim), and that “we trust have aided in the creation of a true “historic consciousness” in the State.” Writing in that same report, Wier argued that the more frequent publication of historical papers “would not only aid in the making out work better known, but it would multiply its usefulness many fold, for thus the documents would be made available for the use of students outside of our own community.” However, it was not until the issuance of the Nevada Historical Society Papers, 1913-1916 that Wier succeed in adding an additional separate volume of historical essays to the Society’s list of publications.

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73 Ibid., 19-10.
74 Ibid., 36.
Still, as imperfect as they may have been, and if not always as timely as she would have wished, the *Biennial Reports*, historical papers, and other publications were the most tangible product of Wier’s efforts to fulfill one of the Society’s most important aims: extending knowledge of Nevada’s resources and advantages to “citizens of other states” and providing the state’s own residents with “a knowledge of those factors which are related to the future material and moral progress of the State.”

For those members who did not live locally and could not view the building and its collection, the publications provided an important source of information about the Society’s work and its collections. During legislative years, the *Biennial Reports* served as means of disseminating the nature of the Society’s activities to a large body of legislators required to vote on its appropriations, many of whom knew little of the organization or its activities. As part of the regular system of exchanges with other historical societies and libraries across the country, the Society’s publications put it on a level with other similar institutions, and made it part of the nation’s larger community of cultural heritage organizations. Wier’s *Second Biennial Report* for the Society even declared that “the report for the society is in demand by the largest and best libraries in this country and Canada...In exchange for these reports we shall receive valuable historical materials.”

By 1918, no less a body than the American Antiquarian Society was requesting copies of the Society’s papers in order to complete their collection of Western history, which was the largest in New England at the time. Without such publications to illustrate the breadth of its activities, it is doubtful that Nevada would have

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77 “We have one of the largest genealogical and historical collections in the country. It is a national library which is not only used considerably by researchers, but is especially useful in historical and bibliographical reference work.” Clarence S. Brigham to Jeanne Wier, April 16, 1918, box 2, folder 1918, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
received invitations to participate in the initiatives proposed by the newly-formed Public Archives Commission or the various surveys sent out by the American Historical Association.

As its library and collections of historical documents grew, Wier herself was central to the Society’s growing value as a “general bureau of information” on economic, political, and social questions about Nevada. As she noted in the Second Biennial Report, “[i]n a professional way we have received recognition as a society which commands the respect of learned societies.” Even before there was a building that people could visit, Wier provided access to the Society’s newspaper files and answered the questions that she could through the Society’s archives. As the collections grew and received more recognition, queries regarding Nevada history came from local residents, from throughout the state, and even from across the United States. Although some correspondence came directly to her (often addressed to Sir) in her role as de facto head of the Society, other queries had been directed toward the Secretary of State or even the Governor, who then forwarded them on to Wier. Although this was not a form of outreach as visible as a pageant or a building, it was certainly the most practical and useful function of the Society, and one that Wier considered its “chief public service.”

Such reference queries came slowly at first, and surviving correspondence reveals that there were usually only a handful each year in the Society’s first decade. Some queries came from schoolteachers across the state, many of whom had only recently moved to Nevada, and wished to know something about their adopted state in order to teach more effectively. “Would you please tell me where I could get a book or pamphlet about Fremont’s expedition through

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Nevada?...Our school will welcome it very much.” Others might come from women’s clubs throughout Nevada eager to conduct service projects that involved gathering the history of some far-flung region of the state. “We have just finished the organization of a women’s club for Las Vegas called “The Mesquite” and have decided that our first efforts shall be in the study of Nevada. Now I don’t know of anyone who is likely to know more about the State than you…”

The state’s rich mining history invited various questions such as this one about the Comstock Lode, “[h]ave these mines been worked out or do they still exist? Were they in fact discovered by a man by name of Comstock? …you will greatly oblige me if you will give a short answer to the foregoing questions or tell where I can secure the best information,” wrote Jerome F. Patterson to Wier on June 14, 1915.

Questions on Nevada’s Indians also arrived in the Society’s mailbox. The publication of articles in various U.S. newspapers about archaeological finds in Nevada often prompted inquiries, some from as far east as the Smithsonian. “I have just seen in the San Francisco Sunset Journal an account of cave discoveries in your state in which your name is mentioned, and I beg to make inquiries regarding the discoveries mentioned,” wrote W.H. Holmes, Head Curator, Department of Anthropology at the Smithsonian Institution. Such letters were commonplace whenever newspapers reported an archaeological find. To a Mr. J.D. Whittaker of Congdon,

80 Mary Evelyn Dexheimer to Jeanne Wier, June 21, 1913, box 2, folder 1913, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

81 Mrs. Julius Summer to Jeanne Wier, February 29, 1911, box 1, folder 1911-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.


83 W.H. Holmes to Jeanne Wier, February 10, 1915, box 2, folder 1915-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada. More often than not, Wier had to dampen the enthusiasm of such correspondents by letting them know that the articles were often much exaggerated.
Iowa, Wier noted, “[a]s yours is only one of a multitude of inquiries concerning this matter I have found it impossible until vacation to send replies.”

Others came from residents who wanted to know what had been written about the “first inhabitants of Nevada.” Wier was direct in her response to such queries. “The study of the Indians is a much neglected subject, not because we do not realize its value, but because no funds have ever been available for it. I myself did a little work along this line some years ago but never had time to put in shape for publication,” she wrote to Mrs. J.W. Johnston of Deeth, Nevada. To a Mrs. Smiley who also asked about information bulletins on Nevada’s Indians, Wier replied with regret that they did not exist: “I hope that we shall sometime have the money with which to gather up the material for a little work on the subject. The various so-called histories of Nevada have but a chapter or two on the Indians.”

California residents also wrote to the Society in search of information on Nevada that was connected to parts of their own state. Wier was always generous and encouraging to researchers who were attempting to write histories that related to Nevada. In October 1917, Mr. W.A. Chalfant, editor of the Inyo Register in Bishop, California, wrote of his efforts to describe the history of Inyo county, noting “[y]our work toward preservation of Nevada historical records is not without direct interest to this part of the State of California, since our position east of the Sierras makes us in many respects more Nevadan than Californian.” Wier was eager to help,

84 Jeanne Wier to J.D. Whittaker, August 24, 1915, box 2, folder 1915-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.


agreeing that “we have indeed many historical interests in common and I regret that time has
prevented me from giving the attention to the eastern slope of the Sierras that is to be desired…I am glad you are working up the subject and shall be glad to do anything we can to aid.”

Sometimes Wier’s answers revealed something of the stress that she was under. To Miss Sperry of Yerrington, who sought Wier’s advice on how to conduct a historical pageant, Wier was succinct in her reply (perhaps thinking back to the workload caused by the pageants in 1914): “I would not try to depict more than one or two incidents. The admission of the state is easily arranged.” Apologizing for the tardiness of her answer, Wier noted, “[t]hus far I am without assistance in my department and am teaching two people’s work. This is the reason I have not answered sooner. Will try to do better next time.”

As with all aspects of the Society’s work, Wier was typically ambitious in her desire to build up this type of service. In the Third Biennial Report she wrote of her wish that the Society model itself after the State Library in Sacramento, and of her aspirations that it might also serve as a bureau for legislative reference work. The opening of the building in 1913 made it possible for people to actually visit the collections, and while she noted that some came merely out of sense of curiosity, or a sense of reverence for the past, Wier also declared proudly that “not a few have made frequent visits to use the archives for the investigation of historical topics.”

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89 Jeanne Wier to Miss Sperry, September 18, 1915, box 2, folder 1915-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada. Although Silas Feemster had joined the University of Nevada history department in 1913, his name is absent from the 1915-1916 University bulletin but returns in the one published the following year.


Community Outreach

Despite the success of the pageants, Wier made no such labor-intensive outreach efforts again. Even the regularly scheduled annual meetings of the Society that typically took place in May near the University’s commencement week activities were held infrequently after 1912. As Wier’s reputation as an authority in Nevada history grew, however, her outreach began to take the form of visits to schools, women’s groups, and other professional organizations where she would give informal speeches on the work of the Society in an effort to spread the gospel of its historical work. Hurriedly composed or given off-the-cuff, these talks lacked the flowery prose of the formal speeches published in the previous biennial reports, but due to Wier’s enthusiasm and passion for her subject, they were still an efficient means to reach rural schoolteachers, schoolchildren, and women’s groups. A hurried trip east to Elko in November 1915 to speak before a teacher’s institute was one such occasion, with Wier declaring to her hosts, “I shall not have time to prepare anything special but will give a plain matter of fact talk to the teachers on the local work in history.”

Typical of these types of requests was one from the Leisure Hour Club in Carson City, which was planning a series of evenings in mid-1918 devoted to “important historical events of the Great Basin region,” which noted that a suggestion that Wier might give “one evening in the course” had been “very favorably received.” Conscious of her workload, they respectfully asked, “if you could find time from your arduous work to prepare a paper on any one of the topics we would appreciate it very much.” Typical of her generosity of spirit when it came to promoting the history of her adopted state, Wier expressed her great interest in and admiration

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93 J.N. Fletcher to Jeanne Wier, June 25, 1918, box 2, folder 1918, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
for their work, brushing off any concerns for travel costs or remuneration for her trip, “[a]s to financial side of the Leisure Hour Club proposition, you need give no further thought. I can take care of that…”94 An additional letter in the string of correspondence relating to her talk is revealing of Wier’s sympathetic nature and provides insight into her own life. Fearing that a stay at her host’s home might cause his wife extra work, she declared her preference to stay at a hotel: “All our women, and especially our club women are so busy these days that no thought should be demanded of them in the way of social entertainment.”95

Other outreach was more strategic in nature. Even before the building had been constructed, Wier had often reached out to legislators to encourage visits to the collections when they were still housed in her own living quarters. A building full of carefully-arranged artifacts and documents to showcase thus made Wier even keener to encourage visits by important local businessmen and state legislators whenever possible. She knew their positive sentiments about the Society might bring in personal donations or more favorable votes on the appropriation at the next legislative session. In his January 13, 1915 letter to Wier, H.C. Heidtmann, manager of a Reno bottling and soda works plant (and part-time legislator), begged off such a visit, but assured her that he was “in hearty accord with the work of the Society and assure of my support (if I may have any) to further the cause of your work.”96 Wier did not give up so easily on persuading him to make a personal visit, however, as she assured Heidtmann that his influence “will be very much worthwhile.” Knowing full well the impact of a personal visit, she still

94 Jeanne Wier to Mr. F.N. Fletcher, June 27, 1918, box 2, folder 1918, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

95 Jeanne W to F.M. Fletcher, September 21, 1918, box 2, folder 1918, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

hoped he might have time to call when in Reno at the weekend, “for if you have seen the work for yourself you can speak with more assurance if others oppose it.”

Beyond Wier’s own outreach efforts on behalf of the Society, local Nevada newspaper editorials provided positive tributes to her work, with one even chastising the state outright for the parsimoniousness with which it treated the Society:

The Nevada Historical Society has a fine collection of statements of pioneers, but, unfortunately the society has never had sufficient money to have the statements published. Indeed, the state does not appreciate the unselfish labors of Miss Jeanne Wier in this work and has never given hearty co-operation that she deserves. But for her the society, itself, would long since have died.

Outside of Nevada, Wier’s work for the Society and her involvement with the PCBAHA had attracted the attention of notable history men such as J. Franklin Jameson, editor of the American Historical Review, who had published her speech on western historical societies in 1911. He continued to remain interested in her work and collecting activities and in correspondence with Wier regarding the publication of some Nevada-related collecting activities sent his best wishes “…for the Nevada Historical Society, in whose work you so greatly interested me.”

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98 “Collecting Nevada’s History,” Reno Evening Gazette, October 2, 1915.

CHAPTER 8:
PROGRESS, CONFLICT AND LOSS: 1919-1927

Nevada in the 1920s

Although the war and the influenza epidemic were behind it, Nevada moved into the 1920s facing some of the same challenges as the rest of the nation. Labor and railroad strikes following the end of the war were a concern in the early part of the decade, as was a decline in the state’s mineral production. The decline was short-lived, however, and unlike the nationwide depression that gripped the US in 1921, heavy industrial demands, particularly for copper, ensured that the state remained prosperous throughout the decade.¹ Nevada’s infrastructure also continued to develop in 1920s, with the creation of numerous state agencies, and the construction of several highways throughout the state. Interestingly, the growth of the highway system in Nevada eventually had a dramatic and lasting impact upon the Society.

While federal legislation beginning with the Federal Aid Road Act in 1916² made possible the initial planning for a state highway system in Nevada, the Federal Highway Act of 1921 provided the funding that would significantly expand the state’s highway system. The matching formula gave an advantage to states where “unappropriated and unreserved public domain exceeded 5 percent of the total area.” The high proportion of public lands in Nevada (over 80 percent) meant that the state benefited greatly from this arrangement (it had to supply only 16.32 of each construction dollar) and the funds created by a state gas tax in 1923.³

² Nevada established the Department of Highways in 1917 to comply with this Act, as it required states to have highway departments in place in order to receive funding.
³ Elliott, History of Nevada, 164.
Such federal and state largesse meant that by 1926, some $10 million had been spent on the construction of Nevada’s highways, and the state’s contribution represented “Nevada’s largest expenditure for any single purpose in the postwar years.” That same year, Nevada, along with many other western states, celebrated the completion of the “Lincoln Highway”—the main transcontinental road through the state. To mark its completion, the 1925 legislature made an appropriation for a Nevada Transcontinental Exposition to be held in Reno. The appropriation also funded the construction of a new state building, completed in 1926, to house the temporary exhibits that were created to honor the completion of the highway. The building’s larger purpose, however, was to serve as the new permanent quarters of the Nevada State Historical Society at the completion of the exposition. Although she had long dreamed of finding a permanent home for the Society, by 1927 Wier found this development to be more of a nightmare that would shake the institution to its very core and destroy almost all that she had worked for over the years.

A Growing Sense of Purpose and Professionalism

Funding: 1919-1926

Such developments were unthinkable, however, at the beginning of the decade, which had started on an unexpectedly promising financial note for the Society. Both Wier and the Society’s executive board were pleasantly surprised to receive a generous appropriation for the 1919-1920 biennium. Whether her eloquent pleas in the Sixth Biennial Report had finally reached the right ears, or there had been a post-war burst of generosity on the part of the legislature, it was clear that things were looking up when compared to the previous appropriation of $6000 for the 1917-1918 biennium. The budget included nine thousand for “general historical

\[4\] Ibid., 265.
work,” five thousand for collecting the war history of Nevada (with additional funds to print said history), and an additional $2600 to fund the purchase of the lot and frame building adjoining the Society’s building to the north. Wier would later report how “gratifying” this appropriation was “to those who have for many years sought to accomplish this work without proper funds.”

Perhaps emboldened by the previous biennium’s appropriation, Wier made an exceptionally large request for the 1921-1922 biennium asking for $12,400 to fund general expenses, and an additional $5400 for war history expenses. Testing the waters still further, she added on a section called “Desirable for miscellaneous purposes” in which she asked for additional funds to support various construction, printing, and collection-related expenses (including the purchase of the Stewart Indian basket collection). Wier was most likely disappointed, but not surprised that she received an appropriation of only $10,000 despite her bold request, with a further $1500 for war history expenses.

By the 1920s it had become a typical pattern for the Society with regard to the legislature. Where she had once asked for only modest funds, Wier now asked for more than what could be allotted, with the hope that the appropriation would inch forward every year as a result of her detailed recommendations (and pleadings) on the needs of the Society. For the 1923-1924

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6 Wier rarely asked the Executive Committee for funds to purchase a specific collection. It was generally a request for funding that would support the type of fieldwork that enabled the successful acquisition of collections. However in the Seventh Biennial Report (1919-1920), she broke with her usual pattern and asked if the legislature might request $5000 from the state to purchase the valuable Indian basket collection of her old friend, Helen Stewart. The basket collection had been assembled by Stewart with “infinite pains and rare intelligence” over a lifetime, during which she had acquired the story of each basket’s maker and its significance. It had been the subject of extensive correspondence in the preceding years. Although Stewart could not afford to donate the collection outright, it was felt that she would offer it to the state for a smaller price than she might ask from an outsider. Seventh Biennial Report 1919-1920, 14. Although a flurry of correspondence shows the great excitement caused by this possible acquisition, in the end, the state did not see fit to donate the needed funds. This priceless basket collection was later broken up and sold by Helen Stewart’s heirs at her death.
biennium, she requested $16,250, emphasizing that the Society had not asked for building funds and would “endeavor to secure these elsewhere.” There was a note of both exhaustion and defiance in her request for this biennium, with Wier declaring “[w]hen once the State has given a proper support, we can promise that the returns will be immediate and more than commensurate with the expenditures. With such a pledge, I have the honor of submitting for your consideration the care of a struggling state department.” For added emphasis, Wier concluded the biennial report with a section titled “What Others Say About Historical Societies” that included two passages on the nature of historical societies and their funding that had been presented before the American Historical Association. Perhaps she hoped that Nevada’s legislators would be inspired or embarrassed by the following description of the Wisconsin Historical Society, a state institution like the Nevada Historical Society, but one that was “palatially housed and generously supported by the State” and compared with the “great universities of the West… as an example of the wise utilization of the public wealth to promote the intellectual interests of the community.”7 Such commentary did not inspire the legislature to open their purse as wide as she would have liked, however, and while she received more than the previous biennial appropriation, the $12,000 was still less than the $16,250 she had requested. It may have been small comfort to Wier that the Joint Ways and Means Committee expressed regret that no funds were available to support the construction of a building however much they were “appreciative of the need for a permanent fireproof building to house the collections.”

In February 1923, the Society underwent a minor structural change, when, following previous council recommendations, it incorporated according to Nevada laws under the name “Nevada State Historical Society.” Although the Society’s leadership was then transferred from

the Council to a governing Board of Trustees, it did not change much in the Society’s day-to-day operations. However, as the 1923-1924 biennium came to a close, the Board of Trustees did propose a way to fund the Society’s much desired permanent structure. Concerned with the overcrowding of the current building, and despairing that the funds necessary (approximately $100,000) to build a proper fireproof structure might never be available, the Trustees bravely asked for the unthinkable: a “permanent appropriation of at least one-half of one cent on each hundred dollars of the taxable valuation of the property in the State.” Whatever money received they received in excess of current expenses could then be made available “for the construction of temporary or permanent housing for the overflow collection.”8 Wier reiterated the request in her recommendations at the conclusion of the Biennial Report, and suggested the value of such an arrangement was clear. More than anything, the existence of a steady income stream would relieve the Society’s “working officers” (primarily Wier) of the time and effort needed to secure the biennial appropriation, who could then direct their energy into writing Nevada history. At the wider organizational level, the guaranteed income would enable the Board of Trustees to “make plans for many years in advance and to conserve their funds for the execution of a far-reaching program.”9 For many reasons, not least of all the imposition of a new tax in a state that was notoriously tax averse, the proposed levy was not to be, and the legislature appropriated just $13,000 for the Society’s use over the 1925-1926 biennial period. Even more significant was the passage of the Nevada Transcontinental Highway Exposition Act by that year’s legislature which


9 In the actual fiscal report and budget submitted for that biennium (1925-1926), Wier requested approximately $17,500 but added in a footnote: “In lieu of this budget, the Society would be pleased to follow the suggestion of the Governor for a one-half cent tax levy on the one hundred dollars to cover current expenses and provide a small surplus each year toward building.” Ibid., 22-23.
included funds to be directed for the construction of the Exposition building that was proposed to serve as the new quarters for the Society at the completion of the Exposition.

The County Committees

From the time of the Society’s founding, Wier had been aware of the importance of having members throughout the State that could serve as ambassadors on her behalf in soliciting donations or making suggestions about historical artifacts or documents that might be of interest to the Society. To this end, she had appointed a “vice-president” in each county of the state to act as a representative in these matters. With only one individual in each county, there was bound to be some inconsistency of effort and with so much work needed for the Society, one person alone could not always shoulder the burden. Thus, in 1920, Wier took this idea one further and developed a new system of committees in each county of the State that would work together to achieve various important goals for the Society. The committees were to focus on the following issues: acquiring a permanent building, collecting war history, gathering pioneer history materials and expanding the membership. Working with the executive council, Wier identified a list of potential members in each county that showed interest in historical matters and assign five to six members to each committee.

In some cases, they were long-standing members of the Society who had always expressed an interest in its work, in others existing members referred new names. Wier threw herself into this new initiative wholeheartedly, and while she made a number of whirlwind trips throughout the State to personally solicit members for the committees, it was her correspondence files that were overflowing with letters requesting the services of dozens of potential committee members. From June through December 1920, Wier worked diligently to reach members in all corners of the state. With her typical bravado, she approached anyone in a position to argue for the Society’s work, including judges, assemblymen, and senators and “appointed” them to the
committees, sometimes without their prior consent. “...I have taken the liberty of placing your name on our Mineral County committee and hope that you will not object as practically all our senators have accepted a little position” she wrote persuasively to Senator J.B. Miller of Hawthorne, Nevada.¹⁰ Inspired by the generous funding in hand at last from the legislature’s recent appropriation, Wier also ensured that all necessary supplementary materials were printed to assist the committee members in their work.

As a significant initiative of the Society, the County committees naturally figured prominently in the Biennial Report covering the years 1919-1920. In it she characterized the building committee as consisting of “prominent and energetic state builders, men and women, who have promised to interest themselves and their respective communities in the question of an adequate fireproof building for the housing of the historical records of Nevada.”¹¹ The building committee was somewhat different than the other committees in that it was set up not merely to solicit materials and members for the Society but ultimately to serve a lobbying function in persuading state legislators to recognize the need for a permanent fireproof building and provide the funding for its construction.¹² Writing to one potential member, Wier described the committee’s purpose succinctly, “[t]he function of the committee will be to receive our literature concerning our crowded condition and thus to become informed regarding our needs...then should conditions seem favorable next January I should like to have the County Committees

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¹² To assist the members of the Building Committee, Wier created an informational pamphlet that defined the characteristics of a proper historical archives building, and showed the inadequacy of the current structure. It was also summarized the work taken toward the securing of a building, and provided a brief summary of the Society’s collections.
back me in a Legislative Appeal for the beginning of a fireproof building.” As she had years earlier, Wier also hoped to inspire private funding for the building, and encouraged committee members to alert the Society of “any opportunity of which they may know to interest our millionaire Nevadans or ex-Nevadans in such a project…”

Wier also used the county committees to assist in the Society’s grand plan to document Nevada’s war history. As she explained in the *Seventh Biennial Report* (1919-1920), most war records had been removed from the states and sent to Washington, DC, so there existed no other way to gather names of soldiers and sailors except by personal canvass. The Society thus adopted the method used by other states “in this emergency” by creating county war history committees who would assist in their local communities to obtain the war service records of men and women throughout the state. After organizing the county war history committees, Wier then carefully prepared a questionnaire for obtaining the data. The duties of the war history committee were more straightforward and involved only the collection of war data in each county using the questionnaire. The nature of the work simply required members, such as Principal H.O. Williams of Virginia City, Nevada, to ensure that the questionnaires were properly filled out. Accuracy was important, as it was Wier’s plan that such forms, when collected, could provide data for the printed war roster, and more importantly, serve as a permanent war archives for the State.

In seeking members for the county pioneer history committees, Wier declared that “…an appeal has been made to the loyalty and patriotism of Nevadans everywhere throughout the State to lend their aid to this endeavor of saving the material for the writing of Nevada history.” She was full of praise for this group of “responsible and efficient” men and women who took on the committee appointments despite their busy schedules. The work of collection was always close to her heart, and she declared the pioneer history committee as a “source of gratification to the officers of the Nevada Historical Society because it indicates that our people have a deep interest in this work and they realize that if it is to be accomplished, it must be done now.”17 As she did with the other committees, Wier created directives for the work. Like the other committees, directives were created for the work. These included pamphlets, record cards, and report blanks to help insure a “systematic and united effort throughout the State.” Some of the pioneer history committees acted as membership committees as well and were to work toward enlisting new members as they gathered pioneer documents and stories.

*Staffing for the Society: Cutts - A Trusted Assistant at Last*

There was no question that Wier’s free labor had enabled the Society’s steady development in the face of uncertain state and private funding from its inception.18 Wier’s regular pleadings in the *Biennial Reports* provide evidence that hiring both clerical assistants to help with the Society’s basic administrative needs, as well as “competent” field workers to helm some of the more intellectual tasks was difficult because of the lack of adequate funding provided in the appropriation. Over the years she used salary funds sparingly in hiring clerical

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18 In their report to the Governor in the Tenth Biennial Report, the Society’s President and Board of Trustees suggested that the work that Wier had freely given as executive officer for the preceding twenty-three years might total $92,000, and if the clerical and menial labor she had also performed were added on $100,000 would not be “too large an estimate of the total savings thus made to the State.” *Tenth Biennial Report of the Nevada Historical Society, 1925-1926*, 8.
assistance, and it wasn’t until after almost ten years of collecting that she hired a professional library cataloger for the growing book collection. Other assistants, including Wier’s own brother, helped intermittently with tasks such as accessioning and placing materials in shelves and cases in the building before and after it opened to the public in 1913.

Wier frequently mentioned the need for “trained” staff in the Biennial Reports, but as there was little to nothing in the way of professional training available for museum or archive work at the time, it was unclear what her criteria were for such persons. She trusted an army of enthusiastic volunteers across the state to be her eyes and ears, many of whom were most certainly amateur historians and interested citizens. For the Society’s paid staff, however, there was a concern with finding the right type of help. Her correspondence makes reference to the assistance of Beluah Hershiser, a former student and daughter of Society treasurer A.E. Hershiser, who helped intermittently before and after her marriage, and remained a trusted confidant to Wier always. In the Society’s 1921-22 Biennial Report, President George F. Talbot had this to say about finding and funding staff for the organization:

The time has come for the Nevada Historical Society when those who have for years been devoted to minute but essential details of daily routine should have their energies freed for the larger task of organization and writing. To relieve them of these petty cares means, in this age of high specialization, either many workers for the various jobs, or else one or two workers who have initiative, judgment and adaptability – qualities which are rarely found among the cheaper classes of laborers. To secure a Jack-of-all-trades who is capable of becoming master of one or two things is not an easy task in this Twentieth century.

19 The difficulty of finding trained help in Nevada led Wier to look for professional development opportunities where she could. In September 1921, she sent in the paperwork for an extension course in Library Methods at the University of Wisconsin, Madison for George Cushing, whom she described in correspondence as one of her helpers.

20 Hershiser had also been a graduate student of Herbert Bolton’s at the University of California, and it was she who had written the scholarly paper on the influence of Nevada on federal mining legislation that was published in the addendums attached to the Third Biennial Report.

Rarely did these assistants take on a settled or permanent role for the Society, and rarely did they get more than a passing mention in the Society’s correspondence until the appearance of Charles F. Cutts in 1920. Described by Wier as a “godsend” he first appears in the 1921-1922 Biennial Report named as “curator” in the list of officers comprising the Executive Council. The fact that he authored his own curator’s report in both this report and the subsequent report of 1923-1924 provides some clue as to his elevated status within the Society as a trusted assistant.

Born in Wakefield, New Hampshire in 1871, Cutts was of the same generation as Wier, but his life experiences had been much different. After completing his education at Packard College, an early commercial business school in New York City, Cutts settled in Carson City in 1891, and ran a successful mercantile business on Carson Street for over twenty-five years. He married Bertha L. Meyers in 1897, but was widowed after only seven years of marriage, and would never remarry. The financial prosperity afforded by his business allowed Cutts to be an active participant in Carson City’s civic and community affairs, participating in church and fraternal activities, and literary and art clubs. Retiring from his business in 1918, he traveled to France, at nearly fifty years of age, to volunteer with the American Red Cross.

Upon his return in 1919, Cutts settled in Reno. His relative prosperity had not only allowed him to travel the world, but to acquire paintings and other forms of decorative arts, as

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22 Jeanne Wier to Dr. Schaeffer, September 27, 1922, box 3, folder 1922-3, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.


25 Cutts was nominated to represent Nevada in the Brazilian Exposition, and Wier found it challenging to draft a profile of him in his absence. She noted to him afterwards, “You are so exceedingly modest about yourself that none of your friends here could tell me anything definite and so I had to go to Carson [City] to gather information about your travels and war work.” Jeanne Wier to Charles Cutts, n.d., box 3, folder 1922-3, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
well as a personal library of art and rare books, and medieval manuscripts. Cutts’ appreciation of arts and culture, and his artistic sensibilities led him to the doorstep of the Nevada Historical Society building around 1920, and his skill and artistry in arranging the exhibits soon made him indispensable to Wier. Describing the Society’s activities in the *Eighth Biennial Report*, Wier paid tribute to “the volunteer assistance of our artistically minded Curator” who had entirely reconstructed the Museum during the biennium, giving it “as inviting an appearance as is possible in our crowded quarters.” He also assisted in more mundane but essential matters such as ensuring proper documentation and description of each museum item on display, and in helping Wier to redecorate the building’s interior. Wier’s praise did not go unnoticed, and by April 1922, the Executive Council formally appointed Cutts to the position of Curator and began paying him a small salary when present, and owing to his love of travel no doubt, “the privilege of being absent whenever he desires.”

As curator, Cutts served as a trusted field agent for Wier in following up leads for items to add to the Society’s collections. His “Curator’s Report” in the 1921-1922 *Biennial Report* showed that even after a short time at the Society he had gained a strong grasp of the collections and wrote enthusiastically of their importance in telling the history of Nevada:

> Tangible objects visualize interesting and exciting episodes of history as printed words can never hope to do. The finished arrowhead speaks of the skill and craftsmanship of the Indians; the old mail-bags, carried by the Pony Express riders, bring before our minds the heroic men of the days before the railroads and

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26 Cutts was most well known as the co-founder of the Nevada Art Gallery in 1931. His painting collection was left to the Nevada Art Gallery at his death in 1949, and it served as the gallery’s founding acquisition. His home served as its first facility. Charles F. Cutts, *Online Encyclopedia of Nevada*, accessed 14 December 2013.


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Cutts was equally, if not more effective, in his lectures and speeches on behalf of the Society in which he waxed eloquently and enthusiastically about the Society’s collections, needs, and its benefit to the public. His extensive travels within the U.S. and throughout Europe brought of a degree of expertise to his talks.

In the 1923-1924 Biennial Report, the brief section devoted to his “Curator’s Report” showed that Cutts had developed a strong sense of devotion to the Society and its goals after only a few years in the position. Describing the current state of the Museum’s crowded cases, he suggested that “the struggling efforts of its early pioneer days are gone, so splendid is the collection of real museum relics.” His work with the Teacher’s Institutes had clearly made him desirous of promoting the collection’s educational value as he wrote enthusiastically that “the public schools are coming to recognize that in the Museum is a practical and helpful educational factor in furnishing an opportunity to visualize history, geography and natural wonders through these very splendid tangible objects.” But Cutts reserved his most impassioned statements in the report to appeal to the Nevada public in continuing to add to the Society’s collections:

“Do not think for a moment that some particular material has no special value. It may be most important historically when added to the collection we now possess. So let us care for the old photographs and periodicals you may have kept for many years. Send us any official, town, or county reports and documents, as well as old letters of early pioneers that may be hidden away in old trunks or boxes… We earnestly ask your kindly interest and hearty cooperation in making it of finer and better service to all the State.”

Collecting Efforts

Cutts was indeed gifted in locating artifacts and documents of value to add to the Society in the early 1920s during his period as curator. Overall, the period from 1919 – 1926 was a

period of healthy growth for the Society with regard to the collections. As always, fieldwork was severely limited by the high cost of travel in the state, as was the salary needed to pay a “competent field officer,” so Wier continued to depend on her most reliable source of donations: a network of loyal and patriotic Nevada citizens. The County Committee system, as formed by Wier in 1920, had formalized this network, ensuring that a nucleus of citizens in each county were designated as responsible for directing the work, following the instructions in a pamphlet authored by Wier, and compiling data using standardized record forms she had created. More than anything, Wier wished to see the County Committees enable a “systematic and united effort” for collecting data and artifacts throughout the state.\(^{31}\)

As she had done previously, Wier organized the donations received during the 1919-1920 biennium into categories. As the *Biennial Report* would be read by a wide audience, from the governor and legislature to Society members, it was the most efficient way to present a narrative sketch of the most important donations. Not surprisingly, the list included mining camp artifacts and Indian relics, two of the most common types of material donated to the Society since its inception. Newspaper donations were always valued, but those from the Territorial Enterprise Office in Virginia City even more so owing to its connection to Mark Twain. The Chinese Joss-House relics were more exotic but showed recognition of the other groups who had settled in Nevada. Some objects described in the report were evidence of more recent events, such as the visits of dignitaries such as President Wilson and King Albert of Belgium to Reno. Additional regional donations from Elko, which formed a large section of exhibits in the museum, were also highlighted in the report and showed the Society’s desire to ensure that the museum represented all of Nevada. With the war history committees in full swing, the report also noted the donation

of “pictures, pins, foreign money and other mementoes of the great struggle” by “soldier boys.” For some reason, Wier felt compelled to defend these objects emphatically by noting, “[t]hese things are sources of history quite as truly as the printed page and should be preserved side by side as part of the same collection.” Perhaps more unique among the materials collected during this biennium was Nevada poetry (composed for a poetry symposium sponsored by the Nevada Federation of Women’s Clubs) and original Nevada music compositions such as the Hank Monk Schottische (in honor of the legendary stagecoach driver) by J.P. Meder, which enriched the Society’s archives.

1921-1922

In the Eighth Biennial Report, which would have reached Society members and Nevada legislators in early 1923, Wier included special section on donating material to the Society for the first time, showing the increasing professionalization of the organization. Although the Society did not seem to have a problem in obtaining regular donations, Wier included a list of “Historical Materials Desired by the Nevada Historical Society,” and a section on gifts that included a form for presenting a gift or bequest to the Society, and tax exemption information. For new members, the detailed list of materials desired included an opening collection statement that described the aim of the Society as collecting “everything that can in any way throw light upon the history of Nevada from its earliest exploration to the present day.” Crucially, this section emphasized to potential donors that material that they might not find valuable on its own, became “priceless in importance when incorporated as a part of a library of reference or a museum showing the chronological development of a State.”

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32 Eighth Biennial Report, 1921-1922, 8.
This year’s report also featured the first Curator’s report composed by Cutts, who focused his attention on describing some of the artifacts donated to the Society’s museum. His fascination with, and perhaps preference for artifacts is clear, with Cutts declaring, “[t]angible objects visualize interesting and exciting episodes of history as printed words can never hope to do.” There is pride too in the Society’s collections: “In this State Museum are to be found many treasures that any of the great museums would be glad to possess.”

Due to Cutts’ prominent role as Curator during this time, the Eighth Biennial Report was also the first to separate the list of library and archival donations from the artifacts. The donation of prominent personal libraries of men with deep ties to Nevada such as Senator Francis G. Newlands, Dr. A.E. Hershiser, R.L. Fulton, James F. O’Brien enriched the library and its archives extensively during this biennium. Not surprisingly, materials documenting mining and Nevada state politics in the form of photographs and manuscripts were prominent in this year’s list as were nineteenth-century newspapers from throughout the state. Wier highlighted here the donation of correspondence related to the work of the “Indian Messiah” Jack Wilson (Wowoka) by Society friend Grace Dangberg. Donations related to Nevada’s fraternal history, as well as so-called educational and political “souvenirs” were listed, including the Anti-Chinese Covenant of 1866. Wier added a new category in this report, describing “musical and theatrical archives” that had been donated over the biennium consisting of songs, sheet music, posters, and theatrical scrapbooks from various donors. Extensive purchases of rare books and magazines that Wier made carefully over each biennium augmented the donations. Because the listing was, of necessity, a brief accounting of the donations, Wier always ended this section with the
instruction that “in order to gain any comprehension of the scope or value of these collections, Nevada citizens must come and see for themselves.”

1923-1926

With each passing year, a continuing stream of donations strengthened the Society’s collections. In the *Eighth Biennial Report*, Wier’s accounting of the collections filled nearly six pages even as she noted that she could only highlight a few “by way of illustration.”

The donation categories showed the incredible range of the Society’s collections. They included a large selection of items related to “the prehistory of the American native and his artifacts,” paleontology and archaeology, mining, minerals, numismatics, old weapons, early day handiwork (including furniture and needlework), old-fashioned clothing and textiles. Other materials documented particular subjects of importance such as government and politics, church history, and fraternal and social history (dance and theatre programs). Notable in this report was the donation of old records from the Capital basement—which had been “molding and falling to pieces”—from the Board of Capitol Commissioners via the Governor’s secretary, Homer Mooney, which included territorial records and materials from the Board of Pardons and the Secretary of State.

Carving out a rare pocket of spare time 1925 had enabled Wier to pursue fieldwork in the Southern Nevada area, traveling to Panaca in Clark County, where a special committee had been formed to collect artifacts documenting the early history of settlement in that area. She provided little detail on the collections of the 1925-1926 biennium, most likely because of the administrative challenges she was facing as she wrote the *Biennial Report*. As regards the

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library, Wier noted that she had purchased a large number of books “as is our custom, in the attempt of building a real research library of Nevada history.”

Planning for a New Building

From the moment of its construction, Wier had viewed the Society’s building as a temporary structure that would serve as a holding space until a larger and more grandiose fireproof building could be funded by the state or via private donation. Almost from the moment the first exhibits were installed, and books placed upon the library shelves, Wier and her staff had struggled to fit the Society’s growing collections within its walls. Temporary solutions such as a mezzanine level served as stopgap measures to allow for the display and storage of the growing collections. She made it abundantly clear in her set of recommendations at the end of each Biennial Report since the opening of the initial building that it was necessary to plan for the construction of a larger and more permanent structure.

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34 Tenth Biennial Report, 1925-1926, 11.
To systematize the planning for this structure and to garner statewide support for the building, Wier organized a building committee comprised of “prominent and energetic” men and women from every county in the state in 1920. As with the other county committees, Wier provided the members with informational pamphlets that would help them convey the pertinent facts about the building to their respective legislators and any other persons of importance. The fourteen-page pamphlet described “the characteristics of a proper historical archives building” (along with information as to the inadequacy of the current structure), steps that had been taken thus far toward a new building, and a brief summary of the types of material collected by the Society.  

35 Seventh Biennial Report, 1919-1920, 8-9. Unfortunately, no copy of this brochure was found in the surviving archives of the Nevada Historical Society.
The county building committee focused on the long-term goal of securing the funding for a new permanent building. In the Biennial Report submitted to the State in early 1921, Wier and the Society acknowledged that a scarcity of private benefactors, and the State’s need to spend its monies economically meant that there was little hope for funds to construct an entirely new building immediately. Still, there was an urgent need for additional space for safe housing, and to this end, they asked only for those funds ($10,000) that could support the more immediate construction of a waterproof basement (50 x 60) with a temporary iron roof. It could easily be built on the lot next to the existing building, and as she noted, “if properly constructed, would serve permanently as a repository for public documents or newspaper files and should be so built as to furnish the foundation for the first unit of the permanent structure.”

As always, building funds proved elusive, and the Society was lucky enough to receive $10,000 in total for the biennium. Lacking the funds to do any major work, Wier and Cutts busied themselves with rearranging and renovating the interior of the building to showcase the existing exhibits in a more attractive manner during the 1921-1922 biennium. In particular, they spent time moving the library materials into the “Annex” the adjoining structure (with its ample floor to ceiling shelving) that had been purchased by state funding in 1919.

Noticeably, Wier left out any request for building funds in the recommendations for the 1923-1924 biennium, remarking only that the Society would “endeavor to secure them elsewhere.” Gauging from the budget and recommendations submitted for that biennium, Wier and the Council had decided to focus on securing salaries and emphasizing the need for adequate staff for the Society.

36 Ibid., 14.
37 Eighth Biennial Report, 1921-1922, 15.
38 Ibid., 22.
If the state had thought for one moment that the Society had abandoned its quest for a permanent structure, they were mistaken. The 1923-1924 Biennial Report clearly indicated that the Society was determined to seek state funding for a permanent building. Noting first the construction of a temporary outdoor shed needed to house some of the larger exhibits, the President and Board of Trustees reinforced the urgent need for a larger building. It was a forceful, yet thoughtful request:

As a state-wide institution we also feel that the new building should be situated with reference to its usefulness for all citizens and all time, and that it should be so planned as to provide for an art gallery as well as museum and historical library. A fireproof building costing one hundred thousand dollars would not be too large for our actual needs.39

The building question would be answered shortly after the delivery of that Biennial Report in early 1925. Sadly, it was not the answer that the Society wanted and would prove to have longstanding consequences for the organization.

**Outreach: Historical Papers and Lectures**

**Historical Papers**

Despite the well-documented challenges of soliciting and editing content for the Society’s historical papers, Wier continued to work diligently to ensure their publication, as she felt strongly that the “materials of history be made accessible to the public in general, and not hoarded for the use of the few.”40 Besides the building and the collections, they were the most tangible representation of the Society’s work, and perhaps as a mark of their importance, the “work of publication” was always the first item listed in the roster of the Society’s activities in the Biennial Reports. Wier described the second volume of the *Nevada Historical Society* Report of the President and Board of Trustees of the Nevada State Historical Society,” in *Ninth Biennial Report of the Nevada Historical Society, 1923-1924.* (Carson City, NV: State Printing Office, 1925), 10-11.

40 *Eighth Biennial Report, 1921-1922*, 21
papers, issued in late 1920, as “more readable” and as a “better advertisement for the State as well as a desirable souvenir for pioneer families.” At three hundred pages, it was a substantial volume, and one that Wier proudly hoped would serve as a model for the Society’s future publications.41

Wier was similarly pleased with the subsequent volumes of the historical society papers published in 1922 and 1924, which together totaled over seven hundred pages. With numerous female authors listed among the contributors, the volumes also served as a means to showcase the work of other Nevada women eager to write about the state’s history.42 As a trained historian who valued the need for research, Wier clearly distinguished between the types of articles featured in the volumes—”critically written monographs,” “reminisces,” “stories of real life,” and “high school themes”—and acknowledged that while errors might have inadvertently crept into the work,” the volumes remained “a valuable historical contribution to Nevada history.”43

Not surprisingly, recognition of Wier’s expertise in Nevada history came from external sources as well, and the editors of the new Encyclopedia Britannica asked her to contribute the article on Nevada in 1921.44 In rare bits of her non-existent free time, Wier (and Cutts) also composed historical articles for the Nevada Newsletter and the Nevada State Journal in 1922.

Beyond producing these historical papers, one of the other publication initiatives that was absorbing Wier’s time was the task of assembling the state’s war history, which had been decreed by act of the Twenty-Ninth Legislature.

41 Seventh Biennial Report, 1919-1920, 8.
42 Among the contributors was Carson Valley rancher’s daughter Grace Dangberg, who had trained under Wier’s old friend Alfred Kroeber at the University of California, and who later used her anthropological training to write a linguistic and cultural study of the Washoe Indians.
44 Eighth Biennial Report, 1921-1922,14.
A Failed Initiative – War History of Nevada

Although a top priority for the Society at the beginning of the 1919-1920 biennium, Wier’s initial enthusiasm for compiling data and artifacts regarding Nevada’s war history was almost immediately tempered by the fact that the official war records held in all states were transferred to Washington, DC. With access to these records closed to the public pending their final arrangement, Wier formed the county war history committees, described above, as a means to solicit this information by personal canvass. However, as she pointed out herself, obtaining the roster and information for the proposed printed history was “a work of time.” Interestingly, she noted that no other state had been able to complete this task, “no matter how early it was begun nor to how simple terms it may have reduced its problem.”

By the end of the 1921-1922 biennium, Wier acknowledged that the war history work had come to a standstill. Although a national association of war history organizations had been formed to exchange information and monitor the availability of state material in the national archives in Washington, DC, there had been little progress at the state level in obtaining the data via her questionnaires. Her statement in the Biennial Report —“Without personal solicitation, apparently no further progress can be made in this important feature of our work”—seems to indicate that the county war history committees had failed in their efforts to gather the data in their respective locales. Two years later, in her recommendations for the 1925-1926 biennium, submitted as part of the Ninth Biennial Report, Wier noted that the work of writing Nevada’s war history “while important, is of less immediate importance, than some other phases of our work.”

Although a number of related artifacts had been collected, no progress had been made in the

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45 The Twenty-Ninth Legislature directed the Society to “collect and compile the war history of Nevada and to prepare a volume setting forth these facts.” Seventh Biennial Report, 1919-1920, 9.

46 Ibid.
writing of the history, and Wier acknowledged that it would be best to let the appropriation made for the task to revert to the general treasury as “the final accomplishment of the task lies so far in the distance.”

It was a rare admission of failure for Wier, but as with most of the Society’s initiatives, there were many other activities to take its place.

**Meetings and Community Lectures**

As the Society entered its third decade, community outreach in the form of lectures held in the Society’s building, and in the field before external groups, continued to be a prominent feature of its work. The annual meetings, which had been held infrequently since before the war, once again became public social gatherings with programs that not only entertained the attendees but reinforced the mission and work of the Society. Much of the impetus behind this increased outreach in the 1920s could be credited to the fact that Wier now had an intelligent assistant whom she could rely on to speak as a trusted representative of the Society and its work in her place.

When the Art Division of Reno’s Century Club (a long-standing woman’s organization) spent an evening in 1921 examining the exhibits in the museum, it was Cutts who stood beside Wier to discuss the purposes of the Society as she remarked on the Society’s relationship to the community’s artwork. By 1922, Wier trusted Cutts enough to permit him to make appearances on behalf of the Society to outside groups, addressing the Mesquite Club in Las Vegas, the Leisure Hour Club in Carson City, and the Century and Rotary Clubs of Reno. In each case Cutts spoke about the Society’s goals and urged the participants to do what they could to expand the collections. At an Admission Day program on November 3, 1922, Cutts read the reminiscences of former Governor Colcord on his early days in the Comstock. Later that month

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48. The data compiled by Wier and her war history volunteers remain in the archives of the Nevada Historical Society today.
at the Society’s annual meeting on November 27, 1922, he spoke on the value of museum exhibits to the community’s cultural life by illustrating points relating to European museums and Wisconsin Historical Society, which he had visited during the past summer.\footnote{Ninth Biennial Report, 1923-1924, 15.}

As a “working member” of the Society, Cutts proved especially helpful to Wier in engaging Society members in other parts of Nevada, as he was able to make personal visits across the state at a time when she was unable to travel due to family and work responsibilities. Beyond his work addressing service clubs in Reno, Cutts traveled to Carson City and Tonopah to address Teachers’ Institutes in 1923, and to Elko in 1924 to give the Admission Day address. Wier did occasionally make time to give outside lectures on general Nevada history as she did with her annual talks before the Monday Club in 1923 and 1924.\footnote{Ibid., 16.}

For strategic reasons, Wier welcomed visitors such as the Washoe County legislative delegation to view the collections in both 1921 and 1922. The building also served as a meeting place for the Pioneer Society, who had gathered together to reminisce surrounded by artifacts from those “early days” since their founding in 1914. Special events, such as the exhibit of Abe Cohn’s noted collection of Washoe Indian baskets in December 1921, and an exhibition of French etchings in March 1922, brought numerous visitors to the Society’s building, making it more than just a museum but a gathering place for the city’s cultural events.\footnote{Eighth Biennial Report, 1921-1922, 15-16.} Even when used only as a meeting space for fraternal and social organizations such as the P.E.O. and Monday Club, the exhibits on display in the Society’s building provided the visitors with a visual lesson.
on Nevada history, and reinforced in a small way Wier’s desire to instill a sense of historic consciousness into its citizens.52

The Beginning of the End: The Building Controversy and the Loss of the Collections

By 1924, it appeared that the Society was, at long last, on its way to a degree of financial and structural stability. Although funding was still a continual struggle, it been steadily increasing over the years. Four thick volumes of historical papers on Nevada’s rich history had been produced, and the help of a trusted assistant had enabled Wier to continue the Society’s forays into community outreach. That same assistant ensured the most artistic and efficient display possible of the rapidly growing collection within a building that grew ever more crowded with each new donation. There were ongoing problems of course — funding was never sufficient to hire the clerical and professional staff needed to organize and classify the mountain of documents added to the collections, or most importantly, fund a proper permanent fireproof structure. Wier also worried constantly over the loss of public records, pioneer stories, and other historical artifacts, but still, there could be no arguing that the Society’s collections were well-regarded in the press, and Wier’s expertise in Nevada history, gained through some 20 years of collecting, was known throughout the state. Yet in just two short years, everything that she had worked for would be in tatters.

Transcontinental Highway Exposition

It is ironic that the events that eventually lead to the loss of the Society’s collections began with the promise of the much longed-for new building that could properly house its collections. As the finishing touches were placed on the Lincoln Highway, the state’s first coast-to-coast highway, the idea of constructing a building for a Nevada Transcontinental Highway

52 Ninth Biennial Report, 1923-1924, 16.
Exposition was first proposed in 1921 as a means to celebrate its completion. Once the exhibits on the highway came down, the Society could then move in and make the building its permanent residence. Excited at the prospect of a fine new building, Wier wrote a note of thanks to the Reno Chamber of Commerce, who had been eager proponents of the Society moving into the building; “When once we are able to get a building to adequately exhibit our collections, we will have the greatest ‘show’ place of the city.” The legislature had other more pressing problems, however, so the project was shelved.53

In 1924, Governor Scrugham revived the idea of the exposition building once again. This time he had the support of the legislature. As before, the Society was invited into the planning stages with the promise that they would be given quarters at the end of the exposition’s run. Wier was anxious that the Society’s participation be dependent on certain conditions. The first was that the legislature would consult the Society throughout the planning process to insure that all display areas would utilize the latest techniques in museology. The second, and perhaps most significant, was that living quarters would be provided for the Society’s curator.54 This was to insure that a professional would always be at hand in the museum and research areas of the building. The Society’s Board must have felt that these conditions had been agreed to as they gave their approval to continue the planning in late 1924.55


54 From the beginning of the Society’s existence, Wier had literally lived among the collections. Even prior to the construction of the temporary building in 1912, the growing collection of artifacts, documents, books, photographs, and other materials had been stored in her home on Center Street. The so-called “temporary” building, constructed near her home, enabled easy access to the collections, which was essential for Wier, who did most of her work on them in snatches of her non-existent spare time, between teaching duties and taking care of her elderly mother. Not surprisingly, she saw it as essential that any new permanent structure for the Society feature living quarters for her and mother, so that she would be afforded easy access the collections.

55 Stensvaag, “‘Life of My Child,’” 9.
In January 1925, an act was introduced into the Nevada State Assembly that would “provide for an exhibition of the products of the State of Nevada” at an exhibition to be held in Reno in 1926 that would be known as the “Nevada Transcontinental Highways Exposition.” The act also designated that there would be an exposition commission, and that an appropriation would be made for the exhibits and for the construction of a building to house them. Despite the earlier reassurances, the bill mentioned nothing that had been discussed earlier with the Society’s Board, and the only acknowledgement of their involvement was a small provision that mentioned that they would be given space when the exposition ended. The Governor responded to their concerns by saying that he feared the bill would have been “bogged down” in committee while they debated these arrangements and that they could be easily “made on the side.” While the Society reluctantly agreed to accept the bill, Wier was deeply upset and dismayed by the turn of events. She was even more upset when she heard that the Board had agreed to go ahead with the planning despite her reservations, on a vote of 8 to 1.

Conflict with the Board of Trustees

In response to the situation, Wier wrote a lengthy letter to the Society’s Board of Trustees reminding them of the original conditions they had requested and noting that the building plans as they existed had “to her knowledge” no really acceptable exhibit space, no room for expansion, no room for a research library, and no living quarters. If the Board was to continue to go along with the exhibition design as currently planned, she felt she had no other choice than to immediately resign her position. Depositing this sealed letter with the Board during their April 13 meeting, Wier left the room. Upon her return, the Board’s attempts to “comfort” her made her feel that they did not take her seriously and thought she was simply overwrought by her

56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
personal and professional problems. She left furious and determined to resign. Wier later found that the Board had not even opened her letter, but this did little to improve her feelings about the situation.\textsuperscript{58}

Another letter to the Board illustrates Wier’s frustration with their actions: “The intimation made several times that I was personally hurt and needed ‘comforting’ was maddening in the face of the realization that it was not my personal feelings but the life of my child that was at stake.” She felt strongly that Scrugham’s plan for the building was also merely a tool to gain control of the Society’s collections.\textsuperscript{59} She reiterated her position that there could be no compromise—the Board would have to either rescind their earlier acceptance of the Governor’s plan or accept her resignation.\textsuperscript{60}

Wier received a letter from several Board members just days later asking her to reconsider her decision. The signatories included Judge Talbot, her long-standing ally on the Board, and her trusted and valued curator, Charles Cutts, to whom she had acted as mentor since his arrival nearly a decade before. She was suspicious of some of the other Board members who had signed, however, feeling that Boyle (as former governor) was in Scrugham’s camp, as was James Finch, one of Scrugham’s lieutenants. The letter offered no alternative to the building situation that Wier felt so strongly about, and in the face of this, Wier’s reply the following day indicated that she had no other choice than to resign.\textsuperscript{61} On April 17, 1925, Wier sent a letter of

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 10.

\textsuperscript{59} Wier had been wary of Scrugham’s intentions since 1924, when he suggested the creation of State Board of Historical Research with herself as “honorary chairman.” She was not receptive to what Stensvaag has described as “an intrusion into her professional bailiwick by an amateur,” and this likely affected her future relations with the Governor. Stensvaag, “‘Life of My Child,’” 8.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 10.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.; Jeanne Wier to Board of Trustees, April 16, 1925, box 4, folder 1925-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
resignation to the Board of Trustees, declaring dramatically that she would “surrender my other job and leave the State to engage in some other line of work.”

The realization that her trusted curator, Charles Cutts, seemed to be in agreement with the majority of the Board, was particularly distressing to Wier. As his mentor, she had consistently encouraged and praised his work, and felt that he was most like her in his thinking about historical matters. In a heartfelt letter to Cutts, Wier poured out her distress over the situation:

After two wholly sleepless nights I am moved to ask you to let me hear from your own lips the denial or the confession of the rumors that have recently come to me concerning your attitude about the problems that have for six weeks been slowly eating out my life…Does that mean really that you still allied with those forces from within, which whether consciously or not, are seeking the death of me and of this Institution which you also have sacrificed so much to build?

She noted with some irony that her confidence in him had inspired the Board to have the same trust in him that they had in her—and she felt he was now using it against her. She queried him as to whether he felt that the current Board truly had the Society’s best interests at heart.

Cutts went to see Wier immediately after receipt of the letter, and after some discussion Wier responded with a letter the following day saying that if the Board were to press the Exposition planning committee for some changes such as living quarters for her, special locations for the Society’s exhibits, and space for a research library, she would withdraw her resignation and stay on. Specifically, Wier said she would continue as Secretary only if the State Exposition Commission would agree in writing to the following item: that there would be no attempt to interfere with the policies or administration of the Society by the commission either

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62 Jeanne Wier to Board of Trustees, April 17, 1925, box 4, folder 1925-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

individually or collectively and most importantly that “Living quarters shall be provided for me under the same roof as the Collections not later than the close of the Exposition.”

Over a month later, on July 1, the Board finally replied to her letter and once again repeated their plea for her to withdraw her threat to resign and work toward some sort of compromise. However, the letter made no mention of any efforts on their part in working with the Exposition planning committee as she had requested in her May letter to Cutts. Wier’s disappointment with their reply was palpable in her response to the Board. Frustrated at their lack of understanding for her position, she expressed her dismay at how there seemed to be no understanding of the importance of having a specialist within the Society to oversee matters: “It is difficult for the historian to define to the laity in what his art consists…..” Intimating at what she saw as a desire to “undermine the Society,” she also evinced anger toward the Board for not recognizing what she considered the insidious efforts by Governor Scrugham to influence historical efforts in the state: “Will you still insist that we are not putting our head into the lion’s jaw by going into a building erected and maintained by our enemies….with not even a janitor who is not selected and employed by the enemy?”

Despite the high drama presented in these letters, Wier did not make good on her threats in the remaining months of 1925. Her relations with Cutts seemed to be repaired. There was continued frustration with the Board, however, much of it from feeling that they did not appreciate her many years of devoted work on behalf of the Society, and her constant struggles

64 Jeanne Wier to Charles Cutts, May 27, 1925, box 4, folder 1925-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
65 Jeanne Wier to Board of Trustees, July 8, 1925, box 4, folder 1925-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
66 This is disputed by James Stensvaag in “‘Life of My Child,’” footnote 26.
with the State. In a letter to Society Vice President Henry Reid in 1925, she wrote that despite these struggles and the “indifference of the frontier community,” the Historical Society had still made an impression. “The quality and scope of this success is better estimated from without the state than within.” Interestingly, she argued that much of their problem stemmed from the focus that had been placed on the museum side of the Society’s operations—the visible objects. In some respects, the addition of Cutts had made things worse because his skills had made the museum displays so exceptional: she described him as too professional a museologist for the Society’s own good. There should have been more stress placed on the publications and the development of the Research library. Moving to the new building under these conditions, she felt, would only serve to make this “imbalance” worse; she felt that the public and the legislature needed to be educated on the real purpose of the Society – the collection of source materials to facilitate proper research.  

Wier continued to perform her customary work for the Society throughout the fall of 1925, but by early 1926, the conflicts with the Board had again taken an ugly turn. There simply was no convincing them to agree with her stance regarding the building and the importance of the Society having input on the design of the space and the inclusion of living quarters for her. As the disagreement between Wier and the board grew from an impasse into open conflict, friendships were torn asunder. Talbot suggested that a general meeting to discuss things be called in December, but Wier put him off saying that it was impossible in the busy weeks before Christmas. The relationship between Wier and Cutts grew shaky as he failed to grasp how strongly she felt about the building situation. Realizing that it was fruitless to try to change her mind, Cutts tried to suggest the importance of maintaining civility in the face of conflict: “No  

68Stensvaag, “‘Life of My Child,’” 12.
good can ever come to anyone where a defensive attitude must continually be kept up. The work you did was very fine but no earthly work is worth the loss of friends.“As69

To find a way out of the impasse, Wier recruited new candidates for the Board from the Society’s membership that were supportive of her position. The candidates were presented at the March 1926 executive board meeting, and after a tense session, the new candidates were elected and the majority of the existing board ousted. The long and steady relationship between Wier and President Talbot, who had been had strongest ally, was one of the casualties. Although he was the only one of the old Board who had survived the “purge,” he had resigned immediately following the meeting, but the new Board convinced him to stay on.70 The disagreements at the meeting were so heated, in fact, that they were reported on in the local paper.

On March 27, 1926, the Nevada State Journal reported on the election of the Society’s new board with the headline “Difference of Opinion Results in Changes in Directorate.” The article noted that a “lack of harmony” between the secretary and the 1925 Board of Directors had resulted in “an almost complete change of the board’s personnel at a heated session at the society building.” Despite the best efforts of a hastily-formed “reconciliation committee” within the Board, there was no getting the two sides to agree, and all members of the old board were defeated with the exception of the long-serving President, Judge George Talbot. Although the article reported that Talbot tendered his resignation almost immediately following the defeat of the other members, he was convinced to remain “after talks had been made in which his presence as a member was urged.” Strangely enough, the reason for the disagreement was not revealed in

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69 Charles Cutts to Jeanne Wier, November 7, 1925, box 4, folder 1925-2, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

70 Stensvaag, “‘Life of My Child,’ ” 12.
the article. In listing all the newly elected members of the Society, the article concluded with one telling sentence: “Miss Jeanne Elizabeth Wier, Secretary of the Society, was reelected.”  

An editorial entitled “Keep It Out of Politics” in that same issue seemed to take more than a mild swipe at Wier over these events. Remark ing that “differences of opinion” in active organizations were bound to occur, it proclaimed that any attempt to draw the Society into politics on the basis of these disagreements, should be “frowned upon by all well meaning citizens of Nevada who believe that the historical society fills a very important and interesting place in the activities of the state.” Although it gave Wier credit for her “energy and initiative,” the editorial suggested that she could never have accomplished this work without “an organization of earnest people behind her.” In perhaps the most public challenge to Wier’s authority, the paper declared that the “The Nevada Historical Society is a statewide organization and is not the property of any one person.” With the Society dependent on the state to a large extent for support, it was not for it to engage in politics: “The minute it takes on political activities its usefulness is gone.”

Not surprisingly, Wier was quick to respond to these criticisms and by the following morning, her comments could be read in the *Reno Evening Gazette.* “Positively no such attempt is being made,” she declared. On the contrary, she argued “the whole desire of the new trustees is to remove and keep the society wholly out of politics.” Wier did report that the new Board of Trustees would be asking for a meeting with the State Commission in charge of the new exposition building, only to ask if it could provide more suitable quarters for the Society and its displays. After such a public brouhaha, she was eager to show her willingness to work with the

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71 “Difference of Opinion Results in Changes in Directorate,” *Nevada State Journal,* March 27, 1926.

State, adding that “the Society was greatly interested in the 1927 exposition and assembling for display in the exposition building the finest historical exhibit ever shown in Nevada.”

The triumph over the election was short-lived, however, as the newly reconstituted Board could not make much of a difference with the governor essentially in control of the legislature. The following year, the legislative finance committee and the legislature itself would end up crippling the Society by approving only enough money to meet its existing debts.

After the tussle with Wier, the Society’s new officers made every effort to demonstrate their support of her position on the new building. Their strongest statement came in the *Tenth Biennial Report*. After a detailed section on how Wier’s voluntary work for the Society had saved the State nearly $100,000, the Board emphasized that “no other person in this State” was fit to do this work, and that there needed to be “careful consideration of any plan looking toward a change of housing of the collections” as a means to retain her. It would be essential, they argued, that any new building provide enough space for the Secretary’s University office work, Society office work, and living quarters in order to enable her to have sufficient time for the Society in addition to her “full schedule at the University.” Pointedly they noted that “no provision has been made for such an arrangement in the new State Building.”

The Board also pointed out a larger objection to the new building: the fact that it was not suited as permanent housing for a historical society because both its architecture and location (on a park plot) made future expansion impossible. Thus, any housing on this spot could only be temporary. Wier’s imprint was clear to see in their solution to the building question. The Board

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74 The change in his status as beloved friend and colleague to outsider is made clear in the *Tenth Biennial Report* (1925-1926), where there is scarcely a mention of Cutts. In the two previous reports, Wier had lavished him with praise, and he had also written his own curator’s report.

deemed it essential to preserve the current property on which the Society’s building was situated for a future building site (due to its size), and as it would not be possible to move the collections until the end of the Exposition, it was most expedient to keep the collections in place, “with the expectation that before the close of the biennium private benefactions will have solved the problem both of a suitable building and of an endowment furnishing at least partial support in enlarged quarters.”76

To bolster their case before the Governor, the Board reported that the Chairman of the State Building Commission had informed them that it was his opinion that the current site of the Society was best suited for “historical purposes,” while the Exposition building was “especially suited for commercial exhibits.” It was therefore clear to the Board that the new building had been “erected without full consideration of the technical needs of an historical society.” With that in mind, they informed the governor that they were currently working on a plan to obtain private funding for the building. Perhaps ignorant of Wier’s past failures in this regard, the Board fervently believed that there were many pioneer families who would “gladly assist in rearing a fitting monument to the founders of the Commonwealth in the form of and archives and museum building.” They merely asked that the governor and the legislature express confidence in their work as a means to secure public support for the private endowment planning.77 Their words fell on deaf ears, however, and the State Building Commission remained determined to take the collections.

Removal of the Collections

Although Wier and the Society’s new Board were desperate to keep hold of the collections, the fact that both the governor and the legislature were on the same side proved

76 Ibid., 8-9.
77 Ibid., 9.
insurmountable. In the final exposition bill as passed in 1926, the legislature declared itself on behalf of the state to be the owners of all the property that had been acquired by the Society, and with a chilling sense of finality noted that “the Board of Capitol Commissioners of the State of Nevada are [sic] hereby authorized and directed as soon as the relics, library, manuscripts, museum, and collection of the Nevada Historical Society shall be provided with suitable quarters in the said Nevada building erected in Reno and, in any event not later than January 21, 1927, to sell all lots and lands” (University and Ninth and East Ninth streets) purchased for the Society by the state in 1911 and 1919.  

During summer 1926, Wier wrote repeatedly to Governor Scrugham asking him to postpone the sale of the building until the Society could be assured of a permanent home for the collections. Scrugham had no real objection to the delay but recommended that she consult the state attorney general. He was supportive and even went so far as to offer her assistance in bringing a “friendly suit” to the state supreme court, questioning the timetable, the State’s right to take control of the collection, and the State’s effort to force the Society into a building they did not want. Despite these efforts, Wier’s hopes were dashed when on October 22, 1926, the Nevada Supreme Court upheld all parts of the law and refused to issue a writ of prohibition.

Despite the eloquent pleas of the Society’s board in the Biennial Report issued in January 1927, the governor and legislature remained unmoved. The final and most devastating nail for the Society’s coffin occurred that month when the legislative finance committee and then the legislature did not approve any monies beyond what the Society needed to pay for its existing debts. It was the death knell for their work, as Wier clearly knew. As the spring wore on, two attempts to sell the Society’s existing quarters and storage space failed when there were no

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78 Stensvaag, “‘Life of My Child,’” 13.
79 Ibid.
bidders. Nevertheless, the Nevada State Building Board’s plans to remove the Society’s collections for placement into the new exposition building moved forward rapidly.

One can only imagine Wier’s state of mind as the collections she had acquired over nearly twenty-five years of collecting across the state at great personal and professional cost, were taken piece by piece from the structure that she worked so hard to fund and build. Even more heartbreaking was the fact that, as reported by the *Reno Evening Gazette* on May 31, the removal of the materials to the new building was to be supervised by the man she had once considered her strongest ally, Charles Cutts. Writing to the superintendent of the new building on June 2, 1927, Wier declared that his order to remove the exhibits (dated May 31) was “unlawful.” Defiant to the end, she exclaimed dramatically “I, as legal custodian of the Nevada State Historical Society, yield only to superior force in the surrender of any Nevada State Historical Society property.”

80 Only a small portion of the materials were taken at this time to serve as the Exposition exhibit, the remainder of the materials were left over the summer and removed later. Throughout the summer of 1927, Wier worked diligently to prepare them for the move even as despaired of what would become of them in what she viewed as a wholly inappropriate building.

**Personal Sadness**

Wier poured out her disappointment and bitterness to both personal and professional correspondents throughout the ordeal and at its end. To former Nevada Governor Roswell Colcord, who had donated a portrait of himself in July 1927, she remarked that she was registering everything as a loan “as she cannot be responsible for anything after it has been taken

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to the new building...For the sake of the pioneers and for the generations still unborn who ought not to suffer because of the amazing ignorance of the present generation of politicians I hope that something may yet be done to stop the wreckage of these accomplishments.”

A month later, writing to a correspondent in Salt Lake City who desired historical information from the Society’s library, and had inquired unsuccessfully with attendants at the new building, Wier noted bitterly that “…the junking is soon to begin and …another man as wholly untrained and unacquainted with pioneer history as these with whom you talked but boasting a Ph.D. is to be made the leader of it.”

To her dear friend Mrs. West in Elko, who had consistently supported her over the years, there was a more personal outpouring as Wier, who was working throughout the summer to prepare the collections for the move, confessed, “I am just living from day to day endeavoring to put by strength enough each night to take me through the next lap.”

Wier’s responses to friends and colleagues and even the regional newspapers showed the depth of her sadness and bitterness at the Society’s situation, but it was not until she was asked to speak before the PCBAHA in fall 1927 that Wier was finally able to air her grievances in a wider public forum. The gathering of historians was a more sympathetic audience to be sure, and one that Wier could be assured would be more understanding of the trials and tribulations that she had endured.

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83 Jeanne Wier to Mrs. Edith West, September 1, 1927, box 5, folder 1927, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
A Final Plea: Wier’s Speech Before the PCBAHA

As for the future of historical work in Nevada, so far as I am personally concerned, it is a matter of hope rather than of belief.\(^8^4\)

In late 1927 a dispirited Wier gave a lengthy speech before the PCBAHA. As a branch of the AHA, it had always been the professional organization with which she felt the strongest affinity, and the one with which there was a strong regional connection regarding the work of other western historical societies. After all, it was before this body that she had given her impassioned speech so long ago on the work of western historical societies using Nevada as a case study. She had been full of hope then, illustrating the distinctive challenges of historical societies in the West, and inspired by the possibility of cooperation between other western historical societies that might enable them to one day be the equal of the great institutions of the Midwest and East Coast.

In this speech, “Experiences of a Western State Historical Society During the Last Quarter Century,” Wier presented an entirely different portrait. Although it briefly discussed the dissolution of the Society, and its current status, it was more of an attempt at understanding what had gone wrong, and to ponder why she had not been able to garner the support needed for the Society. Returning to her speech from 1910 in which she had defined the different types of historical societies, Wier wondered whether she had been mistaken about her earlier assessments about the geographical differences that defined the makeup and funding of the societies. She concluded the speech with a plea for the PCBAHA as an association to think about how they could create sentiment that might result in greater state aid and private endowment for all western historical societies.

\(^8^4\) “Experiences of a Western State Historical Society During the Last Quarter Century,” in reprint of \textit{Proceedings of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association} (1927), 40.
Realizing that many in her audience might not know of the Society’s dissolution, Wier began the speech by giving a brief account of what had transpired. There was a degree of courage in her pronouncement in this public forum that the collections had been “seized by political and commercial interests” and moved by “kindly but untrained janitors without any expert supervision.” Although the museum had been arranged “after a fashion,” the library had been, to her knowledge, “practically junked both for lack of room and of any knowledge of how to set it up and administer it.” She gave a brief accounting of the political situation and resulting legislation that had stripped the Society of its appropriation, noting that the Society had used “all peaceable methods” to try and stop the “seizure” of the collections but had not wished to go to court to fight the situation.85

Wier then provided a sad accounting of what had been lost — the work of twenty-four years of collecting — 6000 bound volumes, 4000 museum accessions, “countless” broadsides and pamphlets. As usual, she peppered her lecture with dramatic adjectives, describing the materials as “confiscated” and “put to unholy uses.” With some sad irony she remarked that the State Board’s knowledge of the collection was so limited that it had boasted that all of the materials could be moved in two days’ time, and then found that “for the job, three weeks’ time was all too short.”86

Admitting that after the first shock of the “whatness” had passed and she no longer had any control over the situation, she turned to examine the question of the “whyness” of it all. Looking past the particulars of what had happened in Nevada, she took a larger view of the status of historical societies in the West in attempting to uncover what was at the heart of the problems that had destroyed the Nevada Historical Society. To do so, she returned to the theories on

85 Ibid., 32-33.
86 Ibid., 34.
historical society development that she had first proposed in her 1910 speech, which had placed them into three categories: those east of the Alleghenies supported largely by private endowments, those of the Midwest, “state-supported in money and sentiment alike,” and lastly, those of the Pacific Slope, which also sought state support but were not yet “on solid ground.” At that time, it had been her belief that while those in the East were “fundamentally” different in their attitudes and methods of promoting historical work, those in the Midwest and the West were simply at “slightly separated stages of a similar development.” Thus, once the West had advanced into an era of social consciousness it would enable the “era of triumph” that characterized the historical societies of Wisconsin and Minnesota. The solution she had originally proposed was simply for the “far West” societies to more closely and thoroughly emulate the methods of the Midwest states.\(^{87}\)

With the experiences of the past twenty-three years now in hand, however, she conceded that she had been mistaken, and that the “far West” had more in common with the Atlantic seaboard than with the Midwest. As she took a slight historiographical turn, it was not surprising that Wier acknowledged Turner in an audience full of historians from the West: “In keeping with the new exhilarating idea that democracy is born of the West and that a constant rebirth of democracy on each new frontier has made America truly American, we have been wont until recently to think that this democracy was the same” wherever it had manifested itself. With regard to the pioneers of the various regions and chronological eras of the United States, she argued that it was only recently that “great thinkers” in the field of American history had begun

\(^{87}\) Ibid., 35.
to “differentiate in any accurate way and to distinguish clearly the pioneer of one chronological area from succeeding ones.”

By way of example, she provided a brief description of what characterized democracy in the Midwest, and then pondered the definition of democracy in the Far West (as she called it). If it was true that the democracy of this region was building up a “natural aristocracy,” one in which “private worth” was praised, and where the “virtues of chivalry, honesty, kindness and courage are more pronounced than elsewhere,” there were still many potential pitfalls. While this might result in a more “vital social code,” it would also be more dependent on “proper intellectual leadership,” and when that leadership failed or was “perverted,” its institutions would be exposed to additional hazards. In a region characterized by such a democracy, there might be infinite possibilities, Wier admitted, but it might also allow for the “possibility of being easily stampeded by the demagogue” and a danger that “strong-armed methods” could prevail “before consciousness of the masses has had time to arouse itself.”

What did such a “social philosophy” or characterization mean for historical work in this region then? It was in this portion of her lecture that the sting of her bitter loss of the Society becomes most apparent. Perhaps reflecting on her own experiences, Wier considered the strength of the “state-supported historical society of the Middle West” to be the loyalty of its citizens who “stand shoulder to shoulder in support of them” and the fact that the loyalty of the “small-town mind” would not be turned by “a chance politician who has his own ax to grind.” Just what was the reason behind the struggle that characterized the challenges of historical society work in this region: was it merely “the result of development in a later era” she asked? Frustrated, she grasped at the reasons: “Having not yet completed the era of construction, is it

88 Ibid., 36.
89 Ibid., 36-37.
that we are not prepared for era of selection and preservation? Is it that our heirlooms are too few as yet to arouse mass sentiment?” Wier then concluded it might have a much simpler reason—that they had been using the wrong methods. Ultimately, she declared herself doubtful on whether state-supported and state-controlled historical associations could ever “permanently thrive on the Pacific Coast.” If they could not, then private endowment, as on the Atlantic seaboard, was the solution or “a combination of the two methods fully safeguarded for each.”\(^{90}\)

Although she argued that there might be hope for historical societies based in some western states (in California, “a state-controlled type should thrive if anywhere in the West” and in the Southwest, the rich Spanish historical background could help), Wier felt that for the Northwest and the Central inland areas of the Far West there is less hope and in Nevada perhaps least of all.” She once again pointed to the key characteristics that had defined Nevada—seasonal occupation and impermanent industries—where “the drifter rather than the real pioneer is apt to dominate,” and the drifter had little state loyalty. Noting that Nevada had become a state at a time of profound national political change and was part of this change, it could be, as a result, “more closely tied in sentiment to the national government, to the detriment of state loyalty, than other states which “were of necessity more divorced from national politics.” Wier’s sentiments here were clearly borne out of bitter experience from her own travels through the vast and arid desert landscape of her adopted state:

> Again the sparse population of Nevada makes difficult the gaining of collective thought and action and makes easy the domination of power other than that of votes. Where one can travel all day without seeing another human being and where water holes, rather than towns, may mark the breaks of a long journey, it is difficult to build anything in the way of social institutions.\(^{91}\)

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\(^{90}\) Ibid., 37.

\(^{91}\) Ibid., 38.
She also attributed some of Nevada’s failure to provide state support for the Society to what she saw as “nation-wide symptoms of distress in the historical field.” Convinced that “real history” (history written using primary sources) was being ignored, she was dismissive of “attempts to prostitute history to the use of other activities.” Included in her stern listing of such improper activities were the writing of textbooks in the interest of “so-called patriotism,” the substitution of motion pictures films for “serious historical study and writing,” historical pageants, pioneer picnics, and the “oftimes distorted historical novel.” Like a rebuking schoolmarm, she expressed disdain that such activities were urged as “substitutes for research and sober writing and the saving of records.” Such “sinister tendencies” would have easily influenced a state that she described as “already wavering…in its loyalty to the writing of its history.”

In her opinion, any hope that remained for Nevada had to come from outside — by the stirring of “pride and consciousness” in observing more successful sections, by “force of example,” and through appealing to its leadership via the written and spoken word. Financially, it had to come from benefactions and endowments. Nevada could boast of its independence but was “in all these things still a missionary field.” As she had in speech before the PCBAHA years before, Wier pleaded for the organization’s assistance in affecting this change in her state’s outlook. Could not a “united effort”—either through resolutions or the appointment of a special committee—help in situations such as this in creating sentiment “in favor of both more liberal state aid and of private endowment?”

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92 Her inclusion of historical pageants and pioneer picnics appears strange in light of previous events sponsored by the Society.


94 Ibid., 40.
Despite her appeal for help, Wier admitted sadly that the future of historical work in Nevada was “a matter of hope rather than belief.” Her closing statement, although cloaked in Wier’s usual flowery prose, was palpable in its sense of defeat even as she hoped that Nevada’s experience might help other Western institutions:

For many years I was delirious with ambition to achieve for my adopted State. I admitted no obstacles. Now a more philosophic spirit has taken possession and in this spirit I have surrendered myself to the dream sprite and the impressions here chronicled have flitted across my mind as I have tried to catch a vision of some solution beyond. If I have snared even a glimpse of something which can be elaborated by other minds for other places and put to practical use for this Farthest West, I am content.

In 1929, Wier submitted the Society’s report to the governor’s office as she done every two years since her first Biennial Report in 1909. The two intervening years may have brought some peace to her broken spirit. Remarkably, she remained, even in the face of the funding debacle, the loss of the collections, and her earlier bitter comments, still devoted to the work of the Society, which she continued to do from her home office. Wier did not mention the heated and lengthy battle over the building with her accompanying resignation threats and the ousting of longtime Society board members in this Biennial Report. She merely wrote that the appropriation was “exhausted early in 1927” and that “the collections were taken by order of the State Building Board.” Although it was impossible to take in new collections or prepare materials for publication, Wier noted that whatever papers came to the Society as Secretary she preserved, and that she answered correspondence “as far as this is possible without the use of the historical library.”

In their own remarks in the Eleventh Biennial Report, the Society’s

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95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
president and Board of Trustees mirrored Wier’s statement by acknowledging that while the legislature’s actions in 1927 had “seriously hampered the work of the Society,” they had not “weakened the ardor of those charged with the supervision of its affairs.”

Wier’s activities on behalf of the Society in the following decade would show the prescience of these remarks as she slowly and steadily rebuilt the wounded organization.

**Personal Struggles**

If the 1920s represented a decade of immense disappointment and professional struggle for Wier, her personal life proved no easier during this challenging time. The dedicated daughter and sister continued to care for family’s financial and physical needs. The care of her elderly mother was largely left to Wier, and was one of the main reasons, beyond finances, that Wier was unable to undertake fieldwork in other parts of the state. Her sister Eva, a graduate of the University of Michigan who had never quite found her place or a consistent profession, bounced between the homes of Wier in Reno, and that of her elder sister Clara in Nebraska, and was a constant worry. Brother Adolphus “Will” Wier Jr., who held a law degree from the University of Michigan, and who had once acted as curator for the Society in its early years, had purchased a hardware store in California, and had been hit hard by the economic downturn of the post-war period. By the early 1920s, Wier was thus under enormous strain, providing financial assistance for her mother, sister, and brother. She was nothing, if not a paradox, however, complaining and rejoicing in the strain at the same time: “I am so very busy that my life at present seems like one long nightmare. Yet I find enjoyment in being busy as I know you do also.”

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A bright spot in this tumultuous decade was the May 1924 commencement during which Wier was awarded an honorary doctorate in celebration of her twenty-five years of service to the University of Nevada. In conferring the degree upon Wier at the commencement ceremony, University of Nevada President Clark described her as a “faithful teacher for 25 years, founder of the Nevada Historical Society, and gatherer and preserver of Nevada’s historical documents.” Writing of the event, the *Reno Evening Gazette* also described the fifty-four-year-old Wier as a “historian of note.” It must have been a bittersweet moment for Wier, recalling as it did her intense determination to pursue a doctorate some fourteen years previously that had ended in failure.

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100 Wier was the only woman among the four persons awarded an honorary doctorate that year. The others were R.D. Billinghurst, city school superintendent and author of Nevada school laws, Emmet D. Boyle, former governor of Nevada and graduate of the Mackay School of Mines, and Peter Frandsen, a biologist described as “an indefatigable scientist and great teacher of the science of light.” “Honorary Degrees of Doctor of Laws Conferred on Four Nevadans,” *Nevada State Journal*, May 29, 1924.

101 “Degree of Doctor to Billinghurst, Boyle, Frandsen, and Miss Wier,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, May 28, 1924.
The stress of her double-pronged professional life had also led to a lifetime of physical ailments that seemed to strike her on a regular basis. In January 1925, Cutts wrote to Governor Boyle of Wier’s ill-health: “She has been quite unwell the past month and has gone so far as to say that she felt that she could carry the burden of the work here no longer.”\textsuperscript{102} In June 1925, she acknowledged “serious illness in the family” to W.H. Mackay that had delayed an answer to the \textit{National Cyclopedia of American Biography} on the life of Governor Sparks.\textsuperscript{103}

Perhaps the strongest blow to her psyche came in March 1928, when Wier’s mother died shortly after her eighty-eighth birthday. However much of a burden her mother’s care had been

\textsuperscript{102} Charles Cutts to Governor Boyle, January 29, 1925, box 4, folder 1925-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.

\textsuperscript{103} Jeanne Wier to W.H. Mackay, June 13, 1925, box 4, folder 1925-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
to Wier, it was a sad occasion coming on the heels of her many struggles with the state over the Society. In a March 1929 letter to the *Globe Gazette and Times* in Mason City, Iowa, Wier wrote the editor of her parents’ passing and of their work in local schools back in the 1880s, and her respect for them is apparent: “Laid away in lavender are many souvenirs given to them by their pupils in Iowa and elsewhere. Always they had the whole-hearted affection of those they taught for they were teachers in the true sense of the word.”

By mid-1928, the death of her mother and the dearth of work for the Society left Wier with unexpected free time, and it was at this time that she first attended a meeting of the Reno chapter of the National League of American Pen Women, a professional organization of women writers. Numerous articles and announcements in the *Reno Evening Gazette* and *Nevada State Journal* indicate that she became highly active in this organization over the next two decades until her death in 1950. In fact, using the newspapers’ social columns as a yardstick, Wier’s social engagements increased dramatically after the late 1920s. Where there were once only six to eight engagements publicized in the first decade, and the same number in the 1910s and 1920s, the number jumped dramatically in the 1930s, with over thirty-five engagements and about twenty-two in the 1940s, the decade preceding her death.

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104 Jeanne Wier to Editor, *Globe Gazette and Times*, March 15, 1929, box 1, folder 18, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
CHAPTER 9:
FEDERAL FUNDS TO THE RESCUE: THE 1930S

Nevada in the 1930s

As the rest of the nation plunged headlong into the Great Depression after the stock market crash of October 1929, Nevada initially felt isolated from the worst of it. However, the failure of a number of state banks in 1932, and then of the large Wingfield banking chain the following year, made it quite obvious that the Depression had arrived in Nevada. Despite these setbacks, two events would eventually improve the state’s shaky economy: the legalization of gaming in March 1931 and the reduction of residency time for divorces that same year. Both of these events brought thousands of tourists to the state, and even more importantly, their money to replenish the state’s coffers.

Perhaps of more significance even than gaming at this time, Nevada’s economy was also fortunate enough to be the recipient of federal largesse that would transform it and rescue it from severe hardship. In fact, Nevada received more federal funding per capita during the Depression than any other state in the US. As Elliott has noted, it was “first in total per capita expenditures, but first, also, per capita in loans, Civil Works Administration (CWA) and Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) funds, and funds for public roads.” Federally-funded projects would transform the state from the building of additional highways, to the construction of Boulder (now Hoover) Dam to the work of the Soil Conservation Service and Agricultural Adjustment Administrations for Nevada farmers and ranchers. The Civilian Conservation Corps also transformed the Nevada

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1 Elliott, History of Nevada, 297. Elliott suggests the reason for the large amount of funding obtained was not clear but that “the state’s small population and powerful congressional delegation may have been contributing factors.”
landscape in many rural areas of the state. Early New Deal programs such as the Civilian Works Administration provided employment to thousands of Nevadans for a few months between late 1933 and spring 1934 before the projects created by the Federal Emergency Relief Act took over. Funding provided by the Relief Appropriation Act in 1935 resulted in the creation of the Works Progress Administration and its allied agencies, and these would eventually go on to become the largest employer in the state.\(^2\)

In contrast to the New Deal programs that funded labor-intensive construction projects, the Works Project Administration (as it did all over the country) provided employment for more skilled workers who contributed to projects that required either clerical and professional help as well as the work of artists, musicians, and writers. It was the workers on one such project that provided the means for Wier to bring her beloved historical society back from the brink of destruction. From reorganizing the contents of the museum and library into a semblance of order, to surveying historical records throughout the state, and providing the resources that enabled the writing and publication of the WPA *Guide to Nevada*, it was federal aid that allowed Wier to make the Society viable again.

**The Aftermath: 1927-1933**

Although the majority of the Society’s materials were no longer in her care from 1927-1933, Wier did her best to perform other duties such as answering correspondence, and accepting loans of material on behalf of the organization. Still smarting from the loss of the collections,\(^3\) Wier was not shy about informing correspondents who was responsible for the Society’s current

\(^2\) Ibid., 298.

\(^3\) Wier was also distressed at how they had been treated after their removal to the new building. In an article in the *Reno Evening Gazette* on December 31, 1927, (“Nevada History Documents Lost Says Miss Wier”), she noted that materials that the Society had spent years in collecting were “in the care of persons who regarded them of so little importance that some had even been used to kindle fires…”

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straits, regularly mentioning the political machinations of the state government that had ripped the collections from her care and plunged the organization into chaos. A response to a request for library materials from Mrs. T.G. Akers in 1928 resulted in a lengthy note explaining why she could not provide the requested document, and concluded, “…I regret most of all that the one chance that Nevada has had to compile a collection for the writing of her true history has fallen by the wayside because of the manipulations of a few demagogues.”

In a letter to Nevada Senator Key Pittman, a skeptical Wier asked for his support of an US Senate bill amendment that would fund the printing of a collection of the official papers of the Territories of the United States, housed in the National Archives. Rather pointedly, she declared, “[a]lthough it does not appear that Nevada, or rather the politicians who control this State, wish any genuine local historical work done, yet for the sake of those other States that properly appreciate such endeavors, I wish that the pending amendment might be passed.”

Time did not lessen the sting much; in a letter to out-of-state members in May 1929, Wier explained why she had not been sending out bills to the membership and snipped, “You know they took all the collections but the loans and put them in charge of an ignorant politician down town.”

In the *Eleventh Biennial Report* issued at the beginning of 1929, the President and Trustees of the NSHS reported their hope that the Legislature convened that year would restore the Society’s funding so that the organization might be “restored to its former condition of efficiency and service to the people of this state in carrying out the ideals of those pioneer men

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6 Jeanne Wier to Mr. and Mrs. Wells Drury, May 12, 1929, box 5, folder 1929-1, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
and women who made it possible that the State of Nevada might have an Historical Society worthy of the name.” The plea fell on deaf ears, however, and the Society spent the next few years in the same strange limbo with Wier, in her official capacity as Secretary, doing her best to maintain what she could of the organization’s business with no access to the collections.

**Federal Emergency Relief Act Funding – A New Start for the Society**

...I would say that while wasted years can never be recalled, there is much that Nevada can do to preserve her history if only all will unselfishly put their shoulders to the wheel and cooperate in this attempt to regain our inheritance.8

The much-heralded Transcontinental Highways Exposition that had demanded the transfer of the Society’s collections to the new exposition building in Idlewild Park lasted but a few months. At its end, as Wier feared, the collections were left in the hands of persons with no recognition of their value. The majority of the museum collections, she would later note, had been largely “massed in the basement of the new building, and as other organizations and departments needed extra room, they were jammed together in an inchoate mass in one section of the south room.” Her beloved library had also been “dumped” in the course of the transfer and was all but unusable.9

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After a few years in this unfortunate condition, the state agency administrating Federal Emergency Relief Administration grants\textsuperscript{10} obtained permission to work on the library in 1934. FERA provided the funding and its workers began to provide some semblance of order by cleaning and placing the books on shelves, and attempting to repair some of the volumes that had been damaged during the transition. They also worked to reorganize the papers and library of Senator Stewart. After about seven weeks of work under the direction of T.D. Vandevort, the work was discontinued pending the FERA reorganization in early April 1934. Vandevort, a former newspaper editor and later the first supervisor of the Nevada Writer’s Project, praised the work that Wier had “intelligently initiated and conducted” in gathering the collections. In a *Reno Evening Gazette* article, he noted that despite the current chaotic state of affairs, the “nucleus for a splendid display remains.” Interestingly, he declared that once the work of the federal agency was complete and the state made the necessary arrangements and named a “competent person” to

\textsuperscript{10} The Federal Emergency Relief Administration, operated by Harry Hopkins, was one of the first New Deal work relief programs designed to provide employment for unskilled workers.
take charge of the collection, “an exhibit can be established of which Nevada should be justly proud.” Describing the collections as having a “value that cannot be measured in dollars,” Vandevort could indeed have been channeling Wier when he declared:

> If sentiment and affection for the old sagebrush state are to be created and observed, it is to be sincerely hoped that the work of rehabilitation which the federal agencies have begun and will continue until order is restored, will then be taken up by state authorities, proper appropriations made and an institution built up that can be thrown open to the public.\(^{11}\)

After work stopped on the project in April 1934, it appears that nothing else was done until the following year. In the summer of 1935, the Nevada Attorney General offered an opinion to the head of the non-manual FERA project that stated that the Society’s officers alone were responsible for any arrangements whereby government workers were employed in its collections. It is not surprising that Wier was approached by state officials to supervise the workers so that they could continue their work, and that she gave up her summer vacation to “revamp the museum as well as the library.”\(^{12}\)

As she began the reorganization project, the state of the collections she had once painstakingly gathered for the Society was indeed shocking to Wier. “No words can ever describe the filth and wreckage which was encountered,” she later remarked. Burrowing into the “heaped-up mess” little by little, Wier and the WPA assistants found that the identification marks on many items were completely lost, and it was only her personal recollection of items and their provenance that restored to them “any historical value.” Fortunately, whether saved by Wier or

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just by sheer luck, the accession record survived and served as a guide in restoring the collections, and revealing what had been lost.\textsuperscript{13}

Indeed, from the first shock at the condition of the collections came the second wave of despair at the realization of just how much had been lost in the intervening years. Although she felt that the most valuable things in the library and museum had been taken, Wier remarked on the irony that the very reason anything of value remained was due “to the fact that in the chaotic condition of the past eight years many valuable items were buried out of sight of those who looted the collections.” To understand what had been lost, Wier supervised the workers in conducting an extensive inventory of the remaining collections, which included approximately 30,000 items in the library, and some 8000 items in the museum. Sadly, the inventory revealed that roughly 10\% of the library was missing, and 14\% of the general museum collections. The size of the task meant that it had not yet been completed by the time Wier submitted her \textit{Biennial Report} in July 1936—approximately a year into the project.\textsuperscript{14}

Particularly distressing to Wier was the loss of so much of an estimated 30 to 50\% of material from the Lovelock Cave, the spectacular archaeological find that she had long ago recommended to the University of California and of which they had in turn, sold much of to the Society for a nominal sum in 1918. As archaeologist M.R. Harrington estimated the objects to be between 2,000 to 4,000 years old, it was indeed a grievous loss, with Wier noting somberly, “were it not that the specimens sent here to Reno are duplicated in the University of California department, the loss to the world of scholarship caused by the carelessness here would be

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
irreparable.”

Tragically, the majority of the Indian basket collection had disappeared as well, as had much of the material that had formed part of the Indian exhibit in the old building.

In the museum, much material documenting the pioneer and Comstock era of the state had been taken, including objects from the earliest historical collection of the state, the Pacific Coast Pioneer Collection of Virginia City that had been donated to the Society by Act of the Legislature in 1915. Perhaps not surprisingly, many Spanish-American and Civil War artifacts were missing, as were souvenirs of presidential campaigns. As a local and regional collection, the loss of items related to the governors of Nevada was painful, as was the disappearance of almost the entire mineral collection, devastating in a state whose primary industry was mining.

The Society’s library also suffered significant losses, from books and magazines to stamps and broadsides. Early books published in Nevada or written about the state had largely disappeared as had books about Indians, archaeology and mining and geological texts. An almost complete file of state reports was also gone, as were many books on early travel through Utah and Nevada and other territorial materials. The papers of Senator Stewart, which Wier had pursued through the burning heat of a Nevada summer and an equally cold fall back in 1908, had also been touched by theft, as were the autographed works on her long-time friend and correspondent, writer George Wharton James. Items had also been taken from the Remington Collection of nineteenth century Pacific Coast newspapers and magazines that she had worked so diligently to acquire back in July 1911. Wier considered the loss of the local broadside files, however, to be the most grievous for researchers, describing them as “illusive but of inestimable

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15 Ibid.
value in recreating the past.” Considering only those books that could be replaced, Wier calculated the cost of the missing books at around $1000.\textsuperscript{16}

Chronicling the losses for the \textit{Twelfth Biennial Report} in 1936—the first one issued since the reorganization of the Society—Wier asserted that she was not trying to fix blame on individuals.\textsuperscript{17} Rather, she wanted to create an understanding that the “policies and administration were of a criminally wrong sort and …[if] the State is willing to face about and adopt a rational policy for the future, the costly experience of the past will not have been in vain.” It would be essential that future administrations “abide by the law” and not be tempted by expositions in the future.\textsuperscript{18}

Although Wier at times recognized the limitations of some of the inexperienced WPA workers,\textsuperscript{19} she was genuinely grateful for their assistance in the reorganization process. A variety of skill levels were apparent. As the first year of work came to close she noted that one or two had been kept busy “subject indexing old newspapers.” Others she described as “accurate and painstaking” had provided valuable assistance in salvaging materials and checking the accession catalog. Having toiled for years with little to no assistance as she initially built up the Society’s collections, it appears that she was extremely grateful for any help she received,

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 13. Beyond the loss of so many irreplaceable objects, books, and papers, Wier noted the physical damage imparted upon the collections: hundreds of dollars worth of broken glass, damaged museum cases and furniture, as well as mildewed photos, prints and steel engravings.

\textsuperscript{17} The \textit{Twelfth and Thirteen Biennial Reports} were devoted almost completely to the reorganization of the collections and the physical transformation of the building space.

\textsuperscript{18} Wier also mentions here, for the first time, that the Pacific Coast Pioneer Collection, once housed in Carson City, had been “ruined in the interest of the St. Louis Exposition.” It was more commonly known as the St. Louis World’s Fair and was held in St. Louis, Missouri in 1904. However, this is the first mention that Wier makes of this incident. \textit{Thirteenth Biennial Report}, 13.

\textsuperscript{19} Indeed she noted that some untrained FERA workers had attempted to catalog later accessions before Wier had been assigned to the project, and she noted that the library catalog would need to be checked for errors and overall losses from the thefts that had occurred to the library collection during its time in the new building. \textit{Thirteenth Biennial Report}, 14.
declaring hopefully, “[e]ven now that we are coming to the more highly specialized part of the work there is much they can do under technical supervision.”^20

Of course, the inexperienced workers would not have succeeded without the help of skilled leadership, and Wier gave much credit to the supervision provided by “earnest and interested superintendents” such as Harriett Gaddis Spann, Director of the Women’s and Professional Division of the WPA and Gilbert C. Ross, State Administrator of the WPA. Spann,^21 a graduate of the University of Nevada’s history program, who also had an advanced degree, showed what Wier described as a “professional attitude toward the work of the society,” while Ross, as a “former schoolman” recognized the “value of restoring the collections both for the sake of the University and for the State at large.”^22

**Creating a New Space for the Society**

One of the Society’s original complaints against the proposed space in the Exposition building had been the lack of room for the proper display and expansion of the collections. This was still her main bone of contention as she reorganized the collections in 1935-1936, pointing out the lack of wall space for picture exhibits, space for readers and room for expansion, and noting that there was no “continuous space where these conditions can be met except the basement.”^23

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^20 *Twelfth Biennial Report, 14.*

^21 Spann participated in a wide mix of social, civic, and political activities in Nevada, and ran unsuccessfully for a seat in the US Congress in 1942. In addition to her work with the WPA, her involvement with groups such as the National League of American Penwomen, Reno Business and Professional Women’s Club, and American Association of University Women would have brought her into close contact with Wier. “Harriet Spann, Nevada Civic Leader, Dead,” in *Reno Evening Gazette*, July 12, 1969.

^22 *Twelfth Biennial Report, 17.*

^23 Ibid., 14.
By 1937, however, Wier and the WPA workers were busily toiling away to carve out a new space for the collections in the basement of this building, now known as the Washoe County Library Building. The fact that they had to work around the collections made their work even more challenging. From cutting out portions of partition walls and removing doors to creating new windows and installing new plumbing and wiring, the WPA furnished the rough labor for this reconstruction project. Typically, Wier paid for much of this project out of her own pocket, spending some $600 for materials and skilled labor, and paying all bills when they came due. Noted Nevada architect Frederick J. DeLongchamps (the building’s original architect) and Carl W. McMillan, volunteered their time and assistance on the project.24

Rebuilding the Society: Queen of the WPA

Beyond her work in supervising the reorganization of the collections, Wier’s most valuable contribution to the Society during the 1930s was the work she did on behalf of the WPA Historical Records Survey that was implemented in each state to provide another form of employment for skilled workers.25 A survey of public records in Nevada had been one of her most fervent recommendations in the Biennial Reports since the very inception of the Society, but it was not until federal intervention that it became a reality. In spring/summer 1936, Wier acted as a voluntary consultant for the HRS (and the Federal Writer’s Project) in supervising WPA workers in the creation of inventories for county records throughout Nevada. In Nye County, she also worked to locate better conditions for the storage and disposition of their early records. Her trusted colleague and former student, Beulah Hershiser Leonard, edited many of

24 Thirteenth Biennial Report, 18.
25 Designed to survey the historical records of state and local governments, the project began in late 1933, sending teams of fieldworkers in every state to various repositories where they would identify holdings and prepare both general guides and individual guides for specific collections. O'Toole and Cox, Understanding Archives and Manuscripts, 64.
the inventories, which Wier described as having been written with “great thoughtfulness and accuracy.”

By 1940, the published results of these surveys, sponsored by WPA funding, made it possible for the Society to continue its tradition of historical research and publication, with guides produced for Eureka, Ormsby, Douglas, Elko, and Washoe Counties. Surveys of federal and church archives in Nevada were also published, as was a valuable check-list of Nevada imprints dating from 1859-1890.

The library collections had effectively been closed to the public since 1927, and even when the reorganization began, they were in such disarray, there was little hope that users might be able to consult them for the research and scholarship that Wier had always viewed as essential. Wier did make an exception, however, by providing access for workers from the Federal Writer’s Project (FWP), something she undoubtedly felt necessary because of the essential role the WPA had played in providing workers and funding for the Society’s reorganization. As they did in each state, the workers of the FWP were researching information for the Nevada state guide that would become part of the American Guide Series. Wier also allowed a few other “special research workers” from other parts of the United States to use the collections to find “data which is not accessible elsewhere.” Noting the loss to scholarship that had occurred because of ten years with no access to the museum and library, Wier announced

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26 Thirteenth Biennial Report, 19.


28 Sheila Rast, State Supervisor of the Nevada WPA Writer’s Project, not only acknowledged Wier as the sponsor of Nevada: A Guide to the Silver State in her preface, but noted that “her services to it go far beyond actual reading of the manuscript, in that many people who gave assistance to preparation of the book were stimulated long ago to an interest in Nevada history by Dr. Wier.” The WPA Guide to 1930s Nevada (reprinted by the University of Nevada Press, 1991), xx.

29 Thirteenth Biennial Report, 14.
plans in summer 1938 to open the collections to University students for the upcoming semester so that they might “yearly increase the output of Nevada studies.”

Financial Support

The state-mandated biennial reports had always served as a means for Wier to report on the Society’s fiscal affairs, as well as significant donations and purchases, and her long-term recommendations for the organization. She also took the opportunity in these reports to lecture state officials on the importance of the Society’s work, and as a means, frankly, to shame them into providing support by comparing Nevada’s funding for historical enterprises to that provided in other states. The reports she issued in the 1930s following the Society’s reorganization were no different, and in fact, Wier deliberately praised the largesse provided by the federal government, as a means to chide the state for its relative inaction on behalf of the Society. She also used the biennial reports to emphasize just how much of the Society’s accomplishments had been the result of unpaid labor (her own).

Beginning in 1934 and continuing through the remainder of the decade, it was primarily federal government funding that paid for the labor that Wier used to reorganize the Society’s collections. As she noted with her customary subtlety in the Fourteenth Biennial Report (covering the biennium 1938-1940), the WPA had expended approximately $42,000 to reclaim the collections “from the chaos in which they were thrown by indiscreet State action in 1927.”

The County, by virtue of providing the building space, had contributed housing, heat, light, and water for the maintenance of the collections, while Wier, as she had done since the Society’s inception, continued to provide her own services on a voluntary basis. During the summer of 1937, Wier even provided $600 of her own money (no small sum during the Depression) to

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31 Ibid., 29.
purchase materials and pay for skilled labor to help with the construction and renovation of the basement rooms housing the Society’s collections in the Washoe County Library Building.\textsuperscript{32}

Reflecting on this in the \textit{Thirteenth Biennial Report} that chronicled the Society’s work from 1937-1938, Wier took the opportunity to remind the state of its duties toward its historical collections:

\begin{quote}
The state of Nevada may congratulate itself that the Federal Government has been willing to donate so much financial assistance in the revamping of this collection. But it would seem that the State should now be willing to supplement this help with donations of its own.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

The uncertainty of state funding was so great that even when the Society did receive a small appropriation from the 1939 legislature ($3000), Wier continued to rely on the funds from an existing WPA project that was in operation, preferring to conserve its state appropriation “for the time when it will be more urgently needed for basic operating expenses.”\textsuperscript{34} During the 1938-1939 fiscal year with no state appropriation available, and the only income available coming from dues, Wier often paid the Society’s bills personally and kept the receipts in order to be reimbursed by the State later.\textsuperscript{35}

As the decade drew to a close, Wier again reminded the governor and the state legislature of their financial obligations toward the Society. Writing in the \textit{Fourteenth Biennial Report} that covered the years 1939-1940, she remarked that “the time is undoubtedly at hand when WPA assistance will no longer be available” and that when that time came that the staff needed would amount to at least a part-time janitor, a full-time worker for visitors and clerical work, and a part-time professional for the cataloging of library and museum materials. Nearly seventy, Wier took

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\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Thirteenth Biennial Report}, 18.  \\
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 21.  \\
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Fourteenth Biennial Report}, 25.  \\
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 29.
\end{flushright}
this opportunity to remind the State that while she expected to continue as long as possible
“without salary” to answer difficult correspondence and its accompanying research, conduct field
work, edit publications, and give public lectures on the collections, that the “the time cannot be
far distant when others will needs to take over at least a part of these duties.” Again she
pleaded with the state’s leaders to recognize the need for professional, skilled workers to perform
the Society’s work:

…if this work is of value to the State, then serious consideration should be given
to plans for making it continuous in the future, by becoming accustomed to the
thought that technically trained and and experienced workers must be employed
as in other highly specialized departments…”

Building New Collections

From 1935-1937, the herculean task of reorganizing the Society’s collections in their new
basement space in the Exposition building left little time for Wier to focus on collecting new
materials for the Society. Of course, she had continued to gather material even while there was
no collection to speak of, gathering “exchanges” and ephemeral broadsides in her own house,
and she also found that there was other material inherited from the Exposition. By 1938, with
the library and museum collections in hand, it appeared that the public’s faith in the Society had
been renewed, and a flood of new donations began to arrive. While the Twelfth and Thirteenth
Biennial Reports (covering the years 1935-1938) had focused almost exclusively on the
reorganization of the collections and the renovation of their existing space, Wier’s chronicle of
the Society’s activities in the Fourteenth Biennial Report (1938-1940) listed nearly three and a
half pages of donations from residents throughout the state and former Nevadans residing in

36 Fourteenth Biennial Report, 30.
37 Ibid.
California. The material was similar in nature to what the Society had previously collected, documenting the state’s pioneers through objects large and small, as well as photographs, paintings, and textiles. For the library there were manuscripts, newspapers, pamphlets, clippings, and Wier’s old favorite, memoirs of early life in Nevada. Loans of Indian artifacts including some baskets made by famous master basket maker Dat-so-La-Lee, were especially pleasing to Wier, who used adjectives such as “very fine” and “splendid” to describe one such collection. Although Wier made only a few purchases at this time, owing to the Society’s severe shortage of funds, she felt compelled to describe just one in detail—a rare old photograph of the “godfather of Nevada”—Abraham Lincoln.

Even as her fieldwork and collecting activities were curtailed during the 1930s, she continued to highlight their significance to the Governor and the legislature in the *Fourteenth Biennial Report*: “It is personal visitation by a trained worker which coaxes from old attics and gathers from deserted buildings or decrepit homes the precious relics of our early history.” As always, she emphasized the importance of professionalism in performing this fieldwork, comparing the “technique of a trained historical worker” with how a trained anthropologist might oversee valuable anthropological work. Even with her County Committees reorganized, they were still in need of “encouragement, direction, and criticism” from a central figure.

**Finding its Place in the Community Once Again**

The challenges of reorganizing the Society’s collections may have been daunting, but to Wier, who had struggled nearly every year of the Society’s existence, they were nothing new.

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38 The donations were all the more impressive because her ability to do field work had been severely limited because of the time involved in reorganizing the collections, answering correspondence and acting as a “general bureau of information on questions pertaining to the history of the state.” *Fourteenth Biennial Report*, 26.

39 Ibid., 29.

40 Ibid., 31.
The assistance of a small army of workers was heartening after her many years crying alone in the wilderness, and as the collections and their new space became one, the Society once again became a place where the community could visit and learn about the history of Nevada. In the *Thirteenth Biennial Report* Wier wrote of school children coming to see the museum “as they did in the earlier days” and “university students again using both library and museum for research purposes." During the 1937-1938 biennium, they held two annual meetings that were open to the public, and provided assistance for the Admission Day celebrations in Carson City just as they had so many years previously.

Another heartening development to Wier was the willingness of community organizations to aid in the reorganization efforts of the Society. The Native Daughters of Nevada provided funds to reframe the many pictures that had been destroyed during their storage in the basement, while the Reno Business and Professional Women took on the Society as their “community interest” and became members as a show of solidarity. In addition to the renewed interest of the Nevada Federation of Women’s Clubs, Wier’s personal work and membership in the Reno Branch of the National League of American Pen Women led them to take a supportive interest in the Society’s work. Wier was also pleased that the University’s history department alumni had invested in Society memberships. Such actions proved to Wier that the Society’s work to document the history of Nevada was still valued by the community at large, even if it was the Federal Government rather than the State that had provided the means to bring about its renewal.

By the end of the decade, it was not only Wier who felt positive about the Society’s future outlook. In their preface to the *Fourteenth Biennial Report*, the President and Board of

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42 Ibid.
Trustees proclaimed that the public had demonstrated an increased interest in the Society’s work; they predicted growth in “acquisitions and archiving,” and even more importantly, in the “writing of Nevada history.” With perhaps a somewhat eerie degree of prescience for July 1940, the Board declared, “[p]atriotism is the cement that binds together all elements of strength in the State. This institution is devoted to the cultivation of a true spirit of patriotism.”

**One More Struggle**

By 1939, Wier and her assistants had been able to achieve a sense of order within the Society’s museum and library collections even if they were severely cramped in their existing space. Accordingly, plans were already afoot to seek out funding for a new building that might be located near the University. In early spring of that year, however, a new threat to the Society appeared on the horizon. The Amodei Bill, which proposed the creation of a Nevada Museum and Art Institute, and did away with the Society, was passed by the assembly on March 14, 1939 and sent to the senate. The Bill requested some $15,000 in funding to purchase the old U.S. Mint building in Carson City and convert it into the housing for the state museum. During the debate over the bill’s merits, members of the Washoe delegation vehemently protested the possible move of the collections. Assemblyman Cahill said the passage of the bill would “take away Miss Wier’s life work” while another said it would “provide a duplicate agency for one already functioning well.” Not all of the assemblymen, however, were fans of the Society; Russell of White Pine County argued that the “historical society has spent $85,000 with nothing to show for

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43 As the Society underwent change and growth with its reorganization in the 1930s, so too did its governing body, the Board of Trustees. Long the province of men only, by the late 1930s, the Society’s membership had elected two women to serve on the Board. Both Beulah Hershiser Leonard and Clara Beatty had been history students of Wier at one time, and had also aided her in supervising the Society’s WPA projects and workers.

it.” 45 Wier herself entered into the fray by noting in the following day’s paper that she had information from “government sources” that it would cost closer to $75,000 to repair the old building. 46 Shortly afterward, a determined Wier spent most of March 17 in Carson City lobbying the legislature on behalf of the Society, and by that afternoon, a compromise of sorts was reached: the Society and its collections would stay in Reno and were given a $3000 appropriation, while the Nevada Museum and Art Institute was created with a $5000 appropriation. Despite the small amount, Wier felt the larger victory was the legislature’s recognition of the Society’s importance. 47

In the Thirteenth Biennial Report, Wier wrote in more detail of the controversial event. She acknowledged the building’s historical importance, but suggested that while its design might not be suited for a general museum, it could house a unique exhibit. As usual she brought up the question of professionalism: “As a general historical museum it would not seem, to a trained historian, to be a safe venture. You may rest assured that our organization will gladly cooperate with the Mint plan so far as it stands the test of historical experience elsewhere.” 48 Her calm words belied the unease she felt at the creation of this competing organization, and the following decade would only see more conflict and tension between the two organizations.

Personal Life

From 1935 onward, Wier’s time was once again consumed by the dual responsibilities of the Society and the University, but she no longer had the responsibility of caring for her elderly mother. During the decade, her involvement with local women’s organizations such as Nevada’s

46 “Historical Relic Removal is Opposed,” Reno Evening Gazette, March 15, 1939.
Native Daughters, the Reno Branch of the National League of American Pen Women, and the Reno Business and Professional Women’s Club on behalf of the Society added another dimension to her already busy life, much of which was chronicled in local newspapers. On May 5, 1932, the *Nevada State Journal* featured a photograph of her with a caption that described her, among other things, as “the only woman head of a co-educational department at the University of Nevada” and as “a versatile writer on Nevada history” for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and contributor to the *Dictionary of American Biography*.49 In September 1934, she developed a new course offering on the “study of women in history” as part of a selection of courses offered at the University for students “in certain phases of work.”50 Nearly seventy, she continued to retain an active schedule conducting exams,51 acting as a speaker for the University of Nevada musical Society Tau Beta Rho,52 teaching advanced summer session history classes,53 and serving on the Public Relations Committee for the University in February 1939.54 She also spoke regularly outside of Reno for groups and organizations.

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Shortly after her seventieth birthday in April 1940, Wier announced her retirement at the May 11, 1940 meeting of the Board of Regents, after nearly forty-one years of service to the University of Nevada. Later that month the Reno chapter of the National League of American Pen Women and many invited guests honored the newly created “Professor Emeritus” during an afternoon tea at the Twentieth Century Club building for her many years of outstanding service to the University and to the state.\textsuperscript{55} While retirement might have inspired a period of rest for the perennially exhausted academic, it actually spurred Wier on to even greater activity on behalf of

\textsuperscript{55} “Club Fetes Dr. Wier at Tea,” \textit{Nevada State Journal}, May 29, 1940.
her other career: a time for her to focus all of her attention on the institution she considered to be “her child.”
CHAPTER 10:
STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATION: THE 1940S

Nevada in the 1940s

Although Nevadans remained largely isolationist during the 1930s as war clouds gathered over Europe, the need for its mineral resources, particularly copper, by U.S. allies, meant that it experienced something of an economic boost even before the United States entered the war.\(^1\) After December 1941, the war soon had a more pronounced economic impact on both large and small communities across Nevada, as the Pacific Coast was transformed into a staging arena for the shipment of troops and supplies to battle stations in the Far East. Military bases soon sprung up throughout Nevada: the Army Air Corps gunnery school near Las Vegas (future Nellis Air Force Base), the naval air station in Fallon, the army air base in Tonopah, and just north of Reno, Stead Air Force Base. Established in 1942 to train signal companies, it would later become a center for radio and navigation schools.\(^2\) In addition to soldiers from nearby Stead Air Force Base, Reno’s proximity to California meant that it attracted many soldiers from the Golden State’s military and naval facilities. They were undoubtedly drawn to Reno because of its legalized gambling, easy liquor sales, and at the beginning of the war, its red light district.\(^3\)

Soldiers were not the only visitors that flocked to Nevada in the 1940s. During the decade between 1940-1950, the state’s population increased 45.2 percent, going from 110,247

\(^1\) Nevada’s mining industry also continued to thrive during the war because of the immediate demand for particular types of metals including copper, tungsten, zinc, and lead. In 1943, the states’ mines produced a record-breaking $56,525,000. Elliott, *History of Nevada*, 318.

\(^2\) Ibid., 312.

\(^3\) Ibid., 313. In mid-1943, military authorities and the Federal Security Agency pressured local authorities to close all legal houses of prostitution in the state.
to 160,083. Not surprisingly, over half of this gain was in two cities: Las Vegas and Reno. The latter grew some 52.4 percent, jumping from 21,317 in 1940 to 34,492 in 1950.\(^4\) Even before the war, Reno had been an attractive destination because of its proximity to recreational activities such as skiing, which was available in nearby Lake Tahoe. Although liberal marriage and divorce laws also drew a number of visitors to Reno, gambling, which had been legal for a decade by the start of the war in 1941, was the largest draw of all. While legal throughout the state, it was only in Reno and Las Vegas that gambling had had a significant economic impact because of both cities’ proximity to large metropolitan areas in California. Despite the draw of gambling and its prevalence in Reno after 1931, Wier rarely if ever mentioned it in her biennial reports, and she showed no interest in documenting its impact upon the state’s history.

**The Society in Wartime**

Like every community in the United States, Reno was affected by the outbreak of war in December 1941, and even the Society was not immune to challenges brought on by wartime conditions. After 1942, gasoline shortages limited Wier’s ability to travel throughout the state on her collecting missions at a time when the newly retired Wier finally had the freedom to travel. A shortage of newspaper print (as well as a lack of proper editorial assistance) repeatedly delayed the publication of the proposed *Quarterly of Nevada History* that she had so long wished for. Such shortages were irritating, but far more serious was the possibility that the collections might actually be damaged or destroyed due to bombing or other war activities. It was a very real concern for those on the West Coast shortly after the war began, and Wier was aware that a booklet issued by the Society of American Archivists called “Protection of Archives Against Hazards of War” had suggested that Nevada’s distance from the Pacific Coast made it an ideal place for the collections.

\(^4\) Ibid., 313-314
location for the safekeeping of records and historical treasures. Yet as Wier frankly acknowledged in the Society’s *Fifteenth Biennial Report*, Nevada had no “really fireproof, bombproof shelters, even for its own treasures.” At the preliminary meetings of the committee on wartime conservation of cultural resources Wier recommended a plan for Nevada that included the construction of a bombproof shelter in Carson City for state records and artifacts, a bombproof shelter in Reno for state institutions and Washoe County records and relics, and improvised shelters at each county seat.  

By 1943, as fears of bombing passed, the state’s concern with bombproof shelters declined.  

A much more positive effect of wartime conditions in Reno was the increased numbers of soldiers who came to visit the Society’s collections in the basement of the Washoe County Public Library Building. Writing early on in the war (1940-1942) in the *Fifteenth Biennial Report*, Wier noted that “members of the U.S. armed forces come here in increasing numbers for recreation, information, or a quiet place in which to spend an hour.” It may have been wishful thinking on her part that some of these soldiers wished “to use the historical data in our library on the causes and progress of the present war,” but whatever the reason, they viewed the Society as a welcome spot, and did so throughout the war and afterward.

**Professionalism**

Throughout the Society’s existence, Wier had continually argued for the importance of having trained historical professionals leading the Society’s collecting and publishing efforts.

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Although she never truly defined what a “trained historical professional” was, it was obvious that she considered a “professional” to be someone with a bachelor’s degree or higher, who had been trained in the scientific method of examining sources as evidence. Although pleased to see Nevada citizens sign up for membership in the Society, or the collections grow via donation from history-minded individuals, she looked with thinly veiled disdain on antiquarians who might wish to have a say in the affairs of the Society.

Although she clearly viewed herself as the expert on all matters dealing with the historical side of things within the Society, Wier was savvy enough to recognize the need for trained professionals to handle the library side of the operations. As far back as 1916, Wier had sought out trained library catalogers to work on organizing the Society’s library. As always, the limited funds available made this a challenging task, as did the lack of trained librarians in Nevada, which sent Wier into California in search of a qualified cataloger during the 1940-1942 biennium.8

In the 1940s, Wier’s retirement allowed her to spend more time securing qualified staff, and her advancing age also brought a sense of urgency to her quest to develop a professional staff for the Society. By the 1944-1946 biennium, she could point to a robust staff—all women—and all on salary. There was Cornelia D. Provinces, cataloguer and librarian; Maude S. Taylor, M.A., receptionist and assistant curator; Margaret C. Howk, typist and assistant receptionist; and Pearl Missimer, general assistant.9 Even this progress was measured, as the Society had not been able to secure an assistant director, largely because the war had drained potential manpower. Wier noted that GI training in universities had “usurped the supply of

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8 Ibid., 13.

trained librarians and museum directors.” In the *Seventeenth Biennial Report* (1944-1946) Wier noted that the work of the Society was a “highly complex and technical undertaking” and that they did not always have the “usual corps of specialized workers for each job.” In searching for that ideal employee, Wier might have been describing herself when she spoke of the need to have at least one worker with “initiative, judgment, and adaptability besides the special training in library and museum methods and with such innate zeal for the ‘cause’ as to be able to forget to count work hours by the clock.”

In addition to searching out trained professionals to work with the Society’s collections, Wier also continued to seek out opportunities that would enable her to better the Society and bring it more in line with the growing set of professional standards for libraries and archives. At an age when most retirees would have long since settled in to comfortably enjoy the fruits of their labor, Wier remained an active advocate for the Society. In June, 1946 she traveled to the Midwest to obtain “useful ideas” from the “ever helpful organizations of the Wisconsin and Minnesota State Historical Societies.” Seeking to obtain “accurate information about certain phases of up-to-date historical equipment,” she made trips to the Pacific Northwest including Seattle, Tacoma, and Portland, and then San Francisco and Oakland in May 1947.

Where she had once religiously attended the annual meetings of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association, in the 1940s, Wier turned her attention to the recently formed Society of American Archivists. Throughout the decade, she regularly referenced the organization’s recommendations for the preservation of collections in wartime and the collecting of war records for the Society. In the *Sixteenth Biennial Report* (1942-1944), she thanked Eva

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10 Ibid., 56.

Adams (later director of the US Mint) for attending the SAA Annual Meeting as her proxy in November 1943. In September 1947, she represented the Society at the joint annual meeting of SAA and the American Association for State and Local History.

Public records Safe at Last

If anything represented the growth of a professional ethic with regards to historical records in Nevada, it was the creation of laws relating to public records. From the very beginning of her work for the Society, Wier had urged state officials to make some provision for the protection and preservation of public records. Despite her repeated pleas, it was not until 1943 that legislation was introduced to create an “archiving system” for state, county, and municipal records. Senate Bill 25, authorized keepers of state, county and municipal records to deliver obsolete records to the Society, and mandated that the executive officers of the Society make certified copies of records, with these copies having “the same force and effect” as the originals.

Yet this solved only one part of the problem in Wier’s mind. A greater concern to her was the fact that obsolete records could be destroyed by the State Board of Control at the request of any State board or officer, with “no agency or person” competent to judge their historical value. It was a sign of her professional growth, that to challenge Nevada’s stance, Wier drew on information from a paper given at the Society of American Archivists annual meeting in 1943, confirming that the majority of states with such legislation regarding records disposal required the approval of a State archival agency, state historian or “other competent person.” The need for professional knowledge of records and their importance was critical, she argued, because paper salvage drives during the war had resulted in the destruction of many valuable records. Stopping

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12 Sixteenth Biennial Report, 41-42
13 Ibid., 11.
this type of destruction without “hinder the disposal of really useless records” was essential. Long before the idea of records management was commonplace, she recognized that there should be “a regular legalized…procedure based on technical knowledge.”\textsuperscript{14}

**Funding**

Recognizing the uncertainty of continued WPA funding, Wier had been carefully preserving the Society’s small state appropriation provided in 1939. At the meeting of the 1941 legislature, the Society received a further $8000, and Wier wrote of her happiness at the response of the legislative committees and members at large who had voted to “save the collections.”\textsuperscript{15}

Although pleased that the State had provided for the Society’s direct support, Wier expressed disappointment at their continued refusal to support anthropological or other historical work such as marking historic sites. She pointed to the monies provided by the federal government and out-of-state institutions in support of anthropological investigations within their own borders. As these had proved successful, she was still frustrated that the Society and the State had not been able to provide more assistance: “…it ought to be possible in a State like this to get the financial support needed in the full daylight of legislative approval, and for institutions whose chief and avowed purpose is to further this type of development.”\textsuperscript{16}

As WPA monies dried up in the early 1940s, the Society once again looked to the State to take on a greater responsibility for the organization’s funding. By the time the 1943 legislature was in session, however, the war was in full swing, and the state’s budget was affected. The

\textsuperscript{14} Wier was also saddened that the wartime scrap drive had resulted in the loss of potential museum pieces such as guns and antique fire-fighting apparatus. “No legislation can reach this type of destruction,” she declared, “but all intelligent people can individually aid in creating a sentiment for the preservation of these things.” *Sixteenth Biennial Report*, 46-47.

\textsuperscript{15} *Fifteenth Biennial Report*, 12.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 27.
Society, which had requested a $13,500 appropriation for the 1943-1945 biennium, received only $10,500 when Senate Bill no. 38 was passed and signed by the Governor in March 1943. Disappointed, but understanding, Wier remarked on this “wartime economy” in the *Sixteenth Biennial Report* (1942-1944) that the legislature “in our case, as in the matter of other institutions, felt that the cutting off of large sum hitherto provided by WPA assistance did not warrant their providing a similar additional sum from the State treasury.”

Funding had decidedly improved by the next meeting of the legislature, and in March 1945, the Society received the fairly generous sum (by previous standards) of $17,500. It was all the more remarkable because the sum remained unchanged from its original proposal in Assembly Bill no. 128 to the time that it passed and was signed by the Governor in March 1945. During this same legislative session, the Society was also successful in obtaining passage of Senate Bill no. 103 which called for the purchase of the valuable Dat-So-La-Lee collection of Indian baskets from Mrs. Abe Cohn in Carson City, which were to be divided equally between the museum in Carson City and the Society. As the legislature rarely provided funds for specific purchases, this was a notable victory indeed.

The Society was less successful in obtaining funding for a building to replace their supremely crowded quarters in the basement of the Washoe County Public Library building. Senate Bill no. 107 had boldly requested some $100,000 for the construction of a new building in Reno, and for the writing of the biography of Key Pittman under the Society’s direction.

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18 This generosity was likely a by-product of the fact that state legislature had instituted a one percent tax on gross earnings from gambling that year; it would soon become a regular source of state revenue.
Although the bill did not pass, Wier and the Society’s board took some comfort from the State’s promise that their building request would be granted in the 1947 legislative session.\textsuperscript{20}

Sadly, just as they had been so many times in the past, Wier’s hopes that the legislature would provide the funds for the much desired building were dashed when the bill sponsoring the funds never made it out of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee in March 1947. There was slight consolation, however, that the legislature provided the Society with the same level of funding for its general operations, around $17,800, as they had in the previous session.\textsuperscript{21}

Accustomed to disappointment in her dealings with state officials, a resilient Wier appeared before the legislature once again in January 1949, at nearly 80 years of age, asking for the building funds. She received a warm tribute from the assembled legislators, but not the funding she felt the Society so urgently needed for their building.

**Collection Building**

Wier’s retirement in May 1940 enabled her to devote much more of her time to her work on behalf of the Society. She spent much of the following summer traveling through the state revamping the old county history committees and collecting historical materials where she could. Where she had once traveled by train, or by buggy and horseback over dusty, unpaved roads, Wier now traversed the state’s highways by car. She continued to be concerned with gathering materials from the remaining old mining camps and was sometimes aided in these efforts by a former student or a member of one of the “old-timer” families.\textsuperscript{22}

One such trip occurred in November 1940 in conjunction with a speaking trip to Winnemucca. As she had over thirty years previously on her trip to southern Nevada, Wier, aided

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{21} Eighteenth Biennial Report, 25 and 28.
\textsuperscript{22} Fifteenth Biennial Report, 16.
by local officials, made two field trips in the area to visit the surrounding mines. With an eye
toward the importance of current and future history, Wier eagerly recorded details of the mine
superintendent’s lecture on the plant as well as the new mining methods and the characteristics
of the new mining camp so that she could disseminate them in a future Society publication.\textsuperscript{23}
She continued her collecting trips the following summer in an automobile, covering much of the
State, where she worked on reconstituting county committees, and following up on promised
newspaper exchanges and securing materials that had been scouted on earlier trips.\textsuperscript{24}

As a result of Wier’s work, the \textit{Fifteenth Biennial Report} lists two full pages of new
museum accessions for the years 1940-1942. Although she did not have space to mention all the
donations, she declared triumphantly that they were “all accessioned and displayed in our
rooms.” Another two and a half pages detailed the library’s new accessions, with Wier
remarking, “[i]n the library, which after all is the heart of our work, there has been very rapid
growth.” Although the perennial lack of funds meant that only about two hundred items (books,
pamphlets, and photos) had been purchased, she pointed out proudly that several thousand items
that had been added by gift.”\textsuperscript{25}

The largest and most prestigious gift donated to the Society at this time was the papers
and relics from the estate of the late Nevada Senator Key Pittman. In December 1941, Wier
made the long journey to Washington, DC to assess Pittman’s library and “museum relics,”
which had been donated by his widow to the Society. Writing of this in the \textit{Fifteenth Biennial
Report} (1940-1942) in early 1942, Wier praised the generosity of Mrs. Pittman and described the
gift as “very important.” Pledging to describe the materials more fully in the next \textit{Biennial

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 13-14.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 16-17.
Report, she noted that the Society had plans to create a Pittman Room in the future that would bring these materials together.²⁶

The following Biennial Report, covering the years 1942-1944, highlighted the massive size and variety of the Pittman donation. Wier spent nearly seven pages documenting the Pittman donation and organized it by category. “Stored in three large storerooms on the third floor of the Pittman home,” in Washington, DC, the donation was shipped in June 1943.²⁷ From September-October 1943, Mrs. S.T. Spann worked on arranging a display of some of the donated items in the Museum. Although waiting on the majority of his papers, this shipment and what had been placed in the Society’s building during the previous biennium added over 4000 new museum accessions and 1000 books for the library.²⁸ It was the most significant political collection the Society had taken in since Wier had traveled to Rhyolite nearly forty years earlier to pack up the papers of Nevada’s first Senator, William Stewart. In addition to serving as a memorial to Pittman, Wier saw the collection’s value in enabling future generations “to visualize life as it was in Washington, DC in the first half of the twentieth century.”²⁹

Between 1942 and 1944, wartime gasoline shortages curtailed Wier’s collecting trips, and she was confined mostly to Reno. Her prolific correspondence grew even more voluminous as she appealed to the Society’s members to act as collecting agents around the state. There were short trips to San Francisco and Sacramento to search for rare library items and a trained cataloger, and a trip to Los Angeles for a second-hand bookstore survey. Unable to undertake major fieldwork, Wier also turned some of her collecting efforts toward documenting Nevada’s

²⁶ Ibid.
²⁷ Ibid., 15.
²⁹ Ibid., 21.
role in the war effort.\textsuperscript{30} In both May and October 1944, Wier spoke to American Association of University Women groups in Elko and Winnemucca, respectively, on state and county plans to collect and preserve Nevada’s historical materials pertaining to the war, as well as the records of servicemen and women.\textsuperscript{31}

The wartime economy did not stop a significant amount of materials from pouring into the Society as the \textit{Sixteenth Biennial Report} noted eight pages of museum donations, and a further eight pages of library donations, exchanges, and newspaper clippings between 1942 and 1944. The following \textit{Biennial Report}, which highlighted materials gathered during the 1944-1946 biennium, indicated nearly eight and a half pages of museum artifacts, and over twenty-five pages of library donations, including books, papers, maps photos, periodicals, prints, pamphlets, and newspapers.

By the time Wier distributed the eighteenth and final \textit{Biennial Report} (1946-1948), compiled before her serious illness and death in 1950, she had made some significant changes in the Society’s operation and focus. Over the many years of its existence, the need to devote equal effort to the museum and library sections of the Society had proved challenging to Wier with her limited time and staff. The museum attracted visitors that required time and attention, which then took staff (when they were available) away from organizing the mass of material in the

\textsuperscript{30} As always, fieldwork efforts to collect war records proved more challenging than Wier had anticipated, and she was unable to secure trained help at a salary they could afford to offer. Fortunately, some of the county committees that she had worked so diligently to assemble were successful in collecting records at their respective county seats. In the \textit{Seventeenth Biennial Report} covering the years 1944-1946, Wier also indicated that much World War II material had come directly to the Society’s Reno headquarters. \textit{Seventeenth Biennial Report}, 53-54.

\textsuperscript{31} “Post War Planning Is Theme of State AAUW Meeting in Elko,” \textit{Reno Evening Gazette}, May 8, 1944 and “Dr. Jeanne Wier Speaks to AAUW,” October 26, 1944.
library that was essential for it to be accessible to researchers.\textsuperscript{32} It was clear that Wier herself saw the latter as the Society’s more important function, and in the *Eighteenth Biennial Report*, she wrote of the need for change in the Society’s priorities. The crowded housing conditions and inadequately trained assistants had created what she felt was an “inchoate state of affairs, particularly as related to library materials.” At the beginning of the fiscal year, July 1, 1947, Wier instituted a new policy in which the “hitherto emphasized function of entertaining visitors to the Museum was now made subservient to the Library end of the work.” Wier thus turned the Society’s efforts away from promoting the Museum to visitors, and made the organization of the library and its collections more of a priority. Assistants were therefore to be hired “chiefly with an eye to their ability to do some part of the processing books.” Documenting this change in the *Eighteenth Biennial Report*, Wier wrote:

> When it is once generally recognized that our Institution is primarily an archiving and historical reference library and that the Museum is but a necessary adjunct, like the illustrations in a book, I am sure that our policies relating to the perfecting of library arrangements will be recognized as justifiable and worthy of commendation.\textsuperscript{33}

As a result of these changes, Wier’s listing of gifts and acquisitions in this biennial report focused less on artifacts and relics for the museum, and much more on library materials acquired by gifts, exchange, and purchase. She was able to assert confidently, “[t]he extent to which we have favored and emphasized the library side of our work is indicated by the figures given in our fiscal report.”\textsuperscript{34} Wier was keen to emphasize the importance of the library and its resources—its leaflets, pamphlets, journals of overland travel and other manuscript material—in the future.

\textsuperscript{32} The tension had also caused problems during the Cutts era as Wier felt the museum’s popularity and high profile had led it to take priority over the library and its valuable research function.

\textsuperscript{33} *Eighteenth Biennial Report*, 10.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 17.
writing of regional history. Describing the “extensive and historically important” picture collection, comprised of stereoscopic views, daguerreotypes and tintypes lithographs, negatives, prints, photographs, water colors, and paintings, Wier proudly declared that they furnished a “visual record of the State from the earliest days to the present time.”

In what was to be her final formal statement on the importance of collecting, it was the historian in Wier that stressed the value of historical records in that they would enable the telling of multiple versions of the same story:

This is the message we are seeking to get to the people of Nevada in justification of our work in collecting and preserving the records of Nevada history, so that every chapter many in time be written over again and with greater perfection. A new searching of the past may better illuminate the immediate present for in those old documents is recorded the pulse beat of the life of our people.

The Building Question Reappears

The success of any collecting efforts were always marred by the dilemma Wier had faced from the very beginning of her work for the Society—space to hold, organize, and display the materials. Addressing the never-ending space challenge in the Sixteenth Biennial Report (1942-1944), Wier referenced the plans (designed by architect Frederick DeLongchamps) for the Society’s lots in Evans Park and expressed hope that the State Postwar Planning Boards would add it to their list of postwar employment projects. Pointing to the postwar plans for buildings in states such as Vermont, Michigan, and New York, Wier declared that more suitable facilities would bring many more thousands of visits into the library and museum. With advance funding from Senator Patrick McCarran and the Postwar Planning Board to help with the plans

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36 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 45-46.
and specifications for the building in 1947, it seemed as if the new building would soon become a reality.

By the close of the legislative session in spring 1947, however, history would repeat itself in a sadly familiar way for the Society with regards to the passage of the bill to fund a new building. Back in 1909, both houses of the legislature had passed the bill to fund the Society’s new building, but the governor had vetoed said bill in the name of economic stringency. Fast forward to 1947, and two senate bills that were to provide a $45,000 appropriation for the construction of the Society’s new building were held in the Assembly Ways and Means Committee until the legislature adjourned.

After nearly forty years of dealing with state officials, Wier had grown accustomed to dealing with legislative disappointments, and she immediately worked with the Board of Trustees to make other arrangements for building space. Working with the Board and other university and state government officials, she received permission for the Society to purchase a ward building from the Reno Army Air Base in October 1948 for five percent of its valuation. The building was to be reconstructed on a section of the Society’s existing lots in Evans Park and would be used as temporary housing for their library and for the teaching of Nevada history. Although the Reno City Council gave their consent to the plan, they made this consent conditional upon the approval of the city’s Board of Variance and the Evans Estate. To Wier’s dismay, the Evans Estate representative offered strong opposition to the plan, as did Reno residents living near the area, and the Society ultimately decided it would not be in their best interests to continue with their request for the variance. Wier remarked wryly that as it was the second time they had lost a potential building site near the university, “it would seem that the
University section of Reno is allergic to historical collections."³³⁹ She announced that the Society would thus be seeking other potential locations near the center of town, and hoped that perhaps private funds might be made available. Never one to give up hope, however, Wier appeared before the legislature in January 1949 to appeal for building funds once again. It was to be her last appearance before state officials, and while they praised her legacy in preserving Nevada’s history, no funds were forthcoming, and she was never to see the much-desired building during her lifetime.

Conflict with the Nevada State Museum

Wier had always been protective of the Society and its mission to “collect everything” that could “in any way throw light upon the history of Nevada from its earliest occupation to the present day.”³⁴⁰ It was not surprising, therefore, that she would bristle at suggestions that the Society merge with the new Nevada State Museum in Carson City or at being mistaken for that same museum by outsiders.³⁴¹ In the Sixteenth Biennial Report, she took it upon herself to provide clarification for state officials on the distinction between the two institutions. She described the Nevada State Museum as primarily a scientific museum that was “designed to give in broad perspective the natural history as well as human background of our State, as well as something of present-day development from the standpoint of technical processes and principles.” Wier’s strong feelings on the Society’s role as the resource for the writing of Nevada history would naturally make her declare that their work “centers in the library, both archives and commentary.” Although acknowledging that it could not exclude anything within “the time range or geographical scope of the roots of Nevada history,” she noted that the center

³³⁹ Eighteenth Biennial Report, 26-27.
³⁴⁰ Twelfth Biennial Report, 6.
and crux of the Society’s work would always focus on “comparatively recent years and local history.” The Society’s goal would be to “perfect the storehouse of knowledge for the use of researchers,” with an emphasis on human behavior as opposed to “the more technical and scientific aspects of the subject.” Ultimately, Wier was convinced that the State could afford to maintain the two types of institutions, and that they should “cooperate in a friendly spirit and with a common purpose.”

Community Outreach

After the struggles to reorganize the collections that characterized Wier’s work in the previous decade, the Society made great strides in increasing its community outreach efforts in the 1940s. Between 1940-1942, some five thousand visitors signed the register, with Wier accounting that perhaps as many had used the facilities without registering. She reported proudly (in the *Fifteenth Biennial Report*) on the frequent visits of University and public school students who came to the Museum for “recreation and study.” For Reno’s large tourist population, Wier saw the possibility of a museum visit as a means for visitors to gain understanding of the “historical background of this mountain state.”

The last of the historical records survey publications—surveys of Ormsby, Mineral and Nye Counties, along with inventories of Federal and church archives series—were also produced during this biennium.

As wartime conditions affected Reno and other cities across Nevada, the Society did its duty on the home front and worked to build a sense of community during this difficult time. They welcomed servicemen into the collections and helped those who wanted to consult data in

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42 *Sixteenth Biennial Report*, 43-44.
44 Ibid., 12.
the library “on the causes and progress of the present war.”\textsuperscript{45} To make it easier for visiting servicemen to find the Society’s “somewhat obscure entrance,” they even erected a park sign to direct visitors.\textsuperscript{46} Wier also wrote of the Society’s wish to boost war morale by producing historical brochures and guides that could be placed in the training camps. Kind-hearted, but perhaps naively in a state with legalized gambling and prostitution (early on at least), she declared that the brochures “should aid soldiers to spend their time more profitably when on leave.” With feelings heightened by wartime patriotism, she also hoped that the Society might be able to provide speakers for the camp programs, who could perform in brief historical sketches, and thereby “strengthen the faith of those who listen in our American institutions” and “foster love of country upon an intelligent basis.”\textsuperscript{47}

During the following biennium (1942-1944), the number of visitors signing the Society’s register continued to grow (9381), with Wier remarking on the large numbers of soldiers who continued to visit as well as the children who were using the collections as a “laboratory for composition work.”\textsuperscript{48} More serious researchers also came in search of material for articles and books, many from long distances. As the Society’s museum’s continued to be a public draw, the organization did not forget its membership, and in February 1943, held an annual meeting in conjunction with a dinner at Reno’s Golden Hotel to celebrate Mrs. Key Pittman and the donation of her husband’s valuable papers and artifacts to the Society. With the organization

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{46} Sixteenth Biennial Report, 13.
\textsuperscript{47} Fifteenth Biennial Report, 26.
\textsuperscript{48} Sixteenth Biennial Report, 37.
approaching its fortieth anniversary, Wier also took the time to ensure that the charter members of the Society still living were recognized at this meeting.\textsuperscript{49}

The end of the war and gasoline rating in 1945 meant even more visitors to the Society’s cramped quarters in the Washoe County Library basement. The flood of visitors “from far and near” that descended upon the Society included soldiers passing through, groups of schoolchildren, and women’s organizations. While the war had virtually ended research by graduate students from the University of Nevada, other university staff and professional staff had used the Society library to research books and articles for publication.\textsuperscript{50}

As Wier focused the Society’s community outreach on local and regional history, the arrival of the Freedom Train in Reno in March 1948 allowed it to be part of a much larger national historical commemoration. It was a rare opportunity to connect the streams of local and national history in the minds of Nevada citizens.\textsuperscript{51} In conjunction with the arrival of the train, the Society organized an evening program with singers, and working with the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH), created a display of local historical material. Wier also sought and received permission from the State Board of Control to use material for a week-long window display in Reno stores. The display received the “hearty cooperation of merchants and banking firms” and was considered a great success. Describing the event in the Biennial Report, Wier took this opportunity to praise her trusted staff member Clara Beatty (and her husband), who had devoted much of her time to the “mammoth job of preparing the

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 42.

\textsuperscript{50} Seventeenth Biennial Report, 53.

\textsuperscript{51} The Freedom Train was an exhibit of 127 significant American historical documents drawn from the National Archives, private collectors, government agencies, and historical societies that traveled by train between 1947 and 1949 to 322 cities across the United States. Over 3.5 million people viewed the documents on display in this exhibit that was privately sponsored by the American Heritage Foundation. Documents included the Treaty of Paris (1783), the Northwest Ordinance, the Bill of Rights, and the Emancipation Proclamation among others. Kammen, \textit{Mystic Chords of Memory}, 573-581.
exhibits.” The Society also prepared a special display of original Nevada documents in their own exhibit rooms during the Freedom Train festivities.  

Value of the Society

Wier had preached from the Society’s early days of its importance to the citizens of Nevada. In particular she had emphasized its role in creating a sense of historical consciousness among the state’s residents as she regularly sought funding from the State. Over the years, her business correspondence on behalf of the Society with donors and those requesting information on Nevada was filled with thanks for the work she had done to preserve the state’s history. Yet it was rare that she shared these sentiments with state officials in the biennial reports. Over the years, public praise for the Society and her work often came in the form of newspaper editorials in the Reno Evening Gazette and Nevada State Journal. In the Sixteenth Biennial Report, covering 1942-1944, Wier took the opportunity to reprint a letter from Gordon C. Farmer, a magazine editor, as a means to highlight the Society’s work for the legislature in a section titled “An Unrequested Evaluation of Our Library and Museum Showing the Esteem in Which Our Institution is Held.” Farmer praised the Society’s library as a “gold mine for western writers” where the “writer of fiction or factual may find material enough to last throughout a lifetime of typing.” Farmer highlighted the “Western” nature of the Society’s exhibits as being “Not the stereotyped Western of two guns in action and the pretty rescue of scared heroines on galloping cowponies. The exhibit is WEST – Mark Twains’ West, Bret Harte’s West, Jack London’s West.” Taking it a step further, Farmer even sent a strong letter of support to the Nevada State Legislature in March 1941 praising the Society and listing the virtues and value of its many collections to writers.

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At the Society’s annual meeting in September 1946, held in a local hotel for lack of meeting space in the existing building, Bishop Thomas K. Gorman also called out State officials for their lack of support for the Society. Speaking emphatically on the importance of the organization’s work, he pleaded for more space, and attempted to shame state officials by noting that “in no other State in the Union is so little attention paid to the preservation of records.”

Wier’s own feelings on the value of the Society to the state evolved over the years, softened even, and she no longer kept to her strict idea that the Society’s main value was as a vehicle to imbue the populace with a sense of historical consciousness. In her conclusion to the Sixteenth Biennial Report, in the section titled “Basis for Our Demands,” Wier laid out some of her more expansive ideas on the Society and how it could help the city in performing important social functions. The Society’s museum was an aid against juvenile delinquency because it provided a different kind of “recreation center” for children and young people; a place that promoted morale among the armed forces who visited Reno and found “few places of high-class amusement and instruction combined”:

Here, in the midst of disruptions in their own immediate life caused by the war, they are able to witness the progress that is still being made in the durable satisfactions of life. To keep alive our ideals of democracy, we must keep alive our knowledge of the struggle through which our freedom was won.

Lofty and naive sentiments perhaps, but they highlighted Wier’s desire to have the Society viewed as more than just a place where people could do research and view historical documents and relics, but rather as a place that captured the very essence of what it meant to be a Nevada citizen.

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54 Eighteenth Biennial Report, 22.
55 Sixteenth Biennial Report, 47-49.
Of course, Wier still viewed the collection of those historical documents and artifacts to be the Society’s most important role, for these materials would enable historians to write a proper history of Nevada as “the deep underlying causes of our development still remain to be discovered.” Although she had once entertained notions of writing such a history herself, she had long since resigned herself to a role ensuring the Society serve as the best possible resource for the writing of this history. The historian in Wier remained concerned about the difficulty of writing this history and warned that it should not be written by a “carpetbagger” or an “unsympathetic foreigner.” Appealing to state officials in the Sixteenth Biennial Report, she asked for help in acquiring the materials from which many persons might collaborate in giving the true story by “monographic accounts and then, through great ingenuity and resourcefulness, a condensation and summary...”56

Wier addressed the “Basis for Our Demands” once again in the Seventeenth Biennial Report, which chronicled the 1944-1946 biennium by writing another impassioned statement on the Society’s work. While admitting that were not many who would “deny the value of historical consciousness and historical writing,” Wier suggested that there was a tendency for some to believe that “our history will just be here to use when we need it.” In Nevada, this was not always the case. She pointed again to those unique conditions that led to the loss of “our archival heritage in Nevada” –the fire and frequent removals that left behind “ghost cities.” Even more disheartening to her was the fact that collectors had recently “carried out quantities of it to California and other places...because to us the things seem worthless and we take no steps to put them beyond their reach.”57

56 Ibid., 47-49.
57 Seventeenth Biennial Report, 59.
Reflecting on the work of Herbert Howe Bancroft and his “omnivorous” collecting policy that had resulted in the creation of the great California library named for him, Wier noted that he had viewed the policy of “completeness” as the thing most desired in a collection. Although they had attempted to pursue this same policy in Nevada, she emphasized that their chief function was to preserve “the primary sources of our history”—the items that were “too rare and expensive for the ordinary library to acquire or to properly index…” Making this valuable material available for use was a time consuming effort, and it was important that their services be judged by the quality and purpose of the work, and not by the numbers of people they served. She described the Society’s library as being “the result of long continuous growth” and not one that “mere money” could create. Once again she expressed her hopes for the future and the need for the state’s financial assistance: “We have waited patiently – perhaps too patiently – for the development of historical consciousness in this State which will show itself in ways other than ‘pride displayed on patriotic occasions’ that will take a deeply rooted interest in helping us to accomplish our long-time purpose.”

Wier’s final statement on the importance of the Society’s work came in the Eighteenth Biennial Report, released in December 1948. Frustrated and weary over the lack of support, she referred the reader back to the section “Basis of Our Demands” in the previous report, noting that it gave “as true a statement as can be made here.” But perhaps an even more significant marker of Wier’s state of mind at this time can be observed by the fact that she concluded the report by reprinting (nearly forty years later) the lecture that she had delivered before her PCBAHA colleagues back in 1910—The Work of the Western Historical Society as Illustrated by Nevada.” It was Wier’s way of simultaneously reminding state officials of the work the Society had done,

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58 Seventeenth Biennial Report, 58-63.
as well as emphasizing the challenges that still remained. One line in the reprinted lecture is particularly telling and one that must have struck Wier as ironic given her constant struggles over the previous decades:

…I believe that the day is not far distant when the State of Nevada will claim as a privilege the adequate support of its historical society; when the people of that State will have realized the power and significance of such an institution in the creation of civic patriotism.\textsuperscript{59}

**Personal Life & Legacy**

As Wier approached her eighth decade, the majority of her family members had passed away.\textsuperscript{60} Only her older sister Eva was still living, and she had joined Wier in Reno to live out her remaining years. Retired from the University, Wier was able to devote the majority of her time to the Society even as she attended social events as an active member of the American Pen Women and Reno Business and Professional Women’s Organization. If Wier was slowing down with age, it was not apparent if judged against her activities on behalf of the Society. She continued to give talks and attend historical events in the region even in her late seventies. In a small community like Reno, the local newspapers regularly chronicled her activities, and it was not surprising that private and professional work on behalf of the Society and her role in documenting Nevada history often merged. In March 1947, she and her sister Eva attended a meeting of the local chapter of the American Pen Women.\textsuperscript{61} Later that year she attended a joint meeting of the PTA and the Smith Valley Civic Club, where she spoke to students and faculty members on the necessity of preserving historical material and about the creation of a junior

\textsuperscript{59} *Eighteenth Biennial Report*, 43.

\textsuperscript{60} Beloved older sister Clara Putnam had died on July 7, 1937 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and younger brother Aldophus William (Will) Wier died in Reno on March 24, 1946.

historical society.\textsuperscript{62} In 1947 and 1948 she was among a tiny group of women named by the American Legion for “Girl’s State” nomenclature, speaking to the assembled girls on the importance of “cooperative work methods.”\textsuperscript{63} Her position as \textit{grande dame} of Nevada history also led the Washoe County Commissioners to invite her to act as technical adviser to the Bower’s Mansion Refurnishing Committee and to serve on the Virginia City Restoration Committee. In October 1948, her many years of acquiring artifacts for the Society proved useful in judging an antique show charity event for the Quota Club in Reno with another Nevada historian, Dr. Effie Mona Mack.\textsuperscript{64}

After years of feeling that her work on behalf of the Society and the preservation of Nevada history had been unappreciated, Wier was no doubt delighted with the news that she was to be honored for this work by the Nevada Native Daughters organization with a celebratory banquet in April 12, 1947. An article in the \textit{Nevada State Journal} on April 6 announcing the upcoming banquet noted that she was to be honored for almost a half century of service to the state and described her as one of the “foremost authorities” in the field of Nevada history.\textsuperscript{65} For the woman who had struggled for years to gain the support of state officials for her work on behalf of Nevada history, it may have been somewhat ironic that the governor, senators, judges, and other state officials had been invited to attend the celebration alongside Wier’s former students and colleagues.

During the banquet, Society president Judge A.J. Maestretti remarked on the state’s debt to Wier for her “continued efforts to collect and preserve historical documents and articles on

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Eighteenth Biennial Report}, 23.
\textsuperscript{65} “Dr. J.E. Wier to Be Honored,” \textit{Nevada State Journal}, April 6, 1947.
Nevada’s early days.” Another speaker, Mrs. S.T. Spann, praised Wier’s work as a history professor as well as for the Society, and letters from many prominent residents honoring Wier were read to the audience. Fittingly, the evening’s festivities also included the announcement of a gift of valuable scrapbooks to the Society from long-time Carson City resident Clara Crisler. At the end of the program, an emotional Wier gave thanks to the Nevada’s Native Daughters and all those present for the honor they had bestowed on her, making a plea that the work of the Society “be carried on and collections preserved for future students.” It was a fitting tribute to Wier as a professor that many of her former students present at the banquet were introduced to the audience and that a table of University of Nevada alumni were also part of the event.

Less than two years later, as she approached her seventy-ninth birthday, Wier received another important local honor when both houses of legislature eulogized her for her “long service to the state” in January 1949. Remarking that since her retirement she had “devoted practically all of her energies to the development of the historical society exhibits,” the praise was carried in an assembly concurrent resolution, and passed unanimously by assembly and senate. The years of struggling with both houses to obtain the necessary funding for the Society seemed forgotten (on the assembly’s part at least) with a rather flowery resolution stating that “…promptings of gratitude unite with the most elementary demands of justice to the end that she receive at least the proper reward for her services before it become a mere footnote on another page of the book of life.”

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Death and Memorial Tributes

Wier had slowed down significantly after advocating for her beloved historical society that January. In early June 1949, she was still well enough to attend a wedding in Sparks and a meeting of the Business and Professional Women’s Organization later that month where she appeared healthy enough to be appointed to a legislative committee for the group.\(^{68}\) It was one of her last public activities before an attack of coronary thrombosis on July 10 left her invalided through October. The seriousness of this illness meant that she was never well enough to return to her work at the Society, and it led her to close the museum and library to all but research workers.\(^ {69}\) Wier spent several months in the hospital throughout late 1949 and early 1950, before she was well enough to return home early that year. In early April, Wier returned to a Reno hospital when her condition worsened and was never to return home.\(^ {70}\) In the early morning hours of April 14, 1950, Jeanne Elizabeth Wier passed away just six days after reaching her eightieth birthday.

Lengthy tributes to Wier immediately appeared in both local newspapers, with the *Reno Evening Gazette* declaring her to be “one of Nevada’s most prominent women”\(^ {71}\) and the *Nevada State Journal* describing the Society as a “monument to her endeavors.” Recounting the founding of the historical society, the NSJ described how the organization became “her vocation as well as her avocation.” Noting that Wier’s life work “centered around the gathering of Nevada historical papers and relics” the article accurately characterized her dream to have the materials


placed “properly in an adequate museum where they could be used and also admired.” In a
touching reflection, the article pointed out that in the State Building’s basement, there was “a
collection of material, almost each piece of which was found personally by Dr. Wier.”72

The Reno Evening Gazette provided a similar tribute to Wier’s work, noting, “[f]or half a
century her work as a teacher, women’s leader and historian had been known widely.” Crediting
her as leading the founding of the Society, it described her constancy as a “moving spirit in the
Society,” whatever its location over the years, and noted that since her retirement from teaching
she had “devoted practically all of her energies to the development of the historical society
exhibits.” Wier would no doubt have been pleased that the article also acknowledged the value
of the historical publications which had always been so important to her, noting that “her life’s
work is traced in various publications of the historical society which she compiled and edited.”73

Both articles wrote of her early work with the suffrage movement in Nevada, and if they
were perhaps incorrect in describing her as a leader in that movement, the NSJ was correct in
describing her an advocate for the “recognition of women in all fields of endeavor.” It was
appropriate, therefore, that on the day of Wier’s funeral, the honorary pallbearers were all
members of the Reno Business and Professional Women’s Club and National League of
Penwomen, two women’s organizations which she had ardently supported in the last two decades
of her life. Among the group of six women serving as honorary pallbearers were Felice Cohn
and Harriet Spann, two women who had worked closely with Wier as she rebuilt the Society in

72 “Death of Dr. Jeanne E. Wier Recalls Founding of Nevada Historical Society in 1904,” Nevada
State Journal, April 15, 1950.

the 1930s. Russell Elliott, who would become a well-known Nevada historian in his later years, and who had been a student of hers from earlier days, served as one of her active pallbearers.\footnote{Funeral is Held for Jeanne Wier, “Reno Evening Gazette,” April 18, 1950.}

Epilogue

As the Society adjusted to life without its founder, the museum and library, which had been shuttered since the beginning of her illness in July 1949, remained closed and did not open again until December 15, 1950.\footnote{Historical Group Museum Opened, “Reno Evening Gazette,” December 15, 1950.} After her death, the Society that she had tended so devotedly continued to grow under the leadership of her former student and secretary, Clara Beatty.\footnote{Clara Smith Beatty, first president of the University’s chapter of the Equal Suffrage League, graduated with a degree in history from the University of Nevada in 1914, and had worked at the Society in various capacities since she was a student. From her colleague and mentor Jeanne Wier she absorbed a deep and abiding love for Nevada history and the work of the Society. Her obituary remarked on “her dedication to the museum and the library and to the preservation of Nevada history.” An October 26, 1967 editorial in the Nevada State Journal describing her work could have easily been describing Wier when it declared that her work as Society director had been pursued with “dedication and high purpose” and that much of her adult life had been “spent in accumulating and researching all aspects of Nevada history.” “Death of Two Renoites a Blow to Community,” Nevada State Journal, October 26, 1967.}

Seven years after her death, Wier’s dream of having the Society issue a regular historical journal was realized with the publication of the first issue of the \textit{Nevada Historical Society Quarterly} in 1957. It would become the primary scholarly journal for Nevada history in the West, and is still published today. With its participation in the celebrations of major public historical events such as the centennials of Nevada statehood and the Pony Express in the 1960s, the Society continued the tradition of outreach as a center for the promotion of Nevada history that Wier had long championed.\footnote{Phillip Earl and Eric Moody, “The Nevada Historical Society,” in \textit{The Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science}, ed. Miriam A. Drake (New York: M. Dekker, 2003), passim.}

In 1958, the Society had remodeled and expanded their existing facilities in the State Building to make them more attractive and welcoming to visitors.\footnote{Peter L. Bandurraga, “One Hundred Years of History in Nevada: The Story of the Nevada Historical Society, 1904-2004,” \textit{Nevada Historical Society Quarterly} 47, no. 1 (2004): 11.} Even Wier’s advocacy
for the preservation of public records was vindicated when the legislature created the Division of Archives as a state agency in 1965 to provide a permanent home for state records and a comprehensive plan for their collection.

Continued collecting efforts throughout the 1950s and 1960s meant that the Society’s existing basement quarters in the State Building, already small in Wier’s time, were soon cramped. By the mid-1960s the building itself (forty years old at that time) was aging, and its location in downtown Reno in Powning Park made it attractive to city officials planning for a new convention center. In 1966, the Society moved into a temporary location while a new site was selected, and the new library and museum were constructed. Two years later, the Society’s new building opened to the public. Located on the edge of the UNR campus, the new facility with its professionally designed galleries was the building that Wier had always dreamed of for the Society.79 Its proximity to the University was a location that she would have undoubtedly approved of as well.

In the decades after Wier’s death, the Society as an organization had experienced the kind of growth and development that she had only dreamed of during her years of struggle: a new building worthy of its collection with room for expansion, professional staff, a regularly published scholarly journal, historical guidebooks for the public, educational texts on Nevada for the state’s schools, and significant collection growth. She would have also been pleased at the funding that allowed for the expansion of collection storage space for the Society’s building and for the remodeling of the building in 1999. Still, this progress did not insulate the Society from financial struggles that affected the State’s coffers even if it was nothing as extreme that characterized its early years of existence under Wier.

79Ibid., 11.
As the Society evolved into a professional organization and became part of an increasingly larger state bureaucracy, there were other developments that may have met with Wier’s disapproval and resistance. Her reluctance to cede control of the Society’s decision-making may have made her chafe at the thought of being part of a larger parent department at the state level. Her wish for the Society in Reno to serve as a centralized location for all historical documents and artifacts meant that she might have disagreed with the creation of a branch office of the Society in Las Vegas in 1976, which later became the Nevada State Museum and Historical Society in 1982. However, what she could not have foreseen during her lifetime was the tremendous population growth in southern Nevada, and particularly in Las Vegas, that made it necessary to have historical resources available locally. With her insistence that the Society needed “properly trained” historical workers, would she have approved of the Docent Council of volunteers that has been instrumental in helping the Society’s library to function in the face of severe staff cuts in the 2000s. Perhaps the fact that the Society has continued to offer regular historical programming for the community would have made her a little more understanding of the role of volunteers in making this type of outreach possible.

And certainly no one would have understood more than Wier about the state’s straightened financial circumstances that almost led to the Society’s closure in 2011. At a time when financial challenges meant staff cuts, a freeze on positions, a discussion of closing the library and dispersing the collections, one librarian on staff at the Society remarked that he was heartened by the knowledge of Wier’s struggles and that he drew strength from the way in which

80 In 1979, a state Department of Museums and History was created to oversee the Society and the state museum in Carson City. Changes in state government reorganization saw this department succeeded by a larger Department of Museums, Library and Arts in 1991, with the Society coming under the re-named Department of Cultural Affairs in 2001. Earl and Moody, “The Nevada Historical Society” passim.
she continually persevered in the face of numerous struggles. In this most recent case, the Society was again successful in proving its value before the state legislature and the government, and continues to be a place where the history of Nevada is preserved and made accessible and serves as fodder for original research by students and scholars alike.

Did Wier succeed in imbuing the population with a historical consciousness during her lengthy tenure as secretary? Certainly the mass of donations (and the accompanying correspondence documenting the donations) shows that hundreds of Nevada residents saw the value of preserving their history, even if they might not appreciate the loftier motives behind it that Wier desired. At a time when there was little in the way of cultural heritage in the sparsely populated state, the Society’s membership rolls featured the names of the state’s leading citizens, and the organization’s annual meetings served as social gatherings that inspired community pride in their shared history. Although the Society never received appropriations large enough to be to Wier’s liking, they did increase steadily over the years (with the exception of the 1927-1933 period), indicating that at least some legislators and government leaders were also aware of the importance of preserving the state’s history. The fact that Wier was persuaded to rebuild the Society’s collections (albeit with federal help and workers) after their removal to the Exposition building meant that the state saw value in the Society’s mission and in making the contents of the museum and library available to the community again. As the self-styled “information bureau” for the state of Nevada, the Society was recognized as a reliable source of information on facts regarding Nevada’s history and historical development, and it received queries from researchers throughout the United States. After the construction of the Society’s first modest building, and later in the crowded basement of the Washoe County Public Library building, the thousands of visitors who came to view the museum’s collections demonstrated the public’s interest in the
artifacts that told Nevada’s story. Perhaps most important to Wier during her tenure was the fact that numerous researchers, from children to university students to professional writers and scholars, used the library to access its books and valuable historical documents—the primary sources of Nevada history—to write new and varied histories of Nevada and the men and women who had played a part in settling it. Ultimately, the fact that the Society still stands today over one hundred and ten years after its founding as a viable cultural heritage institution provides the most compelling evidence that Wier succeeded in making the state’s citizens recognize the value of preserving Nevada’s history.
CHAPTER 11:
CONCLUSION – ANALYSIS AND LEGACY

This dissertation has not presented the complete story of Jeanne Wier’s life; much of her personal life, and her tenure as a professor of history at the University of Nevada has been left out of the story. What remains is the story of her work in developing and shaping the first cultural heritage institution in Nevada. What can this part of the story tell us? The story of her career at the historical society provides insight into both the individual and collective sides of Wier’s life. It some ways, it became impossible to disentangle the ties between Jeanne Wier, Nevada resident, and Jeanne Wier, executive secretary of the Nevada Historical Society, who in one notable instance declared the Society to be “my child.” Yet by placing a line between the two, we can uncover some of the themes that have emerged in this study, and come to some conclusions about her personal legacy and that of the institution she created to document the history of her adopted state.

Jeanne Wier – Historian and Nevadan

Wier as Historian

As an undergraduate history student at Stanford, Wier’s professors had trained her in the most current methodology of the era that considered scientific research with primary sources as the only reliable method of historical inquiry. Although she was never able to attain the graduate degree she so desperately desired, her knowledge of these historical research methods, and the fact that she had written a thesis based on primary sources, meant that she considered herself to
be a historian even if the requisite letters were missing behind her name.¹ It should also be remembered that in many research universities of that early period, the PhD was not “…the essential pass into academic employment that it is today.”² Unlike some of the “amateur” or gentleman historians who had helmed other early historical societies, Wier was in the unique position of simultaneously teaching in a university history department (and later chairing it) and running a historical society for nearly thirty-six years before she retired from the former in 1940.

Wier’s tenure at the University of Nevada and her concurrent work at the Society also provide an example of the ambiguity that characterized the emerging historical enterprise at the turn of the twentieth century, a time when “books represented the apex of their imagined hierarchy of activities, but teaching and collecting and publishing of historical materials were also seen as integral parts of the whole.” In History’s Babel, his account of the discipline of history from its beginnings as profession in the late nineteenth century until today, Townsend utilized the term “enterprise” as he felt it more representative than the conception of history as a discipline or a profession as it covered the range of activities, “where such knowledge about the past is produced and used in an organized or systematic way.” Wier’s work as a history professor (who offered the first course in Nevada history), clearly informed her work as a

¹ Wier’s work in original research at the end of her BA program at Stanford meant that her experience was actually not that far from some doctoral programs at the time. The standards for doctoral training varied from university to university as history PhD programs began to develop in the last decades of the nineteenth century. A survey by Harvard professor Ephraim Emerton in 1893 had revealed that some universities were granting doctorates based only on an extra year or two of study and a final examination. He himself had recommended that the PhD degree require at least two years of focused study after the baccalaureate degree under the direction of a specialist in the field, that resulted in the production of new scholarly research. Robert B. Townsend, History’s Babel: Scholarship, Professionalization, and the Historical Enterprise in the United States, 1880-1940. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 22.

² Townsend, History’s Babel, 16. Indeed, the University of Nevada’s small faculty at the turn of the century had a mix of educational levels, some with bachelors, some with masters, and a very small number with doctorates. See Twelfth Annual Register of the Nevada State University for the Year 1899 with Announcements for the Academic Year, 1900-1901 (Carson City, NV: State Printing Office, 1900), 8-10.
director (in name if not in title) of a regional historical society with all of the duties it involved (collecting, publishing, exhibiting), and illustrates Townsend’s conception of history as an enterprise that encompassed a wider variety of activities in which the “personnel linked with it were employed in more diverse and overlapping pursuits, and the cultural and social resources linking them together were more visible.”3 That Wier created such a connection in her work is evident in this brief statement from the University of Nevada history written on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary in 1924 in which the author noted that while the Society was independent of the University and never classed as an “affiliated organization“ — “[t]he students themselves caught something of Professor Wier’s interest in the early history of the State, gaining from these collections a fairer and clearer idea of the events and life of pioneer days.”4

**Gender issues**

At the time of Wier’s arrival in 1899, the few professional, college-educated women in Nevada were concentrated in Reno at the University. Women dominated the teaching profession in Nevada at the elementary and high school level, but there were fewer women engaged in higher education as an occupation because few women had the necessary educational credentials, and the employment opportunities for such women would have been limited to those in Reno. The *Twelfth Annual Register of the University of Nevada for the Year 1899*, published just after Wier’s arrival, indicated that there were twenty-eight other faculty members, and including Wier, ten of these were women. Five of these women had master’s degrees while Wier had not yet

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4 Samuel B. Doten, *An Illustrated History of the University of Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada, 1924), 134-135.
received her bachelor’s degree from Stanford at the time. As Nevada historian James Hulse has noted, “[i]n the field of history, women were the pacesetters in Nevada higher education,” with both Hannah Clapp and Anne Martin preceding Wier in the history department. Wier remained one of only a handful of female professors at the University of Nevada in its formative years, and for many decades, the only female chair of a university department, and the only female member on the Society’s executive council.

Looking away from higher education at three other professional women contemporary to Wier, to provide context for her experiences: there was Dr. Eliza Cook, the state’s first female physician, who practiced in the Carson Valley, outside of Reno, and Helen Rulison, an early female dentist, who practiced in Goldfield, Tonopah and Reno. Both women had graduate degrees in their respective fields and went on to long and successful careers in their chosen fields just as Wier had. Cook, like Wier, had been mentored by a man, Dr. W.H. Smith, who had encouraged her to study medicine, just as Dr. George Elliot Howard had encouraged Wier in her studies at Stanford and in her early professional life. Like Wier, Cook never married, but unlike the former, she was actively involved in community and reform issues such as suffrage and the temperance movement. Rulison married at age forty-six, and continued to practice dentistry until well into her seventies. Although it is likely that Wier crossed paths with these two

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5 Twelfth Annual Register of the Nevada State University for the Year 1899, 8-10. Subjects taught by these instructors included home economics, English, pedagogy, Romance languages and literature, and vocal music.

6 Although Clapp had taught in Nevada schools for decades, biographies of her do not list any formal academic qualifications whereas Martin had both undergraduate and graduate degrees in history from Stanford. Clapp also acted as “librarian” for the University of Nevada, but her duties as such are not elaborated in various histories of the University of Nevada. James W. Hulse, The University of Nevada: A Centennial History (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1974), 108.

7 Cook died at age ninety-one in 1947, and Rulison at age eighty-four in 1955.

8 Anita Ernst Watson, Into their Own: Nevada Women Emerging into Public Life (Reno: Nevada Humanities Committee, 2000), 125-127.
women, it is unclear if they interacted at all. Wier had a far closer relationship with the brilliant Felice Cohn, who was later to play a large role in the work of the Society. The Carson City native had qualified for her first teaching certificate at eleven years old, and later attended both the University of Nevada and Stanford (certainly a factor in her friendship with Wier). She studied law on her own before qualifying for the bar in 1902, when she was eighteen, and went on to become Reno’s first woman district attorney in 1906. Cohn was also a founding member of Nevada’s Equal Franchise Society, and had worked diligently to ensure the passage of the state’s suffrage resolution that she had herself written. In addition to holding various legal positions for the US government, Cohn ran unsuccessfully for public office a number of times. She was in private practice from 1924 onward, and highly active in a number of civic and community organizations until her death in 1961. Although not every Nevada working woman had these same opportunities, the fact that all of these women were professionally active throughout their lives demonstrates that, even prior to the passage of suffrage, Nevada was a state where women could, to some extent, manage their own destinies in fields that were traditionally reserved for men.

Wier’s career as a professional woman in Nevada typifies what scholar Joyce Antler has characterized as “life process feminism,” a variant of feminism that represents “a single individual’s struggle for autonomy, rather than a self-conscious, political strategy for altering the social order.” Indeed looking at Wier’s life and work as both a professor and leader of the state’s first cultural heritage institution (a position that had been traditionally held by men in

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9 Like Wier, she disagreed with the more militant suffrage tactics advocated by Anne Martin.
10 Felice Cohn Biography File, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
other states), we see an illustration of Antler’s conception of “…feminism not as a theory but as a hard-fought life struggle.”

Wier rarely if ever consciously addressed the significance of her gender as it related to her role in leading the Society or as chair of the history and political science department at the University of Nevada. She clearly supported the suffrage movement in Nevada, calling the first meeting of the Equal Franchise Society in 1911, but her workload was simply too heavy to continue any active suffrage work. Other incidents drawn from Wier’s life demonstrate her support for women’s progress in society, and recognition of their important contributions on many levels. Beginning in 1911, Wier offered a class called “Woman in History” at the University of Nevada that studied “the position and influence of woman in various ages and among different nations” and also included “lectures upon the vocations now open to woman, and the significance of college education in preparation for the same.” This course, with some modifications, appeared in the University Register, for the next twenty-nine years. Her regular mentorship of female students throughout her forty-one year career in the history department, which she often carried over into their work assisting her at the Society was another significant way in which Wier contributed to the expansion of women’s higher education opportunities in Nevada. Wier’s willingness to take a leading role in the Society—her ability to present her case before the legislature, to lobby both public and private figures in support of funding, to travel widely in search of collections over harsh terrain, and to even physically construct some of the very cases that held the Society’s collection of artifacts and documents—provide some evidence that she never viewed her gender as an insurmountable barrier to successfully accomplishing her work. Taken in totality, Wier’s life and work highlight Antler’s

12 Ibid., 154.
13 At Wier’s retirement, it ceased to be offered again for another thirty years. James Hulse, “Jeanne Elizabeth Wier’s Second Career,” in Nevada Historical Quarterly 51, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 313
definition of life process feminism as a “personal, rather than a collective, set of processes taking place over an individual’s life course by which women have sought to mold their destinies in the world and confront, at each stage of their life cycle, the gender-defined issues that have traditionally limited female opportunities.”

Wier’s professional correspondence for the Society is revealing of the numerous challenges that she faced in light of the state’s seeming disinterest in funding the its mission to document Nevada’s history. There seems little evidence, however, that the state based their disinterest in helping Wier based on her gender alone. She regularly wrote and corresponded with state officials, including the governor, during her forty-six year tenure, and was allowed to speak before the legislature and the Ways and Means Committee on many occasions in pursuit of funding, even before women received the right to vote in Nevada (1914). Although she certainly relied on the advice and support of the Society’s prominent male officers such as George Talbot, who spoke to the legislature on behalf of the organization, she did not use them solely as a conduit, she was more than capable of speaking for herself. Her complaints, registered in correspondence, in the biennial reports, and sometimes in the local newspapers, were directed toward the state’s leaders (who from the 1920s onward included female legislators) not for the treatment they doled out to her on account of her gender, but on account of what she felt was their large-scale indifference to collecting the state’s history.

**Relationship with Other Female Colleagues**

Wier’s extensive professional correspondence and the eighteen biennial reports she submitted to the state over the period 1908-1948 indicate that she had very positive relationships with her female students, donors, and colleagues over the years. From the dedicated former

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14 Antler, “Feminism as Life-Process,” 134.
students such as Belulah Hershiser Leonard and Clara Beatty who assisted her with the Society’s
daily work over several decades to generous donors (among many) such as Edith West of Elko
and Grace Lamb of Tonopah to the support of the Reno professional women such as Harriet
Spann and the aforementioned Felice Cohn, Wier inspired loyalty to the Society and its mission
throughout her tenure. Early on she also worked closely with women’s groups such as the
Nevada Federation of Women’s Clubs and the Twentieth Century Club, a noted Reno women’s
civic organization, as a means to secure their assistance and support for the Society’s endeavors.
Prominent Reno women (including Belulah Hershiser, Clara Beatty, and Felice Cohn) were also
elected to the Society’s governing board beginning in the 1920s. In the 1930s and 1940s, Wier
became heavily involved on a personal and professional level with local women’s groups such as
Nevada’s Native Daughters, the Reno chapter of the League of American Penwomen, and the
Reno Business and Professional Women’s Organization. Members of the two latter
organizations thought so highly of Wier that they served as honorary pallbearers at her funeral in
1950. Social columns in the local papers showed that as a professor she was respected enough to
be regularly invited to dinners and social events for the women’s sororities on campus.

Two instances of conflict with prominent professional women have colored the
perception of Wier’s relationships with women. The biographer of Anne Martin, Wier’s former
Stanford classmate, argued that tension between the two women began with Wier’s replacement
of Martin at the University of Nevada in 1899, and only worsened throughout their lives.15 Wier
herself included a response in the Eighteenth Biennial Report denying Martin’s charges (as
reported in a publication sponsored by the Department of History at the University of Nevada)
that the former had denied her opportunity to place her papers in the Nevada Historical

Society.” Martin showed her lingering bitterness at this perceived slight at the time of the banquet by Nevada’s Native Daughters in 1947 that honored Wier when she wrote in her May 28, 1947 diary entry: “Cheap show, her speech—weak, jealous woman—always been jealous of me—I fear because I gave her her job!” Yet of Martin’s most significant accomplishment, her work in obtaining suffrage for Nevada’s women, Wier had long ago given her credit, writing to Ida Husted Harper, editor of a volume on the history of women’s suffrage in the United States, that “there is not the slightest doubt that without her help the amendment would never have carried…the fact that she seems to have merited much of the criticism that has been made of her does not in the least justify anyone in denying her the credit which she earned.”

There was a touch of cattiness in her reply, perhaps, but there also seems to be a certain begrudging sense of fairness in Wier’s willingness to give credit where credit was due.

Nevada historian James Hulse reports anecdotally in his centennial history of the University of Nevada that Wier, “who had a reputation for maintaining a firm grasp of her domain,” later became jealous of her former student Effie Mona Mack, after the latter obtained a PhD at Berkeley in 1930, a distinction that Wier had never attained. Stating that “professional jealousy darkened their relationship,” Hulse suggested that Mack had to be content with teaching high school history in Reno because of Wier’s refusal to consider her former student for a campus position. He also suggested that this jealousy resulted from the fact that Mack had

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16 Eighteenth Biennial Report, 30.
17 Howard, The Long Campaign, 181.
19 In a later article on Wier, published some years after this history of the University of Nevada, Hulse suggested that the “history slot at the university in Reno was never available to her [Mack], because Wier’s successors seemed to have a bias against women.” He added that this was a “subjective judgment, based on little empirical evidence, and with the caveat that Dr. Mack had her own agenda and values, not
published books on Nevada (one of the state’s first textbooks), while Wier had only published and edited articles in the Nevada Historical Society papers. Hulse, now an emeritus professor of history at the University of Nevada, notes that Mack became more involved in University affairs after Wier’s death, which was a full ten years after the latter’s retirement from the University. Ironically, because of Mack’s work in arranging several gifts to the University, her name still resonates on the Reno campus in the Mack Social Science building, while Wier’s four decades in the history department remain largely unknown outside of the University Archives that chronicle her years as a professor. Although these two relationships were the exception, overall Wier had positive and productive relationships with other professional women in Nevada during her tenure at the Society.

Relationship with Other Leaders of the Society

Did Wier have similar positive relationships with the Society’s leadership, and other state government officials? As part of the original committee whose discussions had led to the formation of the Society back in 1904, Wier’s work had clearly inspired enough confidence for her to be nominated for the important post of Secretary/Curator. That she was elected to this post by the membership in 1904, and then reelected to serve for the remainder of her life, even when she lost control of the collections, showed that her hard work and dedication had earned her the confidence and respect of both the Society’s leaders and its membership. She was in always consistent with those of younger faculty members.” Hulse, “Jeanne Elizabeth Wier’s Second Career,” 315.

20 Hulse, University of Nevada, 108.

21 Excluding Wier, of the ninety charter members of the Society, only ten percent were women. First Biennial Report, 1907-1908, 22.

22 It is unclear in later years whether there was an election for the post of secretary as the information presented in the biennial reports varied over the years, and elections were not always mentioned. It’s possible that in latter years it was just assumed that Wier would remain in her post. It seems fairly clear that she did not receive at salary in the first twenty-five years of her association with
fact the only woman on the Executive Council from 1904 through 1921. For the first twenty years of the Society’s existence, Wier had overwhelming positive relationships with the Executive Council, regularly corresponding with long-standing officers Talbot (President), Reid (Vice-President), and Hershiser (Treasurer). Her relations with Talbot were especially cordial, and it was clear that she respected and valued his opinion and he hers. It was not until the great controversy arose over the Exposition Building in 1925 that Wier’s relationship with the Board of Trustees soured, and her desire to replace the Board at all costs reflected negatively on her character. Once this council was in place, it appears that peaceful relations returned, and continued throughout the remainder of her tenure at the Society.

Wier also had largely cordial relations with state officials, politicians, and men of influence in the Society’s early years. Clarence Mackay, Senator George Nixon, Senator Francis Newlands, and University of Nevada regent and assemblyman Frank Williams were among those with whom she regularly corresponded. Although constantly frustrated by funding issues, she generally held no personal animus toward state legislators, even if she did consider them uninformed. This is not to say that she did not react strongly when she felt her work or the Society was being threatened or dismissed. Early on she jealously guarded her domain from encroachment by the University of Nevada president, Dr. Joseph Stubbs, fearing that the University wanted to take control over the collections. On relatively good terms with most of the state’s governors, it was not until Governor Scrugham began to take an interest in archaeology and history and suggested the formation of the State Board of Historical Research, and then went on to support the transfer of the Society’s collections to the Exposition building that she would develop a truly adversarial relationship with state government.
Although angry and bitter at this betrayal, Wier’s devotion to the Society and its mission eventually overcame any bad feelings she had toward the state government, and was one of the reasons that she returned to reorganize the Society’s collections after the disastrous move to the Exposition building in 1927. Although she chastised state officials publicly (in the biennial reports) a few times in the 1930s, it appears that from then on, her relations with legislators were more or less the same as they had been prior to the drama that surrounded the removal of the collections from her custody. There was one final battle that left Wier bruised, and the subject of public criticism from some state legislators: the proposal for the Nevada State Museum in Carson City in 1939. Those state assemblymen who proposed the legislation for the creation of museum deliberately criticized Wier and her handling of the Society in their attempt to secure funding for their project. She was able to fend off the attack, however, because of her reputation and her strong relationships with other legislators, thereby preserving the Society as an institution. Relationships with Key Pittman and Patrick McCarran who served as US senators in the 1930s and 1940s were also positive. She publicly thanked the latter in the Eighteenth Biennial Report for his assistance in securing funds for the creation of postwar plans and specifications for a new building. Although she never did receive the level of funding she felt appropriate during her lifetime, the fact that the legislature praised her greatly at the end of her life meant that she had earned their respect, if not their wholehearted support, for her work.

**Nevada Historical Society – Pioneering Cultural Heritage Institution**

*Manuscripts and Archives Tradition v Public Records*

Like a typical historical society, Nevada’s institution had physical artifacts, books, and documents. Focusing solely on the library’s unique materials, the extensive collections of personal papers that Wier gathered so diligently placed the Society firmly in what archival historians consider the “historical manuscript tradition” that began with the founding of the
Massachusetts Historical Society in 1791, and was devoted to “collecting records and documents that were useful for studying and understanding the past,” and more specifically for preserving material that supported the “growing interest in historical study.”


This approach to the administration of historical records contrasted with the public archives tradition that emerged from France and Prussia, and focused on the concept of provenance as the way in which to manage the various types of public records that emerged from state and local governments.


Wier clearly fits into the mold of the records custodians of this historical manuscript tradition who one archival historian described as approaching their task “with an interest in historical research, and thus a concern for the raw materials supporting research, already fully formed.”


Nevada’s relative lack of concern for the preservation and management of its public records—a situation that Wier frequently brought to the attention of the state’s leaders—was not uncommon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. O’Toole and Cox have noted that, with the exception of instances where private and public historical societies had acquired government records, “government archives were often neglected and difficult to use.”

26 Ibid., 58.

In her work for the Society, Wier’s frequent personnel searches indicated that she viewed the skills of trained librarians as essential for the proper cataloging of the library’s valuable book collection. She also employed similar library-centric modes of description for newspapers and pamphlets, where organization of materials by subject was of primary concern. As Wier often
mentioned the existence of “accession lists” for the Society’s many artifacts, it is probable that she and her staff used methods common to museums in that era. It is less clear how she approached the organization and description of the Society’s manuscript collections that eventually grew to include some local and state public records. The fact that she later attended meetings of the newly formed Society of American Archivists shows that she was cognizant of the growing professionalism and standards that applied to archives even if there was not always a clear distinction as such among the various documentary materials in the Society’s library. Indeed, the Society’s correspondence files from its earliest years included invitations to attend the meetings of the Public Archives Commission that eventually led to the creation of the Conference of Archivists within the American Historical Association, and the subsequent organization of the Society of American Archivists. Wier’s long involvement with the AHA thus would have allowed her to observe the emergence of the archival profession, as she selectively applied some of its ideas and principles, even if she never really separated herself or the Society’s mission from the historical manuscript tradition.

Wier’s Geographical Boundaries

Wier did not operate the Society in a vacuum, and from the beginning sought the counsel of more established historical societies on questions relating to collections, administration, funding, public records, and the type of building needed to house the collections. In seeking this advice, however, Wier stuck to specific geographic boundaries that her educational and

27 There is no evidence that Wier looked to the American Library Association (founded in 1876), the professional organization for librarians, for any similar guidance. She appeared to trust that the librarians she hired would have the proper training to perform their duties as required.  
28 The historical society as an institution had been the subject of intense scrutiny by the American Historical Association in the late 1890s and again just as Nevada was taking the first steps to form its own historical society. The convening of the Conference of Historical Societies in 1904 and the subsequent “Report on Methods of Organization and Work of State and Local Historical Societies” in the AHA Annual Report, 1905 demonstrated the AHA’s interest in defining the different types of historical societies, and their basic functions. Townsend, History’s Babel, 50.
personal experiences dictated. Her connections to California were strong due to the time she spent at Stanford and her regular use of the Bancroft Library for her own research. As a result, she viewed the latter as the pinnacle of everything she strived for in assembling the Society’s library, despite the fact that the two were not comparable institutions. Wier also looked to the historical societies of Oregon and Washington for advice early on in the Society’s history. Interestingly, although large parts of Nevada had once been part of both Utah and Arizona, she never looked to the historical societies of the intermountain states that bordered Nevada such as Arizona or Idaho or Utah. It’s possible that she felt that the youth and the frontier nature of these intermountain states made them too similar to Nevada and unlikely to have the depth of experience that would prove useful to her. Rather, it was the Midwest historical societies, in particular, the Wisconsin Historical Society, that Wier viewed as the gold standard for Nevada to emulate. Was it her Midwest origins that led her to look upon these Societies with the most reverence or perhaps the fact that they were long-established institutions with roots that went back into the nineteenth century? In fact, at the time that Wier first began corresponding with Reuben Thwaites of the Wisconsin Historical Society in the early 1900s, its “staffing and funding were the envy of other societies with scientific aspirations” and thus her academic background would have certainly led her to view such an institution in high esteem. It’s also possible that the Wisconsin Historical Society, which was deeply intertwined with the university library on the campus of the University of Wisconsin, provided a more compatible model for Wier to emulate owing to her own personal situation with the University of Reno. Although she

29 Many of the Society’s early collections also reflected the strong connections that northern Nevada had with California, San Francisco in particular, during the Comstock Lode years.

30 Townsend, History’s Babel, 50.
eventually became disenchanted with the idea of merging the Society with any part of the University’s library, it was something that she had thought of on a number of occasions.

**Context with Other Western Historical Societies**

How did the Nevada Historical Society compare to other regional historical societies? To a large extent, there was nothing new or different in what Wier collected for the Society in context with the collections of other historical societies of the region. Her devotion to collecting the stories of Nevada’s living pioneer settlers, and her near reverence for their tales of hardship and hardiness was probably no different than that of societies in other young western states, particularly that of Arizona, whose society was first organized in 1884 “to perpetuate the memory of those whose sagacity, energy and enterprise induced them to settle in the wilderness and become the founders of a new state.”

Like the leaders of other western historical societies, Wier gathered the cultural artifacts of pioneer and frontier life: wagons, guns, oxen yokes, clothing, furniture, and agricultural implements to name just a few. Regional natural history specimens, including both flora and fauna, were another focus of her collecting efforts that were also similar to other societies of that era, but perhaps less important than they were to Colorado’s historical society in the early years after its founding in 1879.

Wier’s particular interest in documenting the lives of the local Native American population led her to collect items such as baskets and arrowheads, but even these were fairly ubiquitous items in the western and midwestern historical society. The rarer Indian archaeological finds from the Lovelock Cave were perhaps unique to Nevada’s indigenous tribes, but variations on these could be found in other states, and interest in archaeology and ethnology also characterized the Colorado Historical

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Society in the 1920s. Although mining had also played a role in states such as Colorado, Utah, and Montana, its pivotal role in Nevada’s history and development meant that the large-scale collection of artifacts, implements, documentation and photographs of the mining industry was perhaps more significant in Nevada that it was to societies in other western states. Wier also viewed the collection of objects from the Civil War era with perhaps more reverence than other western historical societies because of the pivotal role that Nevada’s statehood had played in the war. Interestingly, she did not appear interested in collecting either artifacts or documents related to gambling.

In the library, Wier collected the typical fare of most historical societies: maps, newspapers, photographs, pamphlets, ephemera, and of course, manuscripts. Beyond the many Nevada-related materials that Wier collected for the Society, she also accepted, like other historical societies, materials that were not directly relevant to the state’s history, gifts from donors who felt that any type of historical object would have a fitting home in the Society’s museum. Such donations only added to the already overcrowded museums of many historical societies in the early twentieth century. A description of the Washington State Historical Society’s museum as having “the look of a crowded curio shop” could have easily applied to the galleries of the Nevada Historical Society’s museum in the 1910s-1920s.

In addition to collecting similar types of material, the histories of other western historical societies reveal that Nevada was not alone in experiencing financial struggles, indifferent members, and citizens that were not always appreciative of efforts to collect and document their history. A passage from the history of the Washington State Historical Society provides insight

33 Ibid.
into the universality of the struggles that any organization faced in documenting its regional history, and the significance of personal dedication on the part of its leaders:

How the Society fared over the years can be attributed to a large extent, if not entirely, to the abilities of the director. Every one of them had to carry a burden of limits. Staff too few, building too small, budget too meager. But to a man they persisted, did not become discouraged, worked for small pay and reveled in the work of history to which they were dedicated.35

In fact, the Washington State Historical Society, upon becoming a state institution in 1903, had its entire legislative appropriation vetoed by the governor the following year.36 The Utah State Historical Society, founded in 1897, struggled along until 1917, when it was finally recognized by the Utah legislature as a state institution, but even then it received only a paltry $200 for its first appropriation at a time when Nevada was receiving $6000 for the biennium.37 In Arizona, similar struggles affected the Arizona Pioneers Historical Society in its early years. Members—when they showed up for meetings—failed to pay their dues with any regularity, and when they finally received state support, the organization’s leaders had to battle for their appropriations at each legislative session just as Weir did in Nevada. During the Depression, the legislature nearly cut off all appropriations for Arizona’s Society, providing only $60 per month for all expenses.38

Wier’s tenure at the Nevada Historical Society was unique because of its length, forty-six years, and because Wier, a woman, had been involved from the very beginning as one of the founders of the organization and in a prominent leadership role. At the Washington State Historical Society (founded in 1891), for instance, there were five male directors during the first forty-six years of its existence. The longest tenure of any director was thirty-one years, and this

35 Ibid., 89.
36 Ibid., 24.
38 Sonnichsen, *Pioneer Heritage*, 56, 80,100 passim.
man, William P. Bonney, could hardly be considered to be as active as Wier. These men also lacked Wier’s professional teaching and history backgrounds—there were two newspaper men, one lawyer, a successful merchant, and one professional artist/teacher—they very much typified the genteel amateurs who had founded so many historical societies in the East. These men also received salaries, however meager, whereas Wier worked for years without compensation beyond reimbursements for her activities on behalf of the Society.

While her role as one of the founders of a historical society, and the length of her tenure may have been unique, she was not the only woman to have played a substantial role in a western historical society in the twentieth century, although she was most certainly the earliest, if only by a few months in one case. In Idaho, the Pioneer Historical Society had struggled since its initial founding in 1881, but with its reorganization in September 1904, women were invited to play a greater role in the Society, and Leona Cartee was elected secretary. She took on the initial task of revitalizing the organization, planning a reunion for the pioneers, and storing donated artifacts in her own home before it was granted a room in Boise’s Carnegie Library. Cartee was also instrumental in inviting Idaho’s governor to visit and see the state of the collections, an event that prompted him to make the Society a state agency in 1907, at which time her tenure as Secretary ended, and she was appointed to the organization’s Board of Trustees by the governor. Two men were then elected as president and curator/librarian of the Society.

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39 In Window to the Past, the history of the Washington State Historical Society, McClelland writes of Bonney’s tenure from 1914-1945: “These were the Society’s middle years and a time when there were no great accomplishments or changes. With Bonney at the helm the Society simply carried on.” McClelland, Window to the Past, 95.

40 Ibid., 89-95 passim.

Arizona’s historical society, originally founded as the Society of Arizona Pioneers, did not even admit women at its founding in 1884. An auxiliary society for women pioneers was later added, but did not have a large role in the organization. By 1897, the fledgling organization had been reformed as the Arizona Pioneers Historical Society, and given a stipend by the territorial legislature. It struggled along until 1925, when Edith Kitt, who had cut her teeth in public service as president of both the Tucson Woman’s Club and the Arizona Federation of Women’s Clubs, took over as secretary. Born in 1878, she was roughly of the same generation as Wier, but her work for the Arizona Pioneers Historical Society began nearly a generation later, with Kitt having spent many years as a housewife and mother prior to her election as secretary.42

Beyond this difference, the similarities to Wier were striking. Like Wier she had originally graduated from a normal school (hers was in Los Angeles, rather than Iowa, and is now the University of California, Los Angeles) and gone on to a career in teaching, later earning a bachelor’s degree in English from the University of Arizona. Her career as secretary of the Arizona Pioneers Historical Society stretched into four decades, just as Wier’s had, even if it was shorter by a few years, ending in 1964. Like Wier, she was keen to interview the state’s pioneers and collect their mementos, and frequently traveled throughout the state to obtain collections. She also experienced the disappointment of losing valuable Arizona collections to more established institutions in California.43 While Kitt lacked Wier’s professional training as a historian, she also recognized the need for professional standards with regard to the cataloging and indexing of their materials, and spent much time visiting other libraries and museums to gain

42 Sonnichsen, Pioneer Heritage, 5-7, 47-49, 57-58, 86-87 passim.

43 In Kitt’s case, it was the Southwest Museum in Pasadena, as opposed to the Bancroft or the Huntington, as it was with many of the collections from the Nevada Historical Society.
an understanding of their methods in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The Bancroft Library was a favorite haunt for this purpose in the summer as it had been for Wier. Perhaps Kitt’s greatest similarity to Wier was in her fierce devotion to the library side of the operations with the books and manuscripts described as “her first love.” An anecdote from *Pioneer Heritage*, the history of the Arizona Historical Society, noted that Kitt once chastised a museum curator, demanding, “Why don’t your put your energies into the library and archives? That’s what we are here for. The museum is just window dressing.” It was a sentiment that Wier would have heartily agreed with.

Marguerite Sinclair began her work in the 1930s at the Utah State Historical Society nearly two generations removed from Wier. Although she played a smaller role as secretary-manager in her support of the work of the Society’s professional scholars, she demonstrated the same sort of boundless energy and dedication that Wier brought to Nevada. With her glamorous looks and persona, she was far removed from the serious, schoolmarmish Wier, but both women showed a willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty for their respective societies. One can hear echoes of Wier in this description of Sinclair working “at her desk until late at night, putting together a new issue of the *Quarterly* or answering letters requesting historical information.” Unlike Wier, however, she had no formal training in history, but with regard to the Society’s library, she had a similar desire to utilize proper techniques, and spent time visiting libraries in the East to study cataloging and filing, and learn about the Dewey Decimal System. Sinclair, like Wier, also worked hard to solicit funding from the legislature, and became an effective lobbyist for the Society even if her tactics were somewhat unorthodox, and far removed

from anything the dignified Wier would attempt. Although Sinclair worked alongside two men at the time of her tenure at the Utah State Historical Society, a history of the organization’s first one hundred years declared that it was Sinclair who “provided the administrative continuity that helped the Society secure a firm place in Utah cultural life.”

One large difference between Wier and her compatriots in Utah and Arizona was that the latter received salaries, while Wier labored on for decades unpaid. Of course, Wier had her regular work at the university to sustain her, but the fact that her work for the Society was on exactly the same level as the work of Kitt and Sinclair, makes the lack of salary all the more striking. It is difficult to sort out whether the lack of salary was the result of Wier’s willingness to perform the work unsalaried, for fear that the state might provide less of a total stipend to the Society as an organization, or the state’s feeling that Wier already received a salary for her work at the University. What is clear is that Wier’s work for the Society, uncompensated, allowed the state of Nevada to save literally tens of thousands of dollars at her expense, even as it gave the legislature a distorted picture of the money needed to successfully operate a cultural heritage institution.

46 Sinclair was described as a “talented singer who sometimes entertained state legislators while soliciting appropriations for the Society” and who also “sang at annual meetings and on radio shows advertising the Society’s programs.” Topping, “One Hundred Years,” 229.

47 Ibid., 230.

48 In the 1930s, Sinclair demanded a salary of $120 per month. Topping, “One Hundred Years,” 231. In her report to the membership of the Arizona Pioneers Historical Society, dated, December 30, 1929, it was noted that Kitt’s salary had been raised to $125 per month. Sonnichsen, Pioneer Heritage, 98. Cartee was most likely unpaid as both secretary and trustee in Idaho.

49 In their report to the Governor in the Tenth Biennial Report (1925-1926), the Society’s President and Board of Trustees attempted to calculate a comparable figure for the amount of money that Wier might have earned had she been paid a salary. They suggested the work that Wier had freely given as executive officer for the preceding twenty-three years might total $92,000, and if the clerical and menial labor she had also performed were added on, $100,000 would not be “too large an estimate of the total savings thus made to the State.” Tenth Biennial Report, 1925-1926, 8.
**Limits and Challenges for Wier’s Work for the Society**

Throughout her tenure at the Society, Wier emphasized in her official reports, and in her two major manifestos on collecting, the difficulties she encountered in documenting the history of Nevada. Beyond an unresponsive state government, a dearth of funding, and a largely disinterested populace, she pointed to overarching issues that were characteristic of the western region of the United States, and even more extreme in Nevada: fewer materials to collect because of the relative youth of the state and the “migratory habits” of a population that focused on mining. Physically there were vast distances to travel for collecting purposes as compared to the compactness of many Eastern states, and materials were scattered around the state. Fire often destroyed mining camps, which were often abandoned when their ores dried up, and in some camps records were left behind. She described such camps as places where a “general spirit of gain so overshadows the life of the community that its real history is seldom written or preserved.” Such transient and often scattered populations undoubtedly had an effect on state revenues and the development of public institutions. Unlike in the East, many of Nevada’s most successful pioneers had left the state with their wealth, and there were thus no large private endowments as in the East, and the state itself did not provide the same type of support as those societies in the Midwest enjoyed.50 On more than one occasion Wier had suggested that the Society’s work would not be appreciated for another fifty years.

The state’s perceived disinterest in supporting historical work led to other challenges for the Society. During Wier’s tenure and afterward, significant collections of Nevada manuscript materials left the state and ended up in the libraries of other repositories. Three institutions in particular were the beneficiaries: Bancroft, Huntington, and Yale. In some cases, this dispersal

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was unavoidable because so many persons who had played important roles in early Nevada history had moved elsewhere after making their fortunes, particularly to California. However, Wier had warned the governor and legislators repeatedly about this possibility in her biennial reports, noting that they would continue to suffer these losses if the state failed to properly fund and outfit the Society. Losing Nevada’s historical documents and artifacts to other states grieved her terribly, and the fact that even more material was not lost to other libraries and private collectors was due to Wier’s constant dedication and vigilance via her field work, and perhaps even more so by the thousands of donations she encouraged and inspired through her prolific correspondence.

Beyond the physical challenges of collecting for the Society, it is obvious that Wier’s own personal struggles affected her work. Attempts to balance her career at the University, caretaking for her elderly parents and dependent siblings, and the multi-pronged nature of her duties for the Society often resulted in illness and exhaustion. Her professional correspondence is filled with references to these illnesses, her personal exhaustion, and accounts of working long into the night and on weekends on both her university duties and her work for the Society. The press of these responsibilities often prevented her from functioning efficiently as the Society’s secretary, and letter after letter began with an apology for the “delay in replying” and blamed the delay on the “crush of work.” Other correspondence expressed her despondency at the state’s general indifference to historical work, and when she was at her lowest ebb, her desire to leave the work altogether. Incoming letters from concerned friends and colleagues frequently remarked on her workload, and expressed hope that she would find time to rest. Yet for Wier there seemed to be an almost pathological desire to remain busy as she wrote in this letter to a donor: “I am so very busy that my life at present seems like one long nightmare. Yet I find
enjoyment in being busy as I know you do also.”

It was an “affliction” that would stay with her throughout her life, even when the Society’s collection were removed from her care, and even after her retirement, when she took on increased work for the Society, as well as the club activities she had never had time for during her working life. Wier’s ability to persevere in the face of her double workload, and her seeming inability to “stop” her work for the Society, was probably one of the determining factors in its survival during the years of financial struggle and state indifference.

**Final Thoughts on Jeanne Wier, Her Legacy, and the Nevada Historical Society**

Although the Nevada Historical Society is now over a century old, and Wier has been gone for over half that time, her presence can still be felt in the Society’s building, where a large portrait of her and a plaque honoring her work adorn its entryway. A portion of the collections she gathered so diligently over forty-six years are on display in its galleries to the left, and just down the hallway in the library’s reading room, patrons regularly consult books and manuscripts for research on Nevada history, using many of the collections she personally gathered during her journeys throughout the state. Obviously much additional material has been added to the collections since Wier’s death, and the Society as an organization has also evolved, but there can be no doubt that the Society as an institution is indeed Wier’s greatest legacy to her adopted state. There were missteps along the way, to be sure, and she could be accused of prickliness and a sense of self-importance about her work that may have offended some. Yet it was Wier’s...

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52 Wier’s life and work ethic seems to follow the pattern of the librarians profiled in Passat’s study of early twentieth century women librarians in the American West. In it she describes how such women, among the first generation of progressives born during the twenty-year period beginning in 1854, were raised in an environment that emphasized strict Protestant moral values and education. As a result, they often “sought careers that provided an outlet for the service that would satisfy their ‘demanding consciences.’” Passat, *Cultural Crusaders*, 17-18.
determination alone that ensured the collection and preservation of thousands of papers, records, maps, newspapers, personal stories, and artifacts documenting Nevada’s early history. Although the cataloging, organization, and display of these materials was imperfect at times, it was indeed to Wier’s credit that she made every effort to bring a sense of professionalism to this work, recognizing the need for standards and appropriately trained personnel. Had she not been performing two full-time jobs simultaneously, it’s likely that Wier could have made more progress in her work for the Society. Had the state of Nevada deemed the work important enough to fund a salary for her position, or to provide more support for overall staffing, travel, publications, and a proper building, undoubtedly the Society could have advanced more under her direction.

Wier’s education at Stanford had inspired her to think about the larger guiding purpose of both the nature of history and historical research. She in turn used these in her teaching, but perhaps even more so as principles to guide her in defining the Society’s mission as an important tool to shape the historical consciousness of Nevada’s residents in order to make them better citizens. In a state that was barely forty years old at the time of the Society’s founding, it was perhaps an understandable and laudable goal to foster civic pride. These lofty motives notwithstanding, it appears that Wier eventually grew to understand that such a mission might be beyond the understanding of many, and that appealing to a simple desire to preserve the stories and artifacts of the state’s pioneers might be a more effective tactic to inspire the general public’s interest and engagement with the state’s history. In some respects, however, the preservation of the state’s history was almost secondary to her larger goal of creating a vast store of primary documents that would allow future historians to pursue original research on Nevada’s history, and thereby define its role in the wider national context of America’s growth and development.
Although this study focuses on the history of a particular type of cultural heritage institution—a historical society—it serves as one of only a handful of such studies representing such institutions as they developed in the West and thus illustrates some of the typical challenges they have faced in this region as well as similarities and differences with Societies in other parts of the country. On another level, Wier’s experiences leading the Society appear little different from the struggles faced by other leaders, primarily male, of historical societies in their formative years. This examination of Wier’s career at the Nevada Historical Society also adds to the small number of histories focusing on the lives of professional women in early Nevada. It provides an illustration of how Nevada, as a western state, provided opportunities for women a generation earlier than they would come to women in other regions of the country.

If there is a practical lesson to be learned from the story of Wier’s struggles in establishing Nevada’s first cultural heritage institution, it is the need for constant vigilance on the part of librarians and archivists to make sure that their work is recognized and valued by the state’s leaders for the very important purpose it serves in making its history accessible to both the general public and scholars. Over her forty-six years at the helm of the Society, Wier learned never to let down her guard or take for granted the amount of lobbying and outreach that it would require on her part to earn the support of both the legislature and the governor, and to receive the Society’s appropriation for each biennium. It also illustrates the significant impact that a committed leader can have on the development of an institution.

As the first cultural heritage institution in Nevada, and the first de facto archive for the public records of the state of Nevada, the Society should hold an honored place among the state’s historical repositories. Unfortunately, the story of struggle is all too familiar to the guardians of Nevada’s history today. Since 2007, the Society has lacked a full-time director and continued to
lose staff. Without a full-time director to advocate for the Society, it has faced repeated funding challenges that have left it behind many of the other cultural heritage repositories and archives in the state. Nevada’s funding shortfalls in 2011 nearly paralyzed the Society, and only a special arrangement that dissolved the Department of Cultural Affairs and merged the Division of Museums and History (the Society’s administrative parent) into the Nevada Commission on Tourism,53 as well as a reduction of staff working hours, kept the doors open in the end. Perhaps even more worrisome is the fact that the original proposal from the Department of Cultural Affairs had slated the Society for closure along with three other museums. In this regard, it appears that Wier’s words, from nearly a century ago, were more prophetic than she realized:

Yet while historic consciousness is evolving in this State, we seek to be patient in waiting for the coming of the financial assistance which is essential to final achievement. 54

54 Sixth Biennial Report, 1917-1918, 11.
## APPENDIX

### CHRONOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>Comstock Lode discovery of major silver and gold ores in northern Nevada</td>
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<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>Nevada territory established</td>
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<td>1864</td>
<td>Nevada becomes a state</td>
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<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>City of Reno founded</td>
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<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>Jeanne Wier (JW) born in Grinnell Iowa</td>
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<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>Society of Pacific Coast Pioneers founded in Virginia City to preserve early history of Nevada</td>
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<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>University of Nevada established by legislature</td>
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<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Building housing collections of Society of Pacific Coast Pioneers destroyed by fire</td>
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<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>JW graduates from Iowa State Teacher’s College (now University of Northern Iowa) with a Bachelor of Didactics</td>
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<tr>
<td>1893-95</td>
<td>JW spends two years as assistant principal of Heppner High School (Heppner, Oregon) after taking over this position from her sister Eva Wier who leaves to attend the University of Michigan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>JW enrolls at Stanford University and studies history under Professor George Elliott Howard</td>
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<td>1897</td>
<td>JW begins field studies of Washoe Indians in northern Nevada for her history thesis</td>
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<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Recruited by her Stanford classmate, Anne Martin, JW joins University of Nevada faculty as assistant professor of history</td>
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<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Nevada population stands at 42,335 with Reno population at 4,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>JW completes work for her degree at Stanford University and graduates with A.B. after completing thesis entitled “The Washoe Indians”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Gold ore found near site in central Nevada (later Goldfield) and greatest mining boom since Comstock Lode discovery begins in Nevada</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1904  May 31: Nevada Historical Society holds first meeting in Morrill Hall on University of Nevada campus, and JW is elected to the post of secretary

First public library established in Reno

1904  City of Las Vegas founded

1905  March: NHS is incorporated by state legislature and is now eligible for state aid

JW becomes head of University of Nevada history department

1907  First Biennial Report of the NHS published (1907-08)

1908  July: JW goes on collecting trip in central and southern Nevada and keeps detailed diary of this trip to Tonopah, Goldfield, Las Vegas and the Moapa Valley. Visits the office of Senator William M. Stewart in Tonopah who agrees to donate his papers to the NHS

1909  Funds for first NHS building denied by Governor’s veto

1910  JW gives lecture, “The Work of the Western State Historical Society as Illustrated by Nevada” at the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association Meeting

Nevada population stands at 81,875 with Reno population at 10,867

State law prohibiting gambling goes into effect

1911  JW calls first women’s suffrage meeting in Nevada

March 4: new bill introduced to provide for a temporary structure for the NHS and appropriating $5000 – it passes both houses and is approved by Nevada’s governor on March 28

June: JW travels through Mason, Smith and Caron Valleys on collecting trips to remote areas rarely visited and acquires a considerable amount of material

July: NHS joins in celebration of Pioneer Days

December: JW makes trip to Lovelock to visit the guano cave containing remnants of a pre-historic Indian settlement in hopes of collecting artifacts for the museum

1912  First proper building for NHS erected

University of California history professor Herbert Bolton gives lecture, “The Obligation of Nevada toward the Writing of Her Own History” at NHS annual meeting in May.
1914  July 2: NHS plays large role in celebrating the semi-centennial of Nevada’s statement by organizing an elaborate history pageant

Oct 30: As a result of the semi-centennial celebration, the Society of Nevada Pioneers is organized as an auxiliary of the NHS

1914  **Women’s suffrage passed in Nevada**

1915-16  JW serves as vice-president of Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Society

1916  Professional library cataloger employed to work on organizing the NHS library collections for the first time

JW advocates for state law providing for the proper care and custody of the state’s public records (including state, county, town and court records)

1917  NHS is affected by US entry into World War I: difficulty in pursuing field work due to transportation and travel problems and JW greatly concerned with collecting information and documents relating to the war effort in the Nevada

1918  Flu epidemic affects NHS and JW requests that general public not visit the museum except by special arrangement

1919  JW commissioned by Nevada State Legislature to write a wartime history of the state

1920  **Nevada Population stands at 77,407 and Reno population at 12, 016**

JW does field work throughout the summer of 1920

JW argues again for an “archiving law” to bring state and local public documents together in one place and advocates for interviewing few remaining Nevada pioneers

1921  Outreach becomes part of the Society’s work as both JW and curator work on special exhibits and lectures for the community locally and statewide

1922  Charles F. Cutts is named as curator of NHS

JW requests monies for historical research and publication as she regards it as one of the most important activities of the NHS
Feb: NHS incorporates according to the laws of Nevada under the name “Nevada State Historical Society” with a governing Board of Trustees and for purposes of superseding the earlier unincorporated NHS.

JW and Curator Cutts conduct Teacher’s Institutes and give lectures at various service clubs in Reno on behalf of the NSHS

JW receives honorary doctorate from University of Nevada – LL.D

JW reiterates the Society’s desperate need for a larger, fireproof structure

Focus on making library collections accessible for historical investigation – catalog of books made available for the first time.

JW does field work in Panaca district in southern Nevada and gathers materials documenting that area

Collections removed from NSHS and control given to the State for use in Transcontinental Highways Exposition held in Reno

JW address, “Experiences of a Western State Historical Society during the Last Quarter Century” given at the Pacific Coast Branch meeting of the American Historical Association

NSHS is essentially decimated with no ability to collect or publish material but JW still attempts to answer queries even with no access to the library

In Biennial Report of 1927-28, JW asks the legislature of 1929 to restore the NSHS to its former state

Nevada population stands at 91,058 with Reno population at 18,529

NSHS materials are transferred, unsupervised and unorganized, to the basement of the Washoe County Library Building

Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) gains permission to clean and reorganize the NSHS Library in the Washoe County Library Building

JW spends her summer break supervising FERA workers in revamping the museum and library and finds that a number of materials (both artifacts and library) have been lost and stolen such as the whole of the Indian basketry collection

Collections not open to public but the library materials are used extensively by the WPA Writer’s Project
JW continues to plan for getting more space in the current building

1936  JW begins work on supervising the WPA Historical Records Survey project in Nevada

1940  **Nevada population stands at 110,247 with Reno population at 21,317**
      JW retires from University of Nevada

1941  **US enters WWII**
      WPA assistance continues at NHS until 1942
      Two recent University of Nevada history graduate students are employed to serve as assistants to JW

1940-42  JW travels in the period btw 1940-42 to San Francisco and Los Angeles to search for library items and a trained library cataloger as there are no trained librarians in Nevada at this time
      JW covers most of the state in several automobile trips during the summer – revamping county history committees and collecting historical materials

1943  Field work in Nevada curtailed due to wartime conditions
      JW attempts to make the NSHS Museum a welcome place for visiting servicemen

1945  As World War II ends efforts to collect state historical materials relating to the war effort are conducted at the county level as JW cannot carry on fieldwork because of war and domestic problems
      Proposed *Quarterly of Nevada History* is delayed by lack of editorial assistance

1946  JW makes trips to the Wisconsin and Minnesota Historical Societies for help and advice regarding the NSHS

1947  JW honored for her work at the NSHS by Nevada’s Native Daughters at celebratory banquet

1950  **Nevada population stands at 160,083 with Reno population at 32,49**
      JW dies of cancer in Reno on April 13, 1950


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