

## Looking back sixty years

The autumn of 1948 was an exotic time for one freshman from Pioche, recently graduated from the Lincoln County High School. He came to the big city of Reno (population about 30,000) with keen anticipation.



Jim Hulse

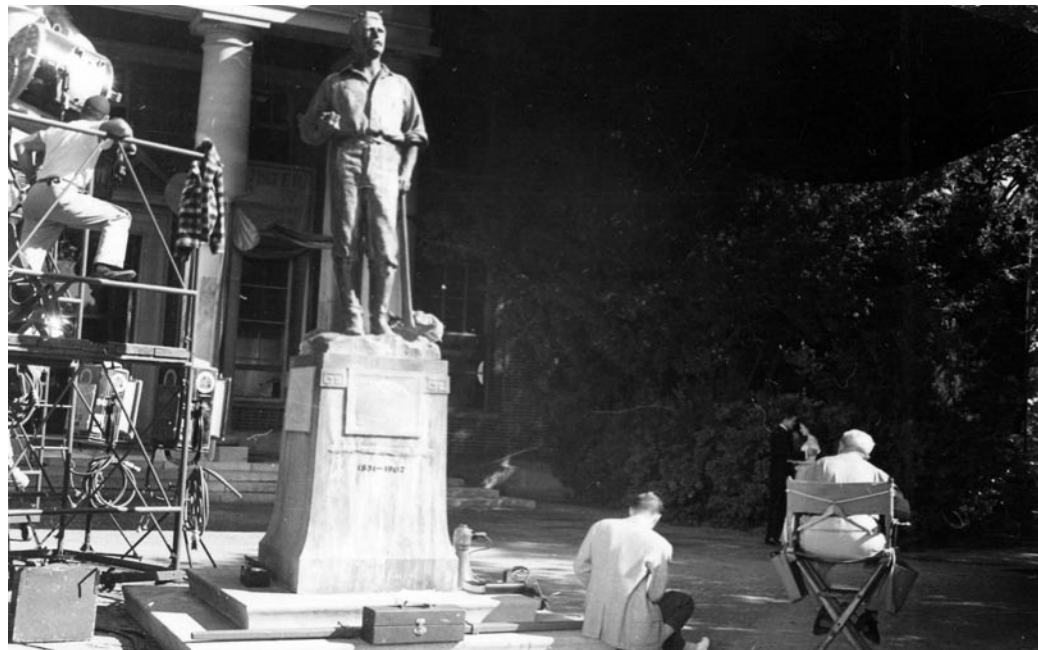
Our class was greeted with a welcome called “Hello on the Hill,” a dazzling sequence of orientations and invitations from deans and social groups.

In those days, it was a privilege, not a normal expectation, for a young man to go to college. It was assumed that young women could do so, but career opportunities were very limited. The process was expensive—the anticipated cost was about \$1,000 per year. Fortunately the student from Pioche had a generous scholarship that covered most expenses. Even in “The Biggest Little City in the World,” a frugal student could get by on about \$100 per month.

Lincoln Hall, built in the 1890s, was the most economical place to live for a freshman. But it was crowded as never before. Veterans from World War II had returned in droves, using their GI Bill benefits that a grateful and generous government had provided in appreciation of their services.

The boy from Pioche found himself in a third-floor room (intended for two men) with two seasoned veterans of the recent war. Wonderful young men, recently returned from the work of the Greatest Generation, they were ready for a good time as they studied. The newcomer studied and heard vicariously about his roommates’ experiences.

In 1948-49, there was one place to eat on the campus. It was known formally as the Manzanita Dining Hall, which had been there



*Filming Mother is a Freshman with Loretta Young, 1948. This photo was taken by Jay Carpenter, then professor of mining engineering.*

for generations. There was always one menu, served from behind a counter, by a woman and a chef, who saw that we all got fair shares. We were probably still in the shadows of the Great Depression and the Great War. The quantity of food was generous enough, but not like mother’s. We called it the Gow House, which did not please Nellie, the manager.

We went to classes in Morrill Hall (philosophy), Stewart Hall (political science), and in the army surplus Quonset huts down in the hollow where Scrugham Engineering now stands. That was the English Department’s turf. Freshmen crowded into those khaki-colored, metal barracks to hear some of the finest lectures ever given on the wonders of literature and language. (And the professors did not even have PowerPoint or recordings or DVDs.)

Faculty offices were usually at a desk in the classrooms, often tiny monk-cells, but sometimes in the older buildings with rotating bookcases that would hold esoteric volumes. Two of these can still be seen in the Prupas Family Study in Morrill Hall.

There were other places of wonder on the campus. The Clark Library—a three-minute walk from Lincoln Hall—had an amazing reading room endowed with high windows and well-stocked bookshelves. The portraits

of past presidents of the University graced the walls, hanging between the windows like the images of saints in a cathedral. (These portraits now reside in the Walter Van Tilburg Clark room in Morrill Hall, a smaller but more intimate venue.)

In that reading room, one could find volumes that demanded hours of concentration. There was no way to Google or Yahoo the subject you wanted. In those dark ages before laptops or internet or photocopy machines or downloads or whatever, it was pencil-on-paper when a good idea appeared in some book. But our essays still got written.

The president’s home was on the campus, located near Morrill Hall at about the point of the western entrance to the Sara Hamilton Fleischmann Building. President John O. Mosley, a distinguished-looking southern gentleman with a gracious wife, had some freshmen in for afternoon tea, a few at a time. It was not completely comfortable on our part, but it was a good learning experience.

Then there was Friday night. We could relax. If you wanted a date with a girl in Manzanita or Artemisia Halls, you had to call well in advance, and think of a place to have a Coke and sandwich. Few of us had cars, so it had to be within walking distance. But all the movie



University of Nevada, Reno football staff; Dick Evans; Coach Joe Sheeketski; Jake Lawlor. RIGHT: Quonset hut being moved.

houses were nearby downtown. And there was a strict rule that she had to be back in her dorm by 10 p.m., or both of you were in BIG TROUBLE.

On Sunday, the Gow House was closed because Nellie needed a night off. On those evenings a covey of freshmen and sophomores would trek downtown to the Wine House on Commercial Row, a charming old eatery near the railroad station managed by the Francovich family. It was possible to have a beer, and nobody knew. We never invited the girls there, at least as far as I knew.

Sometime in that era, I don't remember exactly when, Hollywood sent a couple of movie crews to the campus to film movies about what the idyllic campus life was like in rural America. Some students made a few bucks as extras in films.

In that time of blessed memory, television had not yet reached Reno. It first became available here in about 1952.

There was football! Nevada was already building a formidable national reputation when the 1948 freshmen arrived. The Wolf Pack anticipated an invitation to a bowl game because its passing team was one of the best in the nation. Coach Joe Sheeketski was a hero in Reno. Boosters pledged much money to pay room and board expenses of the team on the campus.

Then, partway through the season, disaster struck. The Nevada eleven lost a game to St. Mary's they were supposed to win, presumably because a fierce windstorm ruined the Pack's passing game. Rumors spread in the national

press that the Reno team had been tainted by gamblers' money, and the boosters subsequently failed to honor their pledge of support money for the team.

The president and controller were also fired late in the year in the midst of a scrap in the legislature in Carson City. It was an eventful year in terms of University politics, but most of these events passed over the heads of us students, who were preoccupied with other things. Turmoil in academia is like a passing thunderstorm, getting little attention from the youngsters who are well sheltered, but roiling the faculty and much of the public.

On the lighter side, we had the Wolves Frolic. This was a lively variety show, produced with student talent, usually on the stage of the State Building in downtown Reno. (The University campus did not have an auditorium capable of handling such overflow crowds.) The acts were noisy and naughty, but they gave only the faintest suggestion of what was to be offered ahead on the stages of Nevada and the nation. Those of us who were 18 years old 60 years ago were still in the age of innocence, as far as I know. Somehow we survived those quaint times. We must have done some studying, because most of us became sophomores in 1949-50.

We have focused here on a couple of semesters in the 120-year lifespan of Nevada's first institution of higher learning. Located first in Elko in 1874, the University Preparatory School moved to Reno in 1886, beginning its collegiate work a year or so later. If we look backward from the autumn of 2008 to 1888,

we might reflect that 1948-49 was the halfway point in our institutional history, so far.

The freshmen of 1948 did not know it, but they were being launched not only into new careers but also into a new half-century of the American experience. Before we graduated, our country was deeply involved in a Cold War that had turned hot in Korea. Nuclear testing had begun in Nevada and was expanding elsewhere. New racial tensions and a long-overdue civil rights movement were underway. A technological revolution of unprecedented dimensions was ahead of us. We approached the future with optimism and most of us prospered.

Cheers and good luck to the incoming students in the fall of 2008. **N**

*Jim Hulse, native Nevadan and emeritus professor of history, is internationally renowned for his outstanding teaching and wide-ranging intellectual pursuits. He earned a bachelor's in journalism in 1952 and a master's in history in 1958, both from Nevada. From 1954 through 1958, he worked for the Nevada State Journal, leaving to attend Stanford University, where he earned a doctorate in history in 1962. He returned to Nevada, beginning as an assistant professor of history, and ultimately being promoted to full professor. The Board of Regents named him the University's Outstanding Faculty Member in 1993. In 1997, he retired following 35 years of service. Hulse is the past holder of the Grace Griffen Chair in history. He has authored six books.*