

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



929

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

1. Name of Property

historic name Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot

other names/site number Amtrak Station, Downtown Reno Train Station

2. Location

street & number 280 Commercial Row

N/A

not for publication

city or town Reno

N/A

vicinity

state Nevada code NV county Washoe code 031 zip code 89501

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

☐ national ☐ statewide ☒ local

Ronald M. Jones, SHPO 9-24-2012
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

☒ entered in the National Register

☐ determined eligible for the National Register

☐ determined not eligible for the National Register

☐ removed from the National Register

☐ other (explain):

for Edison H. Beall 11.14.12
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply.)

☐ private
☒ public - Local
☐ public - State
☐ public - Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box.)

☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

TRANSPORTATION/ Rail-related

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

TRANSPORTATION/ Rail-related

WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19th & 20th CENTURY

REVIVALS/Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival

(Mediterranean Revival)

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE

walls: BRICK, CONCRETE

STUCCO

roof: CLAY TILE

other: _____

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Southern Pacific Railroad Depot in Reno, Nevada, is located in the downtown area at the intersection of Commercial Row and Lake Street. Completed in 1926, the Mediterranean Revival style depot was constructed by Ryberg-Sorenson, Inc., a constructing firm based in Salt Lake City, Utah was given plans by Southern Pacific architects. It is the fifth depot to stand on the site primarily because of fires in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The single-story, rectangular building occupies a space of 6,400 square feet along Commercial Row, the street running parallel to the tracks. Primary decorative features include: semi-circular arch-shaped openings, a red tile roof, a stucco exterior finish, and swag or garland motifs set within recessed panels. The building served the Southern Pacific freight and passenger lines as well as the Virginia & Truckee Railroad line and currently serves the Amtrak train network. Today, the building is in great structural condition, despite showing signs of normal age-related deterioration. The depot has retained much of all seven aspects of architectural integrity since its construction in 1926.

Narrative Description

Exterior

The Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot (the Depot) is a brick and reinforced concrete, single floor building located in the downtown area at the intersection of Commercial Row and Lake Street, the center of the original platted town of Reno. It is the fifth reincarnation of the Depot building constructed on the site primarily due to fires. With plans provided by Southern Pacific architects, contractors Ryberg & Sorenson of Salt Lake City built the current Mediterranean Revival architectural-style Depot in 1926. The original decorative features, including the exterior light fixtures, remain intact.

The rectangular, stucco-finish brick building occupies a space of 254 feet by 35 feet and contains approximately 6,400 square feet. It is divided into 3 sections: a tall section in the center and two wings parallel on each side. The northern and southern facades of the Depot are virtually identical with the exception of a 30-foot long veranda that extends out 10 feet over the middle three bays on the northern side, where the tracks are located.

The tall, central portion of the Depot is divided into five, large semicircular bays on both the northern and southern sides. The middle three bays contain double doors with windows above, and the outer two bays are solely windows. The gable pediments on the eastern and western sides of the roof each have three arch-shaped windows, with the central window being larger. The gable roof showcases a stepped, gable parapet and molded cornices.

The two flanked wings are divided into inner and outer exterior sections. The inner portions each contain three bays with two-over-one, rectangular windows. Above each window are recessed rectangular motifs embellished with swagged garlands. This inner section is topped with a hipped, red tile, flat roof. The outer sections of the flanked wings are approximately double the width of the inner sections and exhibit three pairs of arched-shaped bays: the center bay pairs contain doors with windows above them and the outer bay pairs are solely windows. The roof of the outer section of each wing is flat with a parapet decorated with recessed, checkered, rectangular panels bordering the northern and southern sides.

Attached to the west end of the historic railroad depot is the current Reno Amtrak station. The construction of the Amtrak addition was part of the ReTRAC project that lowered the Union Pacific Railroad tracks through downtown for safety reasons. The addition consists of a seemingly-single story building when viewed from Commercial Row, but has doors leading into the waiting room at track level, a story below, on its northern side. The Amtrak station attaches to the depot at its western end. The transitional space that connects the two buildings was originally the baggage agent's office. The arched shape and style of the windows and doors, the stucco exterior finish, and the clay tile roof in the new addition were designed to be complementary to but distinguishable from the historic depot.

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Interior

With the exception of the additional on the western end of the structure, the tall, central portion of the Depot is the waiting room. The ceiling is 24 feet high and decorated with molded and stenciled open timber. The cornice is also decorated with open timber. Four large, ornamented, dish-shaped light fixtures hang from the ceiling and are original to the building. The walls of this waiting room are finished in plaster with wooden trim. Decorated on the interior wall's surface are recessed panels above the doorways with swagged garland in a contrasting color. The furniture consists of four long, wooden benches with individual armrests on each side.

The eastern wing contains the ticket counter and offices. A long counter with a large, arched-opening faces the waiting room. Double doors leading into the offices are found on both sides of the counter. The western wing has a large opening leading into a hallway flanked with a set of double-doors on each side. Public restrooms and baggage handling areas are located in the western wing.

The interior of the Amtrak station, the noncontributing portion of the building, has little ornamentation. The structure contains a ticket counter on the main floor and a waiting room at track level. There are two ways in which visitors can access the waiting room from the main floor: an elevator on the southern side of the building and a stairway on the western end.

Integrity

The Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot has not been significantly altered since 1926 allowing it to retain a high degree of all seven aspects of integrity. More specifically, the Depot possesses integrity of location, setting, and feeling, representing the influence the railroad had in founding the city of Reno in 1868. Additionally, the small stature of the Depot in relation it has to its surroundings (a giant 80-lane bowling stadium north of the Depot and an equally large parking garage and casino to its south) conveys a presence of a bygone era when buildings were still functional as single-stories in the city's downtown area.

Although the Depot itself has not undergone major alterations, an adjacent structure was connected on the depot's western end and is considered a noncontributing element in this nomination. Beginning in 1999, the Union Pacific Railroad and the City of Reno undertook a project that would improve the safety of the railroad crossings through town. The project, called ReTRAC, lowered the tracks for a stretch of 2.25 miles to a depth of approximately 34 feet below grade. ReTRAC also called for the construction of a modern Amtrak station that would provide passenger access at the new track level. The project was a federal undertaking and the Section 106 process required the design of the addition to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Transportation

Social history

Other: Tourism

Period of Significance

1926-1954

Significant Dates

1926

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Ryberg-Sorenson, Inc.

Southern Pacific Railroad

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance covers the years between 1926, the year the Depot was completed, and 1954, the year in which Reno's central business core began to shift away from the railroad tracks to adjacent streets made more accessible by automobile.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot, built in 1926, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A because the building is representative of Reno's historical development from its founding as a small railroad stop in 1868 to its status as the destination for thousands of people seeking to take advantage of the state's relaxed divorce and gambling laws throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Reno, like countless cities in the American West, was founded because of the establishment of railroad networks in the nineteenth century. However, Reno's railroad networks did much more than simply inaugurate the town; it fostered the city's unique enterprises that popularized Reno in the following decades. The railroad was the force that not only allowed Reno to benefit economically from transportation and commerce rather than mining (as with other northern Nevada towns) but it also fed the city's lucrative "sinful industries"—divorce and gaming, in particular—and made them prosper as it brought people from all over the country to the city. Essentially, the railroad became Reno's lifeline, promoting commerce by freight and passenger trains, ensuring that Reno would not be dependent on boom and bust industries like most other towns in the state.

While the depot possesses architectural significance as a modest example of a Southern Pacific Railroad building, its primary historical significance is associative and best treated under Criterion A.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

Railroad development in Reno and the West

Reno's "oldest citizen" is the railroad: "It arrived in 1868, and nothing in human constructed urban Reno is older than the railroad tracks."¹ This is not surprising since railroads were the most important single town building force in the American West. Like hundreds of other towns, Reno was deliberately planned by the railroad industry. "Such places as Laramie and Benton, Wyoming; Reno, Nevada... and North Platte, Nebraska—to name but a few examples on the nation's first transcontinental line—were creatures of the railroad," historian John Reps wrote about development in the West. "Its surveyors and engineers established these towns well in advance of agricultural settlement."² Railroad companies such as the Central Pacific—which brought the railroad to Reno in 1868—had departments in charge of planning orderly settlements close to the tracks. The companies were powerful in the late nineteenth century, and many newly-established communities lived or died based on where the companies decided to place their sidings and stations.³

From a geographical perspective, the influence of the nineteenth-century rail industry in Reno is unmistakable. Initially, Reno was not the intended site for Central Pacific's railroad depot; rather, the better established community of Glendale, about two and a half miles east of Reno, was considered the logical location for a junction. However, when Central Pacific surveyors arrived in Nevada to choose the site, Glendale was completely flooded from a rather wet spring and heavy snowmelt.⁴ This stroke of meteorological luck gave rancher and innkeeper Myron C. Lake the opportunity to move quickly and convince railroad officials to build at Lake's Crossing, his property near the Truckee River. Lake deeded Charles Crocker, founder of the Central Pacific Railroad, 40 acres of land in March of 1868. Crocker agreed to build the depot on the lands, and deed back to Lake many lots after the land had been surveyed.⁵ On May, 9, 1868, the Central Pacific sold off 400 town lots carved from land Lake had deeded to the railroad, and settlement of the area began in earnest.⁶

¹ Paul Starrs et al, "Downtown Reno & the Railroad: A Report of the Project on Historical Growth & Development of Downtown Reno, Nevada" (Reno: University of Nevada, Sponsored Projects Office, 1997), 4.

² John W. Reps, *The Forgotten Frontier: Urban Planning in the American West Before 1890* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981), 81.

³ Mary Ringhoff and Edward Stoner, *The River and the Railroad: An Archaeological History of Reno* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2011), 57.

⁴ Ringhoff and Stoner, *The River and the Railroad*, 55-56.

⁵ William D. Rowley, *Reno: Hub of the Washoe County* (Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor Publications, 1984), 19.

⁶ Alicia Barber, *Reno's Big Gamble: Image and Reputation in the Biggest Little City* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 14.

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Reno as Transportation and Commerce Hub

Although the new town quickly began to attract residents in 1868, Reno—as with most of Nevada at that time—was largely unknown to most Americans outside the West. The little information the general public may have known about the state largely concerned the mining industry that blossomed after the discovery of the Comstock Lode in 1859, when thousands of miners rushed to Virginia City and Gold Hill. Therefore, if the public knew anything about Reno in 1868, it was as a gateway to the “Big Bonanza” of the Comstock region more than as a desirable place to live.⁷ Reno’s streets were filled with travelers conducting mining-related business by 1870. The area’s railroad networks expanded just two years later, adding the Virginia & Truckee Railroad, which connected Reno to Virginia City by rail in a little over three hours. Unfortunately, by the late 1870s, the Comstock and surrounding properties went into decline, sending the state into an economic depression for the remainder of the century.⁸

Although Reno was lesser known than the Comstock region in its early years, its proximity to the railroad and its role in regional and national transportation networks allowed it to flourish in the last decades of the nineteenth century. John M. Townley explains: “Indeed, as the rest of Nevada stagnated, the Truckee Meadows prospered and emerged as Nevada’s largest community.”⁹ Reno now looked to other enterprises to set the city apart from the surrounding decline. For example, construction began in late 1880 on the Reno terminus of the Nevada & Oregon Railroad, later known as the Nevada-California-Oregon, which connected the town to the productive mining, cattle, timber, and agricultural districts to the north.¹⁰ As historian William Rowley put it, “In the end those communities that did cast their lots with the railroad survived beyond the glory of the mining metropolis.”¹¹

By the turn of the century, Reno was experiencing a burst of prosperity for various reasons. The city transformed, growing from a population of about 4,500 in 1900 to just under 11,000 by 1910—an increase of approximately 140 percent.¹² The city also benefited from significant changes in railroad policies. In 1906, Renoites were delighted to hear of the passage of Congress’ Hepburn Act, which gave increased powers to the Interstate Commerce Commission, as it offered fairness in railroad rates for local products. Also, the Virginia & Truckee Railroad decided to extend its line south to tap into the dairy trade of the Carson Valley in Minden and Gardnerville, increasing the flow of dairy products through Reno.¹³ While such developments helped Reno’s still emergent economy, the community still sought ways to boost both its profits and image by creating industries that would give people reasons to visit the city itself, not just pass through to points beyond.

The Railroad and Early Town Development

At the turn of the twentieth century, Reno sought ways to profit from the large numbers of people aboard the passenger trains that passed through town. Out of their railroad car windows, incoming travelers saw their first glimpse of Reno: Commercial Row. Running east-west along the south side of the railroad tracks, Commercial Row was Reno’s primary commercial strip, housing hotels, saloons, eateries, retailers, and a theater. With so many crowds passing through, residents felt it was important to put the city’s best foot forward. In 1910, for example, members of the newly-formed Chamber of Commerce set up their own shop along the street as a way to display Nevada’s resources—including mineral samples, fresh fruits and vegetables, jars of preserved produce, and fresh flowers—so visitors could see that Nevada’s products were just as worthy as those from neighboring California.¹⁴ Because Commercial Row comprised many first impressions of Reno, local residents pursued every means possible to draw travelers out of their comfortable berths and into their local businesses.

⁷ Barber, *Reno’s Big Gamble*, 16–17.

⁸ Barber, *Reno’s Big Gamble*, 22.

⁹ John M. Townley, *Tough Little Town on the Truckee: Reno, 1868–1900* (Reno: Great Basin Studies Center, 1983), 126.

¹⁰ Barber, *Reno’s Big Gamble*, 27.

¹¹ Rowley, *Reno: Hub of the Washoe Country*, 19.

¹² Rowley, *Reno: Hub of the Washoe Country*, 19.

¹³ Rowley, *Reno: Hub of the Washoe Country*, 32, 36.

¹⁴ Barber, *Reno’s Big Gamble*, 29.

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Commercial Row was also the site for Reno's rough side as many gaming establishments were also located along the corridor. Although today we think of Nevada and gambling as closely associated, the gaming industry, legal in Nevada since 1869, played a different role at the turn of the century; gambling was considered more of a secondary business for saloons rather than an exciting activity for any tourist visiting Reno. In 1902, there were forty-eight saloons and sixteen licensed gambling games located primarily on Commercial Row. The saloons "offered drinks in busy front rooms and games of chance like poker, craps, and faro in smoke-filled back parlors," earning Commercial Row the nickname, 'Gambler's Row'.¹⁵ Moreover, those who visited Gambler's Row were primarily of the transient population—miners, ranch hands, and railroad crews traveling by train—who "saw Reno in the same light as sailors viewed a port city after many months at sea."¹⁶ These transient men demanded entertainment and indulgence of their gaming vices, and although businesses were content with profiting from their moral laxity, a good percentage of Reno residents were not willing to embrace the sordid activity. After years of failed attempts to outlaw the activity within the city, it was the Nevada State Legislature that passed an anti-gambling bill in 1909, to go into effect the following year.

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Reno's railroad depot was a central focal point of the city. Like many other depots in the American West, Reno's first depot along Commercial Row, erected in May 1868, was a simple, utilitarian wood frame building, characteristic of a common railroad design plan that was meant to be easily recognizable to travelers. However, such a common building did not last. Later that year, the first depot was replaced by the grand Depot Hotel, which featured lodging facilities, a restaurant, and a bar. In June 1876, the proprietor added a second story to the Depot Hotel, then a third story just one month later. Unfortunately, the Depot Hotel was destroyed in an 1879 fire that wreaked havoc in the downtown area. Later that year, the new Depot Hotel was reconstructed in an even more grandiose design, featuring three tower-like cupolas, a wooden balcony-type platform that extended around the hotel and a park with an ornamental fountain on the building's western side.¹⁷ The park in particular, an attempt to enhance the visitor's experience, served as a positive advertisement for Reno, thus making the second Depot Hotel a source of pride for the growing town. But suffering from the same fate as its predecessor, the hotel burned down in May 1889. The Central Pacific Railroad—the owners of the property—decided they would not subsidize another hotel-depot combination as there were at the time a number of competing privately-owned, high-quality hotels in town. Instead, the new depot—the fourth to be erected on the site—was once again a single-story, slate-roofed, brick building without a hotel built in late 1889. In 1899, the Southern Pacific Railroad took ownership of all Central Pacific Railroad property, and along with the change in ownership came renovations to many railroad facilities. The new owners added a number of rooms including bathrooms, a telegraph office, and waiting rooms, between 1899 and 1904.¹⁸

Regardless of such accommodations, Reno residents were expressing the desire for a new, more attractive depot as early as 1910. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Reno had undergone significant transformations that brought national notoriety. With the ban on legalized gambling going into effect in September 1910, many Reno profiteers looked to profit from prizefighting, since most states—including neighboring California—had banned the activity, despite the sport becoming popular nationally. Since its legalization by Nevada in 1897, prizefighting bouts brought thousands to venues throughout the state, most of whom traveled by train.

Just months before the gambling ban was to take effect, Reno hosted "The Fight of the Century," the heavyweight championship between Jack Johnson, an African American fighter, and Jim Jeffries, his white competitor, on the Fourth of July, 1910. Johnson had ascended to the top of the sport by combining raw talent and arrogant swagger and was both widely admired and widely loathed, especially by a prejudiced public resentful of his success.¹⁹ Jim Jeffries had been retired for years but was still considered an undefeated champion; promoters labeled him a "great white hope," expecting him to "reclaim the heavyweight title for white America."²⁰ This widely publicized bout brought roughly twenty thousand to the Reno area from all over the country. Although some traveled by motorcar from surrounding states—after all, driving directions were printed in the *Los Angeles Times*—most travelers came through the Southern Pacific's simple, utilitarian

¹⁵ Barber, *Reno's Big Gamble*, 44.

¹⁶ Rowley, *Reno: Hub of the Washoe Country*, 38.

¹⁷ Ringhoff and Stoner, *The River and the Railroad*, 59-64.

¹⁸ Ringhoff and Stoner, *The River and the Railroad*, 65.

¹⁹ Barber, *Reno's Big Gamble*, 75.

²⁰ Barber, *Reno's Big Gamble*, 75.

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depot.²¹ The community's need for a more sophisticated depot design was influenced by the many travelers coming to the city to participate in Reno's profitable and unique businesses.

The Southern Pacific Railroad later announced plans for a new depot—Reno's fifth and current depot—which was completed in 1926. This depot, an example of the Mediterranean Revival architectural style, instantly became a revered landmark as many postcards and other images of Reno from the 1920s-1930s featured it prominently.²²

Reno and "The Cure"

The popular Johnson-Jeffries prizefighting match in 1910 had been Reno's most successful single tourist draw thus far, but a more permanent one was already developing. Reno's divorce industry, its most profitable business of the early twentieth century, took advantage of Nevada's lax laws. The divorce industry was neither accidental nor deliberate. Rather, the laws were inherited: the state's divorce laws had been in effect since Nevada became a territory in 1861. Ease of residency was intended to allow recent arrivals to vote in territorial (and later, state) elections, for a multitude of political reasons.²³ In other words, the laws simply remained unchanged. "While many other states tightened their divorce law in the late nineteenth century in an attempt to protect the permanency of the family, not so in Nevada," notes William Rowley. "As a result Nevada entered the twentieth century with its nineteenth century divorce laws intact."²⁴ Although Nevada was not the only state to have such unrestrictive laws—Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois laws were also lenient—states in the West attracted future-divorcees in high numbers.

While such laws had been on the books for decades, the impetus for the sudden popularity of Reno's divorce industry was a high-profile case. The divorce of the wealthy U.S. Steel President, William Corey, in 1906 ultimately attracted publicity to Reno and its loose laws. In December 1905, Laura Corey, his wife of twenty-two years, arrived by train in Reno from Pittsburgh. No common passenger, Corey arrived in the private railroad car of steel magnate and close friend, Charles Schwab. As historian Alicia Barber explains, "She did not check into one of Reno's many hotels, but instead leased the furnished home of former *Reno Evening Gazette* publisher Robert Fulton... for six whole months, 'at a very high rent'." It became immediately clear that Laura Corey was taking advantage of the Nevada law that allowed one to gain residency after only six months in the state; as soon as she had lived in Reno for that time, Corey immediately filed for divorce and, in late 1906, left Reno to return to Pennsylvania.²⁵

The Corey divorce brought such notoriety to the area that hundreds of elite East coasters came to Reno by train in pursuit of divorce. Travelers from New York and New Jersey were thought to comprise about 60 percent of the divorce business in the early 1900s.²⁶ Reno's promoters—along with the city's many attorneys—were generally supportive of this new industry, which seemed to make Reno even more appealing to all—travelers, tourists, or people wanting out of their marriages. Barber explains, "This new type of transient, the divorcée, was a much more broadly appealing figure than the miners, sharpers, and denizens of Gambler's Row." Thus, the new group of visitors was even more intriguing than the others. Since they were not clearly distinguishable from the general population, speculation in newspapers of who was and was not there for a divorce decree became a source of national amusement. Beginning in 1913 and continuing into the 1930s, the *New York Times* began publishing the names of prominent divorce seekers in its pages.²⁷

The creation of this new industry helped to raise Reno's national profile more than any other event in the city and noticeably increased visitation to the town. Reno's railroad depot stood literally at the center of all the activity. Downtown hotels, including the renowned and luxurious Riverside Hotel (NR listed 08/06/1986), first erected in 1889 on the southern bank of the Truckee River, regularly offered shuttle service to and from the railroad depot. Similarly, other businesses

²¹ Barber, *Reno's Big Gamble*, 77.

²² Ringhoff and Stoner, *The River and the Railroad*, 67.

²³ Barber, *Reno's Big Gamble*, 54; Totton, Kathryn Dunn, "They are Doing So to a Liberal Extent Here Now': Women and Divorce on the Comstock, 1859-1880," from Ronald M. James and C. Elizabeth Raymond, *Comstock Women: The Making of a Mining Community* (Reno: University of Nevada Press), 68-94.

²⁴ Rowley, *Reno: Hub of the Washoe Country*, 36.

²⁵ Barber, *Reno's Big Gamble*, 53-55.

²⁶ Frank W. Ingram and G.A. Ballard, "The Business of Migratory Divorce in Nevada," *Law And Contemporary Problems* 2, no. 3 (June 1935), 305.

²⁷ Barber, *Reno's Big Gamble*, 59-60.

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benefitting from the increase in divorce seekers to the area—local attorneys and, later, divorce ranch operators—also committed to catering to divorce seekers as they would offer clients rides to and from the depot. Moreover, because this location was where divorcés from all over disembarked from their railroad cars, the depot was frequently cited as a prominent Reno landmark.²⁸ Popular culture began showcasing Reno and the divorce industry; Hollywood films from the 1920s onward highlighted the “divorce racket,” and many highlighted the centrality of Reno’s railroad to the new pursuit. For example, in the 1939 film, *The Women*, nearly the entire cast of New York socialites takes the train to Reno to divorce their society husbands. Also, the film, *The Merry Wives of Reno* (1934), shows a newly arrived divorcée disembarking from the train.²⁹ These movies and others displayed to audiences across the country the means of traveling to Reno, and what to expect upon arrival.

Divorce transformed into a highly profitable industry for the city in the years after Laura Corey stepped off the train in 1905—so much so that in 1927, Mayor Edwin E. Roberts, a former divorce lawyer, along with George Wingfield and a small group of politicians, conspired to shorten the residency requirement from six months to three months, which passed state legislation. Not surprisingly, the number of divorce decrees granted increased from 1,021 in 1926 to 1,953 in 1927 then to 2,595 in 1928. Among these divorces were many high profile cases including Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., who left for Reno just four months after the new legislation passed.³⁰

As the 1920s came to a close and the effects of the market crash began to hit the country in 1929, the divorce industry helped to stabilize Reno’s economy through the Great Depression. In early 1931, Idaho and Arkansas both reduced their residency requirements to three months in an attempt to get a piece of the divorce industry pie. To stay ahead of the competition, not only did Nevada governor Fred Balzar lower the already shocking residency requirement in the state from three months to just six weeks, he also reinstated legalized gambling in March 1931.³¹ As a result, the divorce industry continued to proliferate into the 1930s and brought with it other perks for divorce-seekers while they were in town seeking a “Renovation” or “The Cure”—both popular monikers for the Reno divorce experience.

Although the divorce trade largely put Reno on the map in the first half of the twentieth century, its popularity waned by the 1960s. The most important factor in this shift was the relaxation of divorce laws by other states in the postwar decades, “reducing the demand for migratory divorce” as divorce had become more socially acceptable after World War II. New York, in particular, changed its divorce laws in 1968, allowing its residents—who had constituted a large percentage of Reno’s divorce clientele—to stay in their own state for the decree.³² Another blow to Reno’s divorce business came from its southern competitor, Las Vegas. As with many other thriving businesses in Reno, like prizefighting and gaming, once Las Vegas emerged as the more popular destination in the 1960s, the divorce industry followed.

Tourism and Gaming

The thousands of divorce seekers who came to Reno via train were not necessarily categorized as tourists in the traditional sense. Indeed, dude ranches, hotels, and saloons catered to the divorcés offering services and hospitality as any other business, but tourism in Reno did not develop as a viable industry until after divorce was well established.

At the national level, tourism was a slowly developing enterprise. The earliest tourism-based businesses were more regional in scope, mainly centered in the Northeast, “the area of most rapid economic and technological development” in the decades before the Civil War. Locations in that region, like Niagara Falls, were among the first to be canonized as American attractions. But after the Civil War, the American West became a “mythic ideal” and a “basis for a new national consciousness.” Thus, after the completion of the transcontinental railroads, coast-to-coast travel became a desirable activity for the rising numbers of middle- and upper-class Americans who had the time, money, means, and desire to travel for pleasure.³³ In 1906, at a conference in Salt Lake City of 125 delegates representing boosters, businessmen, and politicians from across the West, the “See America First” campaign was first inaugurated. The plan was for a

²⁸ Barber, *Reno’s Big Gamble*, 60, 63.

²⁹ Barber, *Reno’s Big Gamble*, 138, 141.

³⁰ Barber, *Reno’s Big Gamble*, 111.

³¹ Barber, *Reno’s Big Gamble*, 119.

³² Barber, *Reno’s Big Gamble*, 180.

³³ Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 15, 17-18.

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voluntary group, comprised of western businessmen, civic leaders, representatives from railroad publicity departments, and politicians, to pool their resources together in an effort to advertise attractions and develop the first tourist infrastructure in the region, which would stimulate, "the discovery of Americans by Americans," and bring East coasters to the West.³⁴

Along with the See America First campaign, a new form of transportation was also developing: the automobile. The automobile completely transformed tourism in America. "In contrast to viewing the landscape cinematically as it flashed by the train window," explains historian Marguerite Shaffer, "the automobile...brought the tourist into the landscape."³⁵ In other words, instead of travelers passively viewing the landscape through a rail car window, people were now able to increasingly engage and interact with the area around them. By 1926, the automobile had gained an influential presence in Reno, as the Victory and Lincoln Highways were completed through Nevada. In order to celebrate such a momentous occasion, Reno hosted a Transcontinental Highway Exposition in June 1927. Although the exposition was geared toward automobile travelers, Reno's Southern Pacific Railroad Depot brought additional tourists to the city for the celebration. In addition to tourists, the railroad continued to carry freight cars to the area. Decades into the twentieth century and despite newly popular forms of transportation, Reno's railroad was still a central focus.

Reno's gaming industry also profited from the increasing amount of tourists in the region, regardless of their arrival by train or car. Both the legalization of gambling and the new six-week residency requirement for divorce were signed into legislation on the same day, but the former became effective immediately. Legal games included roulette, keno, faro, monte, blackjack, twenty-one, craps, and draw poker, among others. Within days of legalization, twenty-one clubs applied for their gaming licenses turning Gambler's Row into just one section of downtown's expanded gambling region; Virginia Street, Center Street, and Douglas Alley, located between Commercial Row and Second Street, were also areas in which games were made available. The first holiday weekend after legalization, "Hotel rooms were booked to overflowing, and buildings in local parks and local residences were temporarily turned into hotels for the weekend, reminiscent of the 1910 'Fight of the Century'."³⁶

Despite the initial appeal of legalized gambling, however, Nevada gaming didn't become widely popularized until after World War II. The once-small gambling clubs of 1931 had become full-fledged casinos by the 1950s. Establishments began expanding—many of which doubled in size—and started attracting big-name entertainers to the area, including Judy Garland, Mae West, Sammy Davis, Jr., Liberace, and Milton Berle.³⁷ The glamour and excitement of downtown attracted tourists to the area—not just divorcees—in the 1950s and 1960s bringing about the Golden Era of tourism in Reno.

The Beginning of the End for the Railroad's Centrality

All five manifestations of Reno's railroad depot have been located on the same site, the northern side of Commercial Row. As Ringhoff and Stoner explain:

In keeping with typical late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century patterns, the railroad built and rebuilt the depot at its same dominant position at the center of town even as other railroad facilities were moved toward the outskirts. Keeping passenger buildings in the center of town, rather than moving them farther east along with the maintenance yards and eventually the freight operations, ensured that railroad activities would continue to dominate the heart of the urban center.³⁸

The railroad had long served as the northern boundary of Reno's commercial district. In the early days, most of what laid north of the tracks included homes of affluent residents, as well as the University of Nevada, which had relocated to Reno from Elko, Nevada in 1885. But by 1913, the business district began to slowly shift southward when expansion down Virginia Street, the prominent street running perpendicular to Commercial Row began to accelerate.

³⁴ Shaffer, *See America First*, 27.

³⁵ Shaffer, *See America First*, 132.

³⁶ Barber, *Reno's Big Gamble*, 119-120.

³⁷ Barber, *Reno's Big Gamble*, 171-172.

³⁸ Ringhoff and Stoner, *The River and the Railroad*, 71.

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Gambling halls, however, were restricted to the areas nearest the southern side of the railroad tracks. In 1946, the Reno City Council voted to suspend the granting of any additional gaming licenses after residents began to complain about the gradual creep of clubs into the downtown retail area south of Commercial Row, sparking what became a vigorous local debate.³⁹ In 1951, Ernest Primm applied for a permit to operate a gambling hall on the west side of Virginia Street. When the City Council denied his permit, Primm took the case to the State Supreme Court, which upheld the city's decision. Primm got his wish, however, when a newly elected city council reversed its predecessors' decision. In 1954, Primm opened the Primadonna Hotel and Casino on Virginia Street and spurred the migration of casinos from the railroad corridor to a downtown block that theretofore had been restricted to traditional businesses.⁴⁰

The abandonment of Commercial Row undermined the railroad's longstanding status as having defined the city's commercial center. In addition, following the end of World War II, visitors to Reno were increasingly arriving by automobiles and airplanes. Proximity to the depot was no longer critical since travelers had their automobiles to transport them to and around town. Although casinos were still restricted to downtown areas until the 1970s, the Primadonna's move to Virginia Street can be identified as delineating the beginning of the end of the railroad's centrality in Reno because it signifies the shift in Reno's business district from a primarily east-west orientation along Commercial Row to more lucrative and accessible north-south alignment along Virginia Street.

Summary

The Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A because the building is representative of Reno's historical development from a small railroad stop in the latter half of the nineteenth century to a thriving city by the mid-twentieth century. The railroad was the force that drove development of Reno as a center of commerce, which included the unique industries of gambling and migratory divorce that grew to mythic proportions in the 1930s and 1940s. The Southern Pacific Railroad was, in essence, the gateway to Reno for scores of visitors of every sort. The Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot and its modern Amtrak addition continue to serve travelers. As a vital historic resource for the community, the City of Reno is developing plans to rehabilitate the depot into a heritage center for the purpose of interpreting Reno's colorful history.

³⁹ Barber, *Reno's Big Gamble*, 170.

⁴⁰ Barber, *Reno's Big Gamble*, 171.

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U. S. Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration. *Reno Railroad Corridor, Reno, Nevada: Final Environmental Impact Statement*. Washington, DC: 2000. On file at City of Reno, Nevada.

Wernick, Robert. "Where You Went If You Really Had to Get Unhitched." *Smithsonian Magazine* 27, no. 3 (June 1996): 64.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☒ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property +/- 0.5 acre

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 11 258350 4379227
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

280 Commercial Row, 11-380-35, 11-380-36 and 11-380-37. SE, NE Section 11, T19N, R19E

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

Resource boundaries include all land commonly associated Assessor's Parcel Numbers 11-380-35, 11-380-36 and 11-380-37, Washoe County, Nevada.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Trisha Dudkowski, Intern

organization City of Reno

date August 2012

street & number 1 E 1st St

telephone (775) 334-2253

city or town Reno

state NV

zip code 89501

e-mail trisha.dudkowski@gmail.com

Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot
Name of Property

Washoe, Nevada
County and State

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property:	Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot
City or Vicinity:	Reno
County:	Washoe County
State:	NV
Name of Photographer:	Mella R. Harmon
Date of Photographs:	June 2012
Location of Original Digital Files:	Kautz Environmental Consultants, Inc. 1140 Environmental Blvd Suite 100 Reno, NV 89502
Number of Photographs:	6

Photo #0001 (NV_Washoe County_Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot_0001)
South façade, camera facing north.

Photo #0002 (NV_Washoe County_Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot_0002)
South façade (middle), north elevation (right), and west elevation (left), camera facing northwest.

Photo #0003 (NV_Washoe County_Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot_0003)
North façade and north elevation (right), camera facing southwest.

Photo #0004 (NV_Washoe County_Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot_0004)
North façade (right) and north elevation (left), camera facing southeast.

Photo #0005 (NV_Washoe County_Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot_0005)
South façade, camera facing northeast.

Photo #0006 (NV_Washoe County_Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot_0006)
Interior (waiting room), camera facing east.

Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot
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Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Reno
street & number 1 E 1st St telephone (775) 334-2253
city or town Reno state NV zip code 89501

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Reno Southern Pacofoc Rairoad Depot

Name of Property

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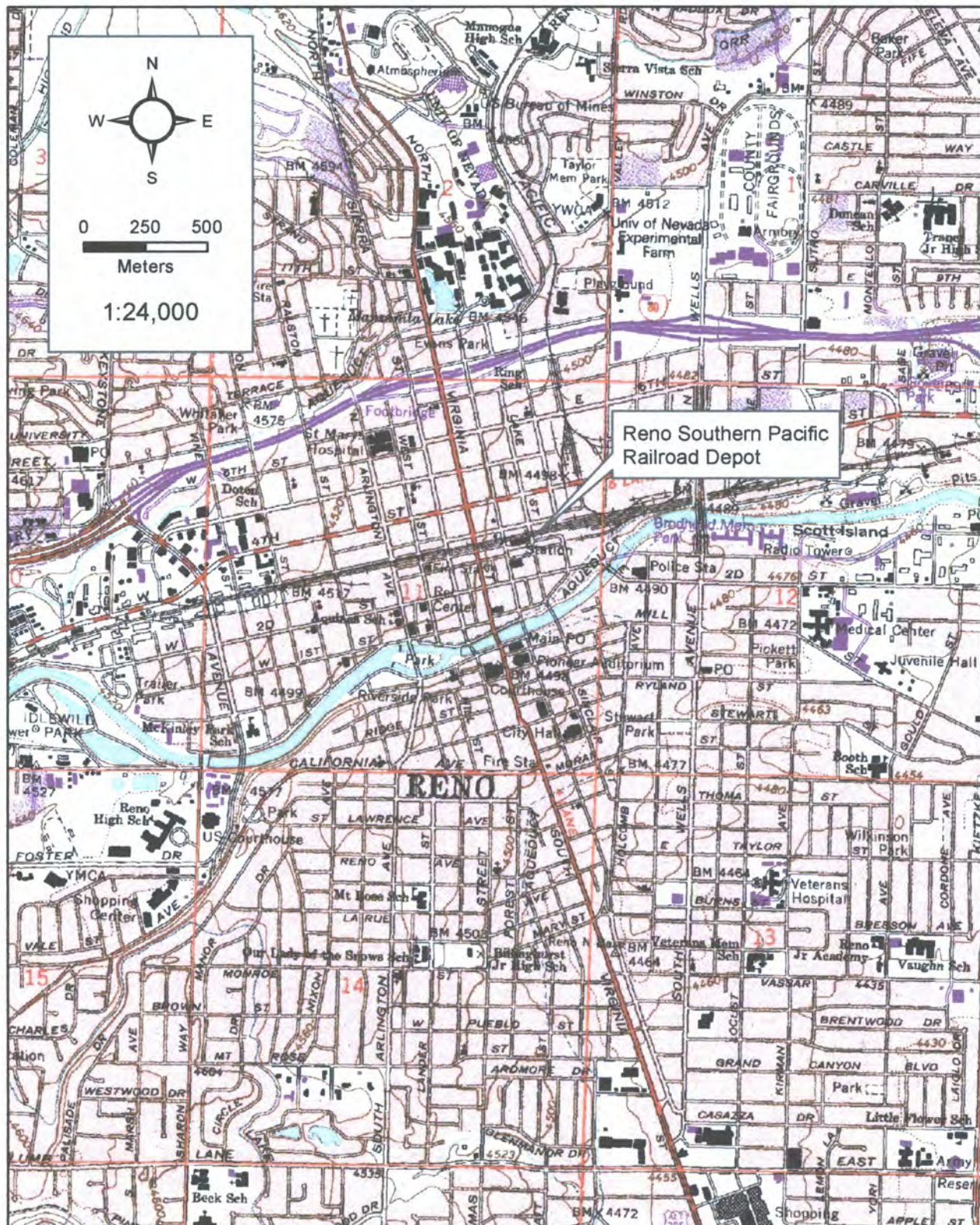
N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation - Map

Page 1

Map: 7.5' USGS topographical quadrangle, *Reno, Nev.*, 1967, P.R. 1982.



Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot
 Base Map: USGS 7.5' Reno, NEV., 1967, Photorevised 1982.
 T.19N., R.19E., Section 11, Datum (NAD 83, meters)
 Project: Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEVADA, Washoe

DATE RECEIVED: 9/28/12 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 10/26/12
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 11/13/12 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 11/14/12
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 12000929

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 11.14.12 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in
The National Register
of
Historic Places

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



NV - Washoe Co - Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot - 0001



NV - Washoe Co - Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot - 0002



NV Washoe Co Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot - 0003



NV - Washoe Co - Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot - 0004



W-Washoe Co - Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot - 0005



NV - Washoe Co - Reno Southern Pacific
Railroad Depot - 0006

Missing Core Documentation

Property Name	County, State	Reference Number
Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot	Washoe, Nevada	12000929

The following Core Documentation is missing from this entry:

☐ Nomination Form

☐ Photographs (#:)

☒ USGS Map

LEO M. DROZDOFF, P.E.
Director
Department of Conservation and
Natural Resources

RONALD M. JAMES
State Historic Preservation Officer

BRIAN SANDOVAL
Governor
STATE OF NEVADA



**DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE**

September 24, 2012

Barbara Wyatt, Historian
National Park Service
1201 Eye Street, NW (2280)
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Ms. Wyatt,

Enclosed please find the following nomination to the National Register of Historic Places:

Reno Southern Pacific Railroad Depot, Washoe County, Nevada

Thank you for your consideration. Should you have questions regarding this correspondence please contact me by telephone at 775.684.3427 or by email at sfogelquist@shpo.nv.us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sara Fogelquist".

Sara Fogelquist
Architectural Historian