UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME
HISTORIC
William J. Graham House

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION
STREET & NUMBER
548 California Ave
CITY, TOWN
Reno
STATE
Nevada

3 CLASSIFICATION
CATEGORY
DISTRICT
BUILDING(S)
STRUCTURE
SITE
OBJECT

OWNERSHIP
PUBLIC
PRIVATE
BOTH
PUBLIC ACQUISITION
N/A
IN PROCESS
BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS
OCCUPIED
UNOCCUPIED
WORK IN PROGRESS
ACCESSIBLE
YES, RESTRICTED
YES, UNRESTRICTED
NO

PRESENT USE
AGRICULTURE
COMMERCIAL
PARK
EDUCATIONAL
PRIVATE RESIDENCE
ENTERTAINMENT
GOVERNMENT
INDUSTRIAL
TRANSPORTATION
MILITARY
OTHER: law office

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY
NAME
Robert and Joy Leland
STREET & NUMBER
548 California Avenue
CITY, TOWN
Reno
STATE
Nevada

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Washoe County Courthouse
STREET & NUMBER
CITY, TOWN
Reno
STATE
Nevada

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
TITLE
none
DATE

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
CITY, TOWN
STATE
Located on its original site at the corner of California and Gordon Avenues in Newlands Heights (see map), the William J. Graham house is situated on two lots, measuring 100 feet by about 140 feet, overall. The structure is 82 feet long and 30 feet wide, plus an attached one-car garage about 15 feet long. The tudor revival house is constructed of brick with half-timbered stucco gables (two on the north, three on the west and one on the south). The original wood shingle roof, leaded windows and an eyebrow window on the Gordon Avenue facade all are intact. Two brick chimneys punctuate the roofline. The house was designed by George A. Shastey (Architect-Designer) for Graham and his wife who occupied the structure until they died there in 1965 and 1968, respectively. The original building plans, dated September 1, 1927, are available. Baseboards, casings and other moldings are intact in the original portions of the ground floor.

The Graham's added a gable cover over a portion of the L-shaped front porch to provide cover for the entrance, plus the small garage at the rear. Another gable covering the east end of the front porch, housing a bathroom-dressing room addition, was constructed in 1971 (plans are available) for Robert Leland, who bought the house and its contents from the Graham estate in 1969 and still occupies it as a residence and law office. All three additions match the original style and materials, including the decorative rafter detail.

Between 1968 and 1971, the kitchen was relocated to occupy a back porch and laundry room; all the original glass-front and other cabinets were preserved. A bathroom also was added in part of the laundry room. The two sets of original bathroom fixtures, plus some decorative tile appointments, have been incorporated into the present bathrooms. A pantry and breakfast room were combined into a study. The front room contains the original tile-faced fireplace (about 78" wide and 49" high to the mantel, opening 41" wide by 28" high). The fireplace was never used until 1969; it was stuffed with 1929 newspapers. Most of the original furnishing have been retained.

The full attic is in the process of being converted to useable space so that more ground floor rooms can be used for law offices. An oak staircase, especially designed to be appropriate to the house, provides attic access, occupying the former hall to the bedrooms. The attic construction has not altered the three facades which are visible from the streets*, five flush skylight windows constitute the only changes to the fourth facade, which faces the private yard.

The grounds were attractively landscaped by the Grahams. The original plantings are almost all intact, including mature trees (blue spruce, norway maple, silver maples), many interesting shrubs, smaller trees, roses, vines and other perennials. One 5' x 8' wooden, garden-tool house, constructed about 1977, occupies the SE corner of the lot, about 45 feet from the house.

*except for small crawl-space vents on the north and south to be framed.
### Periods of Significance

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Areas of Significance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prehistoric</td>
<td>Archaeology-prehistoric</td>
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<tr>
<td>1400-1499</td>
<td>Archaeology-historic</td>
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<td>1500-1599</td>
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<td>1900-1999</td>
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<td>Traveling</td>
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### Specific Dates

- **Built in 1928**, per City Assr's file

### Builder/Architect

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<tr>
<th>Builder/Architect</th>
<th>George A. Schastey, Architect/Designer</th>
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### Statement of Significance

The house at 548 California Avenue is mainly significant because it was built for and occupied nearly 40 years by William J. Graham, a major figure in the history of Nevada gaming, who also was prominent in other colorful aspects of 20th century Nevada history. The Tudor Revival house is noteworthy for its solid construction, excellent craftsmanship and unusually good state of preservation, as well.

Graham's gaming career began at age 18 in Tonopah, where he ran the Big Casino Club. In 1922, he and lifelong partner James McKay bought and operated "The Willows" in Reno, which became nationally known as a gathering place for the divorce colony of the time. Later, Graham and McKay established the famous Bank Club at Center and Douglas Alley in downtown Reno. They also owned the Fordonia Building at East Second and Center Streets in Reno which housed the Club Fortune, plus the headquarters for both the Republican and the Democratic parties. Graham is said to have had influence with powerful politicians, including Senator McCarran, Governors Pittman and Russell and Reno Mayor Edwin E. Roberts.

The notorious Stockade ("cribs") red light district was built in 1923 by the Riverside Securities Company, of which Graham and McKay were the principal stockholders. They leased the site from George Wingfield's Riverside Mill Company for this venture, despite the fact that six months earlier the Reno City Council had enacted an anti-prostitution law. By the end of the year, the law had been liberalized and the Stockade began a thriving business which continued until World War II, even after 1938 when Graham and McKay were finally (after three tries) convicted of mail fraud. Senator McCarran obtained a full pardon for Graham from President Harry Truman.

Graham and McKay also were prominent bootleggers in northwestern Nevada and they promoted famous prizefights, including the 1931 Baer-Uzcudun Reno fight, in partnership with Jack Dempsey.

Remnants of many aspects of Graham's activities were still in the house when the Leland's acquired it: a champagne glass etched "The Willows", bootleg liquor and the makings, sawed-off shotgun holsters, photographs of prizefights and racehorses, marked ballots (with rubber stamp) for the 1926 general election, cards suspiciously arranged by face value rather than in decks, and many other items.

No information was found on George A. Schastey, the architect.
10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA
ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: less than 1
QUADRANGLE SCALE: 7.5'
QUADRANGLE NAME: Reno

UTM REFERENCES

ZONE
EASTING
NORTHING

A 1 1 0 0 3 6 0 0
B 0 0 0 0 0 7 9 0 0
C 0 0 0 0 0 5 6 7 0
D 0 0 0 0 0 1 4 8 0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION
Lots 6 and 7 in Block 1 as shown on the map of NEWLANDS COMPANY MARKER TRACT SUBDIVISION NO. 1, filed in the office of the County recorder of Washoe County, Nevada, on July 13, 1907.

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE
Joy Leland

ORGANIZATION
548 California Avenue

STREET & NUMBER
Reno

CITY OR TOWN

DATE
10/14/82

TELEPHONE
323-2757

STATE
Nevada 89509

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE ___ LOCAL X ___

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE
Alternate SHPO

DATE
Jan. 13, 1982

FOR NPS USE ONLY
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
Atkinson, Harry Hunt (1881-1968)


Cahill, Robbins E. (1905- ).


Cahlan, John F. (1902- ).


Demaris, Ovid


Edwards, Jerome E.


Graham House

CONTINUATION SHEET


1969 My Careers as Journalist in Oregon, Idaho, and Nevada; in Nevada Gaming Control; and at the University of Nevada. Typed transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Mary Ellen Glass, University of Nevada, Reno, Library, p. 275. In University of Nevada, Reno, Library.


Petricciani, Silvio E. (1917-)


Reno Evening Gazette

3/23/74 "Missing Reno banker: Was it Fear, Suicide, or Murder" No Clues After 40 Years. No. 310, p. 1.


2/14/82 "Reno: State Prizefight Capital in Years Past" P. 4G.

Sanford, John (1906-)

1971 Printer's Ink in My Blood. Typed transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Mary Ellen Glass, University of Nevada, Reno, Library, pp. 56-68, 70, 82, 95. In University of Nevada, Reno, Library.

Sacramento Bee

9/11/48 "Reno Business Block Is Sold for $350,000"
San Francisco Examiner
2/13/1938 "Graham, McKay Convicted. Reno Pair Guilty on Four Counts."
2/12/1938 "Graham, McKay Found Guilty. Face Maximum Penalty of 17 Years, $25,000 Fine."

Stewart, Patricia

Toll, David W.

Warren, Wallie

Wilson, Thomas Cave (1907-);
1975 Reminiscences of a Nevada Advertising Man, 1930-1980 or Half a Century of Very Hot Air, of I Wouldn't Believe It if I Hadn't Been There. Typed manuscript of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Mary Ellen Glass, University of Nevada, Reno, Library, pp. 94-95. In University of Nevada, Reno, Library.

Zanjani, Sally Springmeyer
NEWLANDS HEIGHTS
Reno, Nevada

WILLIAM J. GRAHAM HOUSE
548 California Avenue