by Guy Louis Rocha

There have been at least seventy-four legal executions in Nevada and one in Carson City, Utah Territory.

Prior to the creation of Nevada Territory, John Carr was executed by hanging on the west side of Carson City, Carson County, on November 30, 1860 by order of the 2nd Judicial District of Utah Territory for the shooting murder of Bernhard Cherry in Carson City in late October.

Between late 1861, when Nevada Territory was organized, and 1903, executions by hanging were conducted at the county seats in which the person was convicted.

There has not been a definitive compilation of legal executions conducted in Nevada prior to 1903, however there are twenty known legal executions between 1861 and 1903:

- 1863, January 9; Allen Milstead, Dayton
- 1868, April 24; John Milleain (Millan, Millian, or Milliean), Virginia City
- 1868, October 30; Rufus B. Anderson, Austin
- 1870, December 16; Ah Fung, Unionville
- 1870; December 16; Ah Ung, Unionville

- 1873, October 17; David M. Hall, Belmont
- 1874, April 24; John Stewart, Aurora
- 1874, December 29; John Murphy, Carson City (at the foot of Lone Mountain)
- 1877, January 19; Peter Larkin, Virginia City
- 1877, October 30; Robert Crozier, Winnemucca
- 1877, December 22; Sam Mills, Elko
- 1878, February 19; J. W. Rover, Reno
- 1880, April 27; Charles Wesley Hymer, Winnemucca
- 1882, February 9; Charley Hing, Winnemucca
- 1885, January 23; Indian Dave, Belmont
- 1886, March 5; Clarence Gray, Winnemucca
- 1886, December 31; Edward Crutchley, Hamilton
- 1890, June 20; Elizabeth Potts, Elko
- 1890, June 20; Josiah Potts, Elko
- 1890, December 12; Hank Parish, Ely

Aurora (1), Austin (1), Belmont (2), Carson City (1), Dayton (1), Elko (3), Ely (1), Hamilton (1), Reno (1), Unionville (2), Virginia City (2), Winnemucca (4)

The earliest known legal execution in Nevada Territory occurred on January 9, 1863 when Allen Milstead was hanged outside Dayton for killing Lyon County Commissioner T. Varney at Ragtown (for judicial purposes, Churchill County was administered by Lyon County until 1864) on October 29, 1862. Some 700 people viewed the execution.

On April 24, 1868, John Millian was hanged outside Virginia City for the strangulation murder of prostitute Julia Bulette. Mark Twain was among the estimated 4000 persons who witnessed the execution.

On October 30, 1868, Rufus B. Anderson, age twenty, hanged at Austin for the shooting murder of Noble T. Slocum. Anderson had to be dropped three times from the gallows before he died. Members of crowd tried to intervene after the first try, but was held back by militia guards.

The first Chinese legally executed in Nevada, Ah Fung and Ah Ung, were hanged in Unionville on December 16, 1870 for killing a fellow countryman. An estimated 300 persons watched the execution.

On December 18,1874, Governor Lewis Rice Bradley granted a reprieve to John Murphy in

Carson City in order that his sanity be determined.

In 1875, the state legislature prohibited public executions without invitations.

The first African-American legally executed in Nevada, Sam Mills, was hanged in Elko on December 22, 1877 for the shooting murder of James Finnerty at Halleck on April 8, 1877.

On February 19, 1878, J. W. Rover was hanged at Reno for the murder of business partner I. N. Sharp on April 8, 1875 at Sulphur Springs, Humboldt County. The Supreme Court, on appeal from Humboldt County District Court, ordered a retrial. Conviction in second trial. Another appeal, another order for retrial. Change of venue to Washoe County, again convicted of murder in the first degree in third trial. Board of Pardons refused to commute death sentence. Rover protested his innocence to the end.

A story made the rounds in late July 1899 that Frank J. McWorthy--the other business partner, accuser, and sole witness in the trials--allegedly made a death bed confession in Arizona Territory in the late 1890s that he had killed Sharp, and Rover had been hanged for a crime he did not commit. The Reno Evening Gazette wrote that McWorthy was still alive and living in Oakland, noting that the News of Carson City was wrong in printing this story. The 1900 U.S. Census for California lists J. Franklin McWorthy, age seventy-four, occupation "miner-gold," living in Eden, Alameda County, with his wife Helen. Other California census enumerations list New York-born F.J. McWorthy living in San Francisco (1860, 1870) and Oakland (1880). See the News (Carson City), July 22, 1899, 3:3; the Silver State (Winnemucca), July 22, 1899, 4:6; Reno Evening Gazette, July 24, 1899, 1-5; Humboldt Star (Winnemucca), Feb. 21, 1928, 1:4-6.

The first Native American legally executed in Nevada, Indian Dave, a Shoshone, was hanged at Belmont on January 23, 1885, for the murder of a Chinese man near Keyser's Springs and Lockes Ranch in Railroad Valley.

The first and only woman ever executed, Elizabeth Potts , was hanged with her husband, Josiah Potts, in Elko using double gallows on June 20, 1890, for the shooting murder and mutilation of Miles Faucett in Carlin.

The 1901 state legislature required that all executions be conducted at the State Prison in Carson City beginning in 1903.

The first execution by hanging at the State Prison, John Hancock, was on September 8, 1905.

The largest multiple execution in the history of Nevada occurred on November 17, 1905 when four men, Thomas F. Gorman, Al Linderman, Fred Reidt, and John P. Sevener, were executed using double gallows for the murder of a transient they threw off a moving train while they pilfered the box cars.

Two Native Americans, Indian Johnny, a Shoshone, and Joe Ibapah, a Goshute , were executed using double gallows on December 7, 1906 for the murder of a transient.

The 1911 state legislature provided that a death row inmate could elect to die by shooting or hanging.

The first and only execution by shooting occurred on May 14, 1913, Andriza Mircovich , a Montenegrin, for the stabbing murder of a fellow countryman in Tonopah.

Ten men were hanged at the State Prison before the law was changed.

The 1913 legislature passed Assembly Bill 177 providing for execution by electrocution. Governor Tasker Oddie vetoed the bill on March 28, 1913 following the advice of Attorney General George Thatcher. Thatcher, in an opinion rendered on March 25 of that year, declared the bill unconstitutional on the grounds "that the subject of the Act is not expressed in the title." The 1915 legislature sustained the veto.

The 1921 state legislature eliminated hanging and shooting as a method of execution, and provided for execution by lethal gas. Nevada was the first state in the US to use lethal gas as a method of execution.

The first person in Nevada and the country to be executed by lethal gas was Gee Jon , a Chinese man, on February 8, 1924, for the shooting murder of a fellow countryman in a Tong war dispute in Mina.

Thirty-two men were executed in Nevada's three gas chambers between 1924 and 1979.

The oldest person ever executed at the State Prison was John Kramer , age sixty-one, on August 28, 1942.

The youngest person ever executed at the State Prison was Floyd Loveless , age seventeen, on September 29, 1944, for the shooting murder of a constable near Carlin when Loveless was fifteen.

Governor Edward Peter Carville received an Attorney General's opinion on September 21, 1944 stating that the "Governor has no authority to grant reprieve when sixty days from time of conviction has expired."

The only double execution using lethal gas occurred on July 15, 1954-- Linden Leroy and Frank Pedrini at their request.

The last involuntary execution prior to the U.S. Supreme Court declaring capital punishment unconstitutional in 1972 was Thayne Archibald , on August 21, 1961, for the execution-style murder of a kidnap victim following a robbery in northern California (Bill Raggio, Washoe Co. D.A., prosecuted the case).

The 1967 state legislature passed a law exempting persons under the age of sixteen who commit a capital crime from being executed.

In 1972, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that existing capital punishment laws were unconstitutional.

Four years later, the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty.

The 1977 state legislature adopted a new death penalty statute.

Jesse Bishop was the last person to be executed in Nevada using lethal gas on October 22, 1979.

The 1983 state legislature changed the method of execution to lethal injection.

- December 6, 1985, Carroll Edward Cole became the first person executed by lethal injection in Nevada (see http://www.crimelibrary.com/serial_killers/predators/edward_cole/1.html
- June 19, 1989; William Thompson, second,
- June 23, 1989; Sean Flanagan, third,
- June 3, 1990; Thomas Baal, fourth,
- March 31, 1996; Richard Moran, fifth (involuntary execution),
- October 5, 1998; Roderick Abeyta, sixth,
- April 5, 1999; Alvaro Calambro, seventh,
- April 21, 2001, Sebastian S. Bridges, eighth,
- March 26, 2004, Lawrence Colwell, Jr., ninth,
- August 12, 2004, Terry Dennis, tenth,
- April 26, 2006, Daryl Linnie Mack, eleventh.

Since 1905, fifty-four men have been executed at the State Prison in Carson City: ten hanged, one shot, thirty-two by lethal gas, and eleven by lethal injection.

In 2002, the U.S. Supreme Court abolished the death penalty for persons deemed mentally retarded.

In 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court abolished the death penalty for persons younger than eighteen.

NOTE: Retired Nevada State Archivist Guy Rocha presented a history of the Nevada State Prison and its relationship with Carson City in an Exploring Nevada presentation "The Capital and the Prison."