



the PINK HOUSE

The Reese-Johnson-Virgin House, more commonly known to locals as The Pink House, stands at the center of town in historic Genoa, Nevada. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places for its “association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history”, The Pink House has hosted and borne witness to significant events in Genoa and Nevada’s past. It is also recognized for its architectural significance as an example the Gothic Revival style that was popular in the 19th century.

The Pink House has housed many interesting characters and played different roles throughout the years. It’s story plays out like a scene from a Western drama, providing a wealth of insight into the life and times of old Genoa.

The Pink House is nearly as old as Genoa itself, and is certainly one of the oldest surviving buildings in Nevada. Genoa became Nevada’s first non-native permanent settlement when John Reese of Salt Lake City established it as a trading post for Gold Rush pioneers in 1851. Reese’s business and land holdings grew and he expanded his operation to include a saw mill and grist mill. In 1855, Reese built the Pink House next to his grist mill, thus commencing the story of this treasured landmark.

The Pink House was not known by its colorful name at the time, as it wasn’t initially pink. That would come years later, along with many other renovations and additions that occurred over the decades. The name of the town was also officially changed in 1855 from Mormon Station to its present name, Genoa. The name change and the building of the Pink House coincided with an important time in Nevada’s history. The government of Utah Territory, of which Nevada was a part, had sent a delegation from Salt Lake City to establish a more formal government. Reese’s house became a de facto town hall, and the meetings that established Genoa as the county seat of Carson County were held there.

Through the rest of 1850s the house would be an important meeting spot for local In 1859 Reese returned to Salt Lake City. His saw mill and grist mill were not making money and he was in debt the financiers of those operations. Given a hiccup in recordkeeping, the status of the house from 1859 to 1870 is difficult to determine. It is assumed that Reese’s creditors maintained control over it during their litigation with Reese, but the houses residents and goings-on there are a mystery. Whatever the case, the house was bought in 1870 by J.R. Johnson, a local merchant who had lived in Genoa since 1860. Johnson bought the house with the intent of bringing his family from the east

to live with him. He made several significant changes to the house, including painting it pink, giving rise to the house's eponymous name that it holds today. Johnson also moved the house from its position on the west end of town next to the old grist mill to its present location on Genoa Lane near the center of town. This was no small feat either, as the house was manually moved through the streets wooden rollers and planks. Johnson lived in The Pink House quietly with his family until 1883. During that time he was a popular Genoa resident, holding the offices of county treasurer, assessor, and public

The man who bought the house in 1883 was another prominent Genoan, as was the woman he would marry. Daniel Webster Virgin came to Genoa in 1863 to practice law and became the first district attorney of Douglas County, which had been created in 1861. He later became district judge at the Douglas County courthouse in Genoa. His wife Mary was of the large and distinguished Raycraft family, owners of a hotel, livery, and stage lines. The Virgins brought the Pink House into its heyday. They added a porch with white columns and railings, taking care to stay true to the house's Gothic Revival architecture. They also built an icehouse and a two-bedroom cottage for one of their daughters, Lillian, and her husband Louis Finnegan. By this time, Genoa was a quiet town of about 500, having been passed over by the railroad and highway that were built several miles to the east of town. Mary was known for keeping an abundant garden of fruit trees, and flower and vegetable gardens. Chickens, a horse, and a cow were also kept on the property. The Virgins added an icehouse, which became popular in the summer when Mary would serve homemade ice cream and raspberry shortcakes from it.

While the Pink House enjoyed its day in the sun, tragedy struck swiftly for the Virgins. They had three children: Ellen, Will, and Lillian. Ellen died young when the buggy she was traveling in overturned. Will also died (how?) while working in the lumber business near Truckee, California. Mary Raycraft died shortly after, as did Lillian's husband Louis a few years later. Upon Louis's death, Lillian moved into the Pink House permanently to be with her father. The Judge Virgin ended up living a long life, and practiced law from the Pink House after his retirement. He died in 1928 at the age of 94. On the day of his death the town flag flew at half-mast in honor of the distinguished Genoa judge.

Despite the unfortunate events that befell her family, Lillian Finnegan went on to become one of Genoa's most revered citizens. She was active in town and school affairs and is credited with starting The Candy Dance, a celebration that is Genoa's largest annual event to this day. As the story goes, the town wanted to install electric streetlights in 1919. To finance the project Lillian came up with the idea of holding a dance as a fundraiser and passing out candy made by the townswomen to entice attendees. The

Candy Dance was a success, and continued to be held every year as a way to pay the city's electric bill. Over the years it has expanded into a street and craft fair attended by tens of thousands of people during the last weekend of September.

Lillian Finnegan died in 1938, marking the end of 54 years of ownership of The Pink House. The house was immediately bought in 1939 by Percy and Agnes Train, (what did they do). They were passing through town one day and bought it on a whim of excitement. The Virgins' possessions were left in the house, with many of the furnishings and décor dating to the 1870s. Renovation and transition marked the Train's first few years of residency. Unfortunately, Percy died in 1942, making Agnes the sole owner. Her parents moved in with her, but she remarried and moved to California in 1944, leaving her parents to occupy the house. Her father died in 1955, and in 1956 she sold the property to her good friends and Genoa locals, Philip and Jeanne Gossi. The Gossis lived in the house with their children for eight years and ended up moving to Reno for the schooling advantages of their children. The next owners, Herbert and Erna Cordes, only owned The Pink House for one year, thought they fixed it up for rental purposes and gave it a new foundation. They bought a ranch in Washington and sold the house in 1965. Since 1965, The Pink House has gone through a series of owners and purposes, serving mostly as a commercial building. Today The Pink House is owned by Dan and Lois Wray, local business owners who saw potential in the house. In 2014, with the help of the Douglas County Historical Society and the State Historical Preservation Office, they began the important task of restoring The Pink House to its original Gothic Revival splendor. Where possible, the original wood was refurbished so that The Pink House could retain its stature as a National Registered Historical Site. Careful attention has been taken to maintain the integrity of the structure, and the interior has been redone to match the style and décor of the late 19th century.

