

# A HISTORY OF THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEVADA

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Developing a history of the Geological Society of Nevada presents a challenge since most of its past was not formally documented but resides in the collective memories of its members. Recollections of events that happened up to 50 years ago produced many inconsistencies and left much to interpretation. The only formal history of the Society is found in a nearly complete collection of newsletters that I was able to assemble. These are supplemented by the numerous guidebooks, symposium volumes, and various other formal publications of the Society. This document is an effort to summarize, in a few pages, the almost 50 years of Friday evening meetings, social events, field trips, symposiums, and informal meetings. Much has been omitted because of information gaps and lack of space in this format. I hope this summary will stimulate others to come forward with additions, corrections, notes, documents, etc., so that an expanded GSN history can be produced in the future. At the onset, I want to thank the many individuals who provided the information upon which this history is based. They are far too numerous to list here.

On December 2, 1957 an invitation was sent to a select few requesting attendance at the organizational meeting of the Geological Society of Nevada. Although this appears to be the first "official" GSN communication, there must have been previous discussions about forming such a group. Reno did not have a large exploration community at the time; therefore the founding fathers were principally from academia and the U.S. Geological Survey. The first formal meeting of the Society was Friday December 6 at 8:00 PM in Room 200, Mackay School of Mines building on the campus of the University of Nevada (there was no UNLV then). The announcement indicated that "All persons interested in geology are invited to attend the meeting and to join the Society." Dr. Vincent P. Gianella, Professor Emeritus of Geology at the University of Nevada presented the Society's first talk. His subject was the geology of the Virginia City area which was followed by a review of two recent U.S.G.S. publications dealing with the area and the Comstock Lode. The announcement went on to state, "The basic purpose of the Geological Society of Nevada is to meet regularly for the review of recent geological literature and for the presentation of local research. It is anticipated that the organization will include not only the University of Nevada Geology faculty and graduate student, but also local mining geologists, government geologists, and consultants."

Following the first meeting, minutes were issued that contained the philosophy and principals of the organization; "the exchange of geologic ideas and concepts, discussion of recent geologic works and review of current literature." It is from this concept that GSN evolved.

Many people were instrumental in the formation of the society, the most prominent of which were Bill Johnston, Robert Horton, Dick Larsen, Larry Beal, Bert Slemmons, Vincent Gianella, and Jim Wilson. Jim was apparently the only company (Anaconda) representative in the founding fathers. During these early years there was at least a low-level struggle over the direction of GSN. Should it be more like the Geological Society of America, or the Society of Economic Geologists? Initially, meetings followed a more GSA format. As the mining community increased in Nevada, the Society's character gradually shifted to that of a SEG meeting with monthly talks changing from generally non-economic subjects to more descriptions of mineral deposits.

Room 200 in the Mackay School of Mines building was the organization's general meeting place until November 22, 1963. Meetings started at 8:00 PM on the second Friday of each month (summers included) and were followed by tea, coffee, and cookies. Attendance was commonly 10-15 people. From 1957 to 1963 meetings were occasionally moved to other locations on campus and off. Room 215 of the Mackay Science Hall and the Education Auditorium were used at various times, apparently when larger attendance was expected, such as the several joint meetings with the local AIME group. The only off campus meeting spot was 116 N. Center, across from the Cal Neva casino. This facility was originally Vario's Stein and later became the Stein Hofbrau. Interestingly, and possibly a signal of what was to come, the off-campus meetings were held in the Tap Room of Vario's and the Keg Room of the Hofbrau.

Apparently, there was a fraction of the membership that felt these two rooms were inappropriate venues for scientific meetings. In the early 1960s attendance decreased to the point that the viability of the Society came into question.

Several changes occurred in the mid-1960s that put new life into the organization. The meeting location moved permanently to the Stein Hofbrau on November 22, 1963, which allowed for an expanded format. Meetings started at 6:00 PM with no-host cocktails followed by dinner at 6:30 PM. The formal meeting commenced at 8:00 PM, and was followed by an after meeting discussion session in the bar. Meals were ordered from one of the Hofbrau's menu. At this time exploration in Nevada was on an upswing which brought more industrial geologists to Reno, resulting in a significant change in presentations from a scientific bent to more economic topics. These changes seemed to be responsible for a dramatic increase in membership and meeting attendance. For a reason that is probably lost in our collective aging memories, meetings were moved to the third Friday of each month. These changes apparently brought about a decrease in attendance by academics and government geologists and a marked increase in company geologists participation.

Meetings continued at the Stein Hofbrau unit January 17, 1969 when they were moved to Lee's Hofbrau at 136 N. Virginia. For the January 16, 1970 meeting GSN returned to the Stein. The specific reason for this move is not documented but several people claim that noise from the bar area, specifically one wedding party, prevented a suitable meeting environment. Until 1970 meetings were not commonly held in December for the stated reason that they conflicted with the holidays. What may be the first Christmas meeting was held on December 18, 1970. Starting in 1986 meetings were continuously held in December, but it wasn't until much later that general interest talks were presented to attract spouses and non-member guests in a more Christmas party type gathering.

GSN outgrew the Hofbrau in the fall of 1981 and moved to the room "upstairs in the back" of Sierra Sid's. The meeting announcement gave directions to the room as up "the stairway located behind the Keno booth." No-host cocktails started at 6 PM followed by a 6:30 PM buffet dinner. The talk commenced at 8:00 PM. Dinner cost was between \$9-11, depending upon how many people attended. GSN guaranteed 85% of the reservations and if no-shows were greater than 15% of the reservations the Society made up the difference. GSN records contain a thick file of letters requesting payment for the cost of a meal from the non-shows. There is no evidence as to how many checks were actually received. The last meeting at Sierra Sid's was on January 20, 1984. Again, increased attendance resulted in a move to larger facilities.

Between that date and the move to the Elks Club for the first meeting of 1996, GSN was a transient group. The favored location was the Holiday Inn on 6<sup>th</sup> street, but there were stops at the Peppermill, Travel Lodge, Ramada Inn, and Nendel's Quality Inn.

After the tea and cookie period, monthly meetings consisted of pre-meeting cocktails, followed by a no-host dinner, a talk, and some form of informal post-meeting cocktail discussion by at least a few members and usually in a drinking facility. During the early years there were isolated hosted cocktail hours. Continuous hosting of cocktails started in 1988 when DMW Geophysics of Salt Lake City agreed to pickup the tab for the February through May 1988 meetings. After that, numerous groups signed on to host cocktails, all of which are too numerous to mention here. The one constant is Eklund Drilling Co. who traditionally hosts the first meeting of each season, and steps up to the plate many times when a host void occurs.

A complete listing of talks presented at each meeting is beyond the scope of this paper. Such a list would illustrate the steady shift from subjects dealing with the geology of areas, regions, and concepts into more applied papers, the common "grade and tons" talks that have been a mainstay in recent years. One could almost make a correlation between metal prices and the types of talks at the monthly meetings. During periods of lower metals price, which mostly equates to gold, more "scientific" talks were common. During periods of renewed exploration and discovery activities talks were more focused on metal deposit geology. Some of the early meetings included guest speakers whose transportation costs were covered by GSN. As the years progressed and talks shifted to Nevada gold deposits speakers became

responsible for their travel costs, most of which were covered by their employers. A few of the early meetings were combined with the local AIME chapter (now Northern Nevada Chapter of SME).

Yearly dues started at \$1 and increased to \$2 in the fall of 1966. The next increase was in 1975 when they were elevated to \$4. Interestingly, during the late 1960s and early 1970s a list of delinquent dues payers was published in the newsletter. During 1982-1983 dues were \$10 and in 1984 they were \$15 per year. No records could be found that indicate why these dramatic increases occurred or if there were intervening increases. Dues have gradually increased to the current \$30 per year.

There has always been a monthly newsletter. The first meeting notice, and subsequent notices until the late 1980s, was a single page containing only basic information such as time, date, location, speaker, and subject. Commonly, there was a short paragraph discussing the speaker's background and a sentence, or two, about the talk. The only other information to appear in the newsletter was the yearly nomination of officers, dues notices, and delinquent members' lists. About 1990 the newsletter was expanded to the present multi-page monthly communication. This new format allowed for a talk abstract and an expanded speaker background, in addition to communications about the Society's, and related groups, activities. Many features have come and gone from the newsletter over the years, and could be a subject of a separate history. Cartoons have run, Seismo-watch was published; summaries of talks at other venues, a president's column, lists of publications and exploration summaries appeared. One of the more controversial segments was the column by the two old dinosaurs. These unidentified characters had a knack for taking the industry and individuals to task. In the end their sharp wit was their demise. GSN officers seemed to have had enough, although that may not have been the general membership's feeling. Sometime in the mid-1990s commercial advertisements started to appear in the newsletter, and they have become a prominent part since.

What appears to be the Charter Members list was located and contains forty-four names. Of these only three lived outside of Reno-Sparks; two in Yerington and one in Mina. Membership exceeded 100 sometime during the mid- to late-1970s. During the 1980s membership steadily grew to a several hundred, eventually increasing to near 1,000. Membership also tracks the dynamics of the mining business. As metal prices increase and exploration/mining activity expanded in the Great Basin, so did membership. During periods of contraction in exploration activities there was also a decrease in membership, but interesting not proportionately. Many people maintain their membership even after they leave the industry, occasionally these folks attend meetings. There is a loyalty to the organization that transcends professional affiliation, which cannot be said about many other organizations.

Field trips have also been focal events for the society. What was probably their first organized GSN field trip was to Alligator Ridge in September 1981. The trip apparently did not include a field guide, at least not one that was an official GSN publication. The trip cost was \$49 which covered transportation from Ely to the mine site and a lunch. Transportation to Ely and accommodations were the responsibility of the participants. This was a theme of the early GSN trips, participants were responsible to get themselves to the departure site for the trip, arrange their own accommodations, and supply meals, except for lunches and drinks during the trip. It was in the early 1990s that the several days all inclusive field trips were implemented. These trips gathered participants on a bus, or two, and produced more camaraderie, and resulted in the numerous "go down to history stories" that are integral parts of past GSN fieldtrips. Published field trip guides became a hallmark of the Society, starting with Special Publication 1 for the September 21-23, 1984 trip to Pinson, Florida Canyon, Rochester, and Relief Canyon. The next year the spring and fall trip format was implemented. The history of GSN field trips is well documented in the Special Publication series. Field trip guidebooks are an important segment of the Society's publications. In addition to road logs and collecting articles under one cover, many of the guidebooks contain descriptions of deposits that are not published elsewhere.

The Society also organized five symposiums, all held at John Ascuaga's Nugget in Sparks, Nevada. The first was in 1987, then 1990 and every five years since. These events have grown in size and stature, attracting attendees from throughout the world. Each meeting concluded with the publication of the proceedings and field trip volumes. These publications serve to document the development of geological thinking about gold, and other metal deposits and can be found in personal and public libraries around the

world. As a testament to our industry, even during the darkest days of the recent metals depression, GSN stayed the course and held a well attended meeting in 2000. Immediately after the 2000 meeting, and deep within the mining depression, GSN displayed its faith in the industry and started planning for the 2005 symposium. Planning is now underway for the 2010 symposium.

The Geological Society of Nevada became a formal entity on August 25, 1983 when a Certificate of Incorporation was filed with Nevada's Secretary of State. Embedded in that document was the Society's first constitution and by-laws. As part of the GSN umbrella chapters formed in Elko, Winnemucca, and Las Vegas. These chapters hold separate meetings and field trips. The concept of chapters in other parts of Nevada may be in part an outgrowth of a letter sent by an Ely member in 1982, and probably others like his. Included with his membership check for \$10 was a note saying the people in eastern Nevada felt like an "illegitimate child" since all of the Society's activities were concentrated in Reno. This letter while not suggesting the chapter concept did indicate a need for formal activities outside of Reno-Sparks.

About five years ago the Society formed the GSN Foundation to develop an endowment for the promotion of education in mining related fields and to contribute to the UNR DeLaMare library, Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology mapping projects, and other similar non-profit causes. Funding comes from a variety of sources including contributions and revues from the symposiums. The annual Christmas party has turned into a fun evening for members and their significant others, as well as a major source of funding for the Foundation through a silent auction and raffle.

As the Society grew social and organizational aspects also expanded. Annual end of summer picnics, early summer golf tournaments, and a mid-summer evenings with Doug Silver have become traditions. Recently, a Board of Directors was formed to give the Society a formal structure, to supply a coherent bond for the several chapters throughout the state, and oversight that will ensure a viable organization into the future.

With the writing of this document the history of the Geological Society of Nevada should not be put to rest. There is much more to discover about our past and it is important to continue recording events into the future. Those of us that have been members for many years have witnessed the unfolding of a truly unique series of events as the Nevada gold industry developed. Much of this has been recorded in the activities and publications of the Society and it is important for the education of future geologists to continue this documentation of our history.