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Wide Open and Authentic: Discover Carson Valley Histories

Learn about a Basket Maker, Cattle Kings, Old West Pioneers, Nevada Basque Heritage, and Historic Sites

CARSON VALLEY, Nev. (June 8, 2023) —Carson Valley, Nevada, is a place with deep history, unforgettable legends, and unbeatable access to some of the Silver State’s most celebrated trails. Long ago, the area welcomed pioneers traveling along the California Trail - a stop for a break, to water cattle and restock on supplies before making the trek over the Sierra Nevada and into Placerville. However, one look at the uncharacteristically lush habitat, a contrast to Nevada’s desolate desert landscape, and mountains that reach to the sky, a few spirited individuals decided to fulfill their American dream and settled Nevada’s first permanent town, Genoa, Nevada.



Carson Valley, Nevada | May 2023 | Photo by Connor Childress

Thanks to these early pioneers, the history that built Carson Valley’s communities of Genoa, Minden, Gardnerville, and Topaz Lake still remains – and it’s not found in museum walls but real-life homes, buildings and other unique spaces. There are dozens of century-old homesteads and barns that predate Nevada statehood of 1864, rich cultural histories of many kinds, the oldest saloon in the state and trails that go back to the old west settlers.

It's helpful to begin a Carson Valley visit by stopping by the Carson Valley Museum & Cultural Center in Gardnerville. An old high school that first served Gardnerville students, this historic structure traces the history of the valley starting with the Native Americans who called the region home, to early California Trail navigators. The displays and artifacts tell the stories of the many cultures who decided to make Carson Valley their home, including the Basques, Germans and more. Here, learn the stories of Ben Palmer—one of the region's first black cattle kings, Dat So La Lee—Nevada's most famous Native basket maker and Snowshoe Thompson—a Nevada hero who delivered mail over the snowy Sierra Nevada passes when the Pony Express couldn't do it.



Discover the Genoa Courthouse Museum in downtown Genoa. The museum is open seasonally starting from Memorial Day through Nevada Day (Oct. 31) each year and accurately depicts the history of the town, local heroes like Snowshoe Thompson, the early pioneers, the story of how candy once saved the town and what life would have been like for all the people who lived there starting in the 1850s. Across the street, tour Mormon Station State Historic Park and the state's first permanent structure.

History comes alive at the Dangberg Ranch, which invites guests down a single lane dirt road and over the threshold of a 20th century ranching empire estate in Minden, Nevada. Tour the stomping grounds of Carson Valley forefather H.F. Dangberg, who emigrated west during the 1850s and decided Carson Valley was too promising to leave. A failed prospector, Dangberg first began making and selling butter to pioneers navigating the Carson Trail, and slowly started expanding his empire one acre at a time until he was one of the largest and most successful landowners and ranchers in all of Carson Valley. Learn the story of how he donated land to the V&T Railway, which prompted the development of one of the very first master-planned communities in America, Minden itself. Dangberg also funded the invention of the Ferris Wheel and raised a generation of adventurous children. Summer brings concerts, performances, or an opportunity to just stretch out on the stately spread, enjoying the views of the Sierra Nevada.

Learn Minden's origin story and see it in action along historic Esmeralda Street, where visitors can stroll a historic, master-planned neighborhood, see Dangberg-funded community centers, an original bank completely restored as a private business, saloons, restaurants, the Bently Distillery including a LEED Gold restored flour mill and creamery, and much more.

In Gardnerville, bring a piece of Carson Valley history home with a visit to Cheshire Antiques—easily one of Nevada's largest and most celebrated antiquing experiences with dozens of well-curated vendor booths filled with Native American turquoise, western mining and ranching relics, depression era glass, and much more.

Before hitting the road, there's no better way to toast Carson Valley's heritage than with Nevada's unofficial state drink, the Picon Punch, at JT Basque Bar & Dining Room. Learn more about Nevada's liveliest culture from a 19th century boarding house and restaurant, where garlic-loaded steaks, French fries, and flowing red table wine has never stopped being on-demand since 1896.

Find out more about the places that are the heart of Nevada's history, including Genoa, Minden, Gardnerville and Topaz Lake [here](#), or get in touch with the Carson Valley Visitors Authority directly at (775) 782-8145.

Straddling the California-Nevada state line 1.5 hours south of the Reno-Tahoe International Airport, discover the four communities—Genoa, Minden, and Gardnerville, and Topaz Lake—that comprise spectacular Carson Valley. Beholding some of Nevada's first and oldest establishments, visiting Carson Valley means authentically interacting with Nevada's many histories while experiencing world-renowned outdoor recreation Nevada, and the American West is known for. From legendary forefathers who paved the way to Nevada statehood, to wild horse bands, eagles, and other wildlife, to premiere air sports, American Indian, Basque, and Western Ranching histories and cultures, and distinctive dining experiences that all exist here and only here, Carson Valley offers an adventure for everyone. For more information about lodging, special events, and more trip planning tools, see VisitCarsonValley.org or dial (775) 782-2555. The Visitor Information Center is located within the Carson Valley Museum and Cultural Center at 1477 U.S. Highway 395 N, Gardnerville, Nevada.

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