History of Phillip & Annie Callahan Park, Reno

Phillip & Annie Callahan Park is more than a modern recreational space — it is the surviving site of a working ranch and a one-room schoolhouse, tied directly to the history of early Nevada settlement. the park's story is one of ranching, community education, and preservation — a living link to Nevada's 19th-century settlement and the Callahan family's role in it.

The Phillip and Annie Callahan Park is so named to honor the parents of the Callahan family who donated 25-acres to make the park possible. The wonder of this park goes back to the earliest days of Nevada's settlement by ranchers and miners, and booms and busts of the Comstock Lode in nearby Virginia City. Phillip Callahan's father, Matthew, came to Nevada in 1863 from England via Sacramento. He operated brickyards in Virginia City and Carson City during the height of the Comstock. The bricks for the Catholic Church and post office in Virginia City came from the Callahan brickyard. As the need for bricks began to wane, Matthew moved his family to Galena in 1884 and operated a dairy farm. Later in 1890, the family bought the 160-acre Ghiglieri ranch to the north of their ranch. Matthew's son Phillip bought the Reynolds ranch of 160-acres around 1908. They hauled milk and butter from the farm up the old toll road to sell in Virginia City. Besides dairy, the farm grew wheat, oats, barley, and potatoes. The fruit trees included apples, plums, and pears, plus they gathered chokecherries and elderberries. The ranch had a smokehouse for smoking meat and making sausages.

The ranch had very few visitors in the early days because it was so far away from town, and the roads were too rough for wagons to navigate. Matthew's son Phil presented the school board with a petition to get a school at Galena. The school was approved and built by Phil and his brothers—a wooden school that opened in 1908 at Galena Creek. The family tore up their house in Virginia City to make the one-room building. The schoolhouse was upgraded to stone during the Depression. The rocks came from the ranch and a stonemason from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) built the school, which opened in 1940 and was used until 1959.

The historic Galena Creek Schoolhouse resides here and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2011. According to Wikipedia, Nevada's most famous poet of the 1960s and 1970s, Joanne de Longchamps lived in the schoolhouse in 1975 and wrote a book of poetry named "The Schoolhouse Poems". In 1974, Joanne wrote "Three years ago Galen and I acquired (at an auction from the School District) an acre of land at timberline. It lies under the dominion of Mount Rose and Galena Creek. In one corner of this acre is the schoolhouse – a one room building of hand-cut local stone. To my knowledge, this is the third schoolhouse to stand on or near this site. The first was built when the town of Galena thrived in the 1860's, a timbering town (no longer in existence) that supplied the mines of Virginia City."