

## Edith Naomi (Bremenkampf) Bernard

### At a glance:

**Born:** May 04, 1914 in Eureka, Nevada

**Died:** April 21, 2005, Carson City, Nevada

**Maiden Name:** Bremenkampf

**Race/nationality/ethnic**

**background:** White/American/German-Scotch

**Married:** Arthur E. Bernard

**Children:** Donald Arthur, Layle Lorraine,  
Marcia Lynne, Patricia Sue

**Primary city and county of residence and work:**

Carson City

**Major Fields of work:** Wife, Mother, Teacher, Nevada State Prison Women's Matron, Member of St. Peter's Church, Eastern Star, Carson Tahoe Hospital Auxiliary, American Cancer Society, Brewery Arts, Community Concert Association, PEO, Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent of the Ormsby County School District



Photo Credit:  
Courtesy Bernard Family Collection

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### Biography:

One of the most important components for a successful community are the number and passions of unpaid, volunteer citizens who step up to take on projects that are essential to the well-being of others - community needs that don't fall within the communities "budgeted" items categories. Naomi (Bremenkampf) Bernard was one of those individuals and in every Nevada community she was a part of, her life revolved around her family and civic responsibilities. Her commitments were modeled by her father's tenure as a long time Eureka County School Board member and her mother's involvement in Eureka community organizations.

Edith Naomi Bremenkampf was born May 4, 1914, in Eureka, Nevada as the youngest child of Herman G. and Jeanette (Farlinger) Bremenkampf. She and her older siblings Herman George and Ella Francis attended Eureka County schools where Naomi graduated in 1931 at the age of 16. Besides lettering in both basketball and track in high school, and participating in local plays and Chautauqua presentations, she also worked part time as a typesetter for the local newspaper, the Eureka Daily Sentinel. Naomi often told her children that as early as she could remember, the Bremenkampf household was a gathering place for Eureka's young people. Her older brother and sister's friends had assembled at the Bremenkampf home after school and on weekends and Naomi's friends continued that custom as they crowded into the small family home where they practiced selections for the small band she was a part of, and when Naomi's mother was hostess to impromptu get-togethers.

As with most families in Nevada, money was in short supply during the Depression years. Father Herman was ill for the last ten years of his life and died during her first year at the University of Nevada in 1931. Higher education was important to her though, and she found the means to remain there for the two years needed to obtain a "normal" teaching degree. Higher education was of such importance to her that her children were indoctrinated from early childhood with the knowledge that their adult lives would begin "when they graduated from" not "if" they attended college.

In the spring of 1933, she was hired to teach in a one room schoolhouse located on an isolated ranch in the mountainous area near Jarbidge, Nevada. There were many such positions in sparsely populated Nevada communities in those Depression Era years. On a salary of \$80.00 plus room and board, she taught her "student body" which consisted mainly of one ranch owner's five children. As with most rural teachers Naomi quickly became adept at teaching to each child's specific developmental level.

Entertainment was what one could make in those isolated areas and dances in Jarbidge or picnics in nearby Charleston provided an outlet for the young and old alike. Automobiles were scarce and Naomi would recount to her children's stories of riding horses the five miles through a canyon into Jarbidge singing at the top of her lungs to "scare any wild animals away."

At the end of that first year Naomi was hired to teach in the more populated mining camp of Bristol Silver near Pioche. This teaching position, as were the many other similar job opportunities within the state, was open only to unmarried women. It was thought that hiring a married woman was taking a job away from a man who might have a family to support. Consequently, single woman teachers lasted in these positions only a very short time because the number of eligible young men was always greater than the number of eligible young women in most mining camps and the young women usually ended up married at the end of the school year. Naomi later found one of the reasons she had been selected for her Bristol Silver position was the photograph she had attached to her initial application form caught the eye of a young miner named Art Bernard, who just happened to be a good friend of Bristol Silver School Board Trustee President Lavona Linck. Lavona had shown him all the applicants' pictures for the

coming school year, and he persuaded her to lobby the other board members to hire the good looking teacher with the “funny last name”.

That teaching position came with a small cottage for the teacher which just happened to be located across the street from Art’s family home. Among the fourteen Bristol students were four of Art’s younger brothers and sisters. Naomi became a frequent visitor at the house across the street “tutoring” Arts younger siblings. As the months passed, it became clear to both Art’s family and the other residents of Bristol that Art Bernard was definitely courting the young school “Marm”, and in March of 1935 they drove to Parowan, Utah where they were secretly wed. The news however, became public knowledge when a Salt Lake City newspaper printed the news of the marriage. Finding another teacher so late in the year was a hardship for the small mining community so Naomi was allowed to complete the school year.

Son Don was born in 1936 and a daughter, Layle who died in infancy was born in 1938. The couple moved to Pioche in 1939 and then to Ely in 1940 when Art was appointed to the position of Nevada State Deputy Inspector of Mines. Daughter Marcia was added in 1942 and daughter Patricia in 1944. With the family now complete, Naomi set out to contribute her skills and time to her community. She joined the Order of Eastern Star and became the church organist for the Bartholomew Episcopal Church, as well as becoming involved in son Don’s school’s PTA and Cub Scout Troop. She told the author that one of her proudest community accomplishments was in helping to establish an Ely chapter of the nationally based Community Concerts Association. This subscription organization regularly brought in nationally ranked musicians to perform in Ely. Naomi’s connection with that organization would follow her to Carson City.

In May of 1947, the Bernard’s moved to Carson City, Nevada which was still a small town with a population of just over 4,000. By that time her children were mostly of school age and Naomi was able to become involved in various civic activities. She transferred her membership to the Carson City chapter of the Order of Eastern Star, became a member of St. Peter’s Episcopal Parish and joined the Carson City Leisure Hour Club, Carson City’s oldest social club. She was elected President of that organization in 1949. Also in 1949 she was appointed to a five member committee by the mayor Caro Pendergraft of Carson to examine possible sites to establish Carson City’s first municipal park. A May 5, 1950, Reno Evening Gazette article lamented that, “Carson City probably enjoys the unenviable distinction of being the only capital in these United States with no park facilities.” In a short history of Mills Park written by Naomi in 1995, she described the events that produced the park. The famous Virginia and Truckee Railroad which was headquartered in Carson City went out of business in 1950. The Committee identified a piece of V&T property currently a part of railroad magnate, Darius Ogden Mill’s Estate as having park potential. Upon receiving a favorable response from the Mills estate, the Park Committee initiated negotiations to obtain the acreage which was located at the eastern edge of the city and known informally as “Foley’s Forest”. In 1951 the Estate sold to the City of Carson “...for and in consideration of the sum of ten dollars (\$10.00), lawful money of the United States...”

approximately 50 acres for the park with the stipulation that it be known as Mill's Park in honor of its benefactor, D.O. Mills.

In 1950 Naomi continued her civic participation by serving as a 1950 Federal Census Enumerator. She also served as President of her children's Parent Teachers Organizations and was both a Brownie and Girl Scout leader.

Her husband Art, had been appointed Nevada State Warden in 1951. At that time, it was the State's sole prison institution. With the prison association, even more civic projects were to be realized. Warden Bernard allowed for the overseeing of Nevada State Prison Trustee Inmates to clear and prepare the land before construction was begun on the Mills Park facilities. Trustees also did some landscaping work around the newly built Carson Tahoe Hospital. Blood drives were organized within the prison for inmates to donate blood for the Red Cross. Inmate handiwork was donated to be used in community fundraisers for the hospital. All of these activities encouraged a pride of partnership between the prison inmates and the town in which the benefit was shared by all.

Naomi worked tirelessly for health-related issues. Carson City did not have a full service hospital until a 19 bed hospital was opened in 1949. Patients were transported to Reno hospitals by the local mortuary station wagon. That small 19 bed facility soon needed to be increased and Naomi was there to help in any way that she could. In addition to helping facilitate the prison partnership with her husband, she became a charter member of the Carson Tahoe Auxiliary in 1952. She was elected its President in 1956. One of the many important contributions of the Auxiliary was to transport blood supplies between Carson City and Reno as there was no other intercity transport service in existence during those early years. The women would make regularly scheduled trips to Reno to pick up the blood from the Reno Blood Bank and then bring it back to the Carson Tahoe Hospital for use by local physicians. Naomi's support for the hospital continued throughout her fifty plus year membership in the CTH Auxiliary. She was honored in 1999 as one of the Auxiliary founding members and the photograph of both she and her husband as long time CTH supporters was used in one of the hospital's 1999 advertising campaigns.

She took a leadership position in the fight against cancer early on. In 1953 as Ormsby County Commander of the Nevada Division of the American Cancer Society, she launched an extensive educational and service county wide program. In 1956 she was named Chairman of the newly formed local unit of that Society. She immediately set out to contact twenty-seven Ormsby County citizens to serve on the new board. Dr. Richard Petty past president of the Nevada Division of the American Cancer Society said of Naomi, "She was trained as a teacher and was well organized with anything she did. When you asked Naomi to do something, you knew that it would get done".

When husband Art was appointed Nevada State Warden, Naomi assumed the position of Nevada State Prison "matron" for the next eight years. In that position she was responsible for the daily interaction and communication between the women inmates

and the warden, giving voice to their concerns and requests. Because of the close proximity to the institutionalized men in this old facility, these women were very limited in any type of area for physical exercise or recreation both inside and outside of their rooming areas. After the male inmates were locked down for the night and within sight of the prison guard towers, Naomi and her young daughters would often take the women inmates out of their quarters for exercise walks in the evenings alongside the road that passed by the prison. Both she and her husband Warden Bernard, foresaw the inevitable growth of women inmates to the prison population because of the continuous state population growth and consequent inmate incarceration rate within the state. She lobbied with her husband within the legislative budget process, for building a new and separate women's facility next to the main prison complex – a facility that would have features for the rehabilitation of women- features not possible in the existing older prison complex. The hope of this facility was finally realized in 1965 when the new institution was completed.

Her interest in the arts continued. Naomi helped reorganize the Carson City Community Concert Association chapter which had disbanded some years before for lack of a suitable concert venue. The new association was able to obtain the use of the newly constructed Carson City Movie Theater. It had been built with stage facilities and was suitable setting for the concerts. And while adult memberships were important for the survival of the Association, Naomi believed in obtaining donated student memberships for those musically inclined school age children to attend concerts. Thus those students could experience the high degree of professional expertise by nationally acclaimed artists in both vocal and instrumental areas who were brought in to perform.

Her role in community activism in Carson City continued for the next several decades. She served as President of the Desert Garden Club; an organization dedicated to community public works projects. This group raised money for Mills Park improvements which included the planting of ornamental trees within the complex and the sponsorship of one of Carson City's first organized anti-littering programs. Naomi also participated in the hosting of the semi-annual "Legislative Wives Bridge Luncheons" which were held for the wives of State Legislators who came with their husbands to the Nevada State Legislature sessions. The Carson City women often lobbied the Legislative wives on issues important to the women's issues. Statewide and long enduring friendships were born of these functions. She became a member of P.E.O. Sisterhood, whose primary purpose was to provide educational opportunities for female students worldwide.

After retiring in 1969 as Administrative Assistant to the Carson City Superintendent of Schools, Naomi and good friend and neighbor Caroline Kelley, began to volunteer weekly at the Carson City Convalescent Center. Each Wednesday for the next fifteen years, Naomi would play the piano and both she and Caroline would sing for the residents of the long term nursing home and encourage both residents and staff to join in the sing-a-longs.

Shortly after retirement, she helped save one of Carson City's most historical buildings. Her participation as charter member and subsequent officer of the Carson City Arts Alliance helped spearhead the purchase of the 1862 Tahoe Brewery building and in the process helped insure that the Carson City Brewery Arts Center became the focal point for the development of future arts in the city. This group through grants and fundraisers purchased the structure to showcase local artist' works and house working areas for painting and sculpture, in addition to the construction of a 100-seat theater dedicated for public art and presentations. The original Alliance has flourished and not only was the original building rehabilitated but in 2001 the Brewery Arts Alliance was able to purchase the adjacent former St. Theresa's Catholic Church structure. By 2006 the Brewery Art Center consisted of a two-block arts campus with performance halls, rehearsal and classroom space, an outdoor public arts plaza and an outdoor amphitheater. The two-block campus is tied together with walkways, benches and plantings.

There is an old saying that each of us should leave the world a better place for our having lived in it. Naomi's good friend Gertrude Gottschalk summed up her social contributions this way; "She was interested in anything that made the community better."

This wonderful lady passed away on April 21, 2005. She left our world a better place by her contributions to her community and to her family. Her legacy can be viewed in tangible ways such as structures and institutions as well as those intrinsic attributes that she modeled for her children, responsibility, honor and ethics. Indeed, hers is a legacy to be remembered and celebrated.

***Researched by Patricia Bernard and written by Marcia Bernard Cuccaro  
Posted on website November 2010***

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