GLORIA GRACE GRIFFEN CLINE

Birth: March 21, 1929, San Francisco, California.

Death: April 2, 1973, Dublin, Ireland.

Maiden Name: Gloria Grace Griffen

Race/nationality/ethnic background: White

Marriage:
Dean Forbes Cline, 1957-1963
John Charles Harrison, 1966-1973.

Primary city and county of residence and work:
Reno, Washoe County; Las Vegas, Clark County.

Major fields of work: Historian, educator, writer, researcher.



Gloria Griffen Cline
UNR Special Collections

Teacher, historian, writer supported women in her profession

Gloria Griffen devoted her talents to researching and teaching Nevada and Western history at the university level. Her history-loving family honored her after her early death by donating their books and financial support to her alma mater, the University of Nevada.

Gloria Grace Griffen was born on March 21, 1929, in San Francisco, California, to Robert Arnold Griffen and Grace Gillespie Griffen. In 1931, the family moved to Reno, Nevada. Robert was a rancher and livestockman, but he also was a man of the arts. He was a writer, painter, illustrator and researcher of Western Americana, so Gloria grew up in a house that respected history and stories of the West. From her earliest memories, she loved history and geography, with heavy interest in the “hows” and the “whys” of those subjects.

Gloria attended Reno High School and graduated in 1947. She started at the University of Nevada in the fall and quickly became busy with the sorority Delta Delta Delta. She also joined the history honor society Phi Alpha Theta and was a member of the French and Spanish clubs. An overachiever, she skipped sophomore year of college, receiving her bachelor’s degree in 1950. She jumped into graduate school after that, researching Nevada and Western history with her M.A. thesis “Early Exploration, Routes, and Trails in Nevada.” She took just a year to finish her graduate education by 22 years old. She found opportunities in college to travel and learn whenever she could, including the University of Copenhagen in Denmark, Mexico, the Aleutian Islands, Japan, Luxemburg, Paris, and Indonesia. Through these studies, she took international relations classes

and researched local histories, for a potential career in political science. She also traveled as a delegate for Phi Alpha Theta, visiting Puerto Rico in 1952.

After receiving her master's degree, Gloria worked for a short time at the University library in 1953, and later as a lecturer for the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, (then called "The Southern Branch") but education was still calling her. In 1954, she was accepted into the University of California's history PhD program. There, she was an honor student and received a fellowship through the Soroptimist Club. She continued to study Peter Skene Ogden and the early explorers of the West, and her doctoral thesis was titled "The History and Exploration of the Great Basin." She used difficult-to-access Hudson Bay Company archives in London, as well as the Bancroft Library at the University of California for her research.



Gloria Griffen Cline at the Bancroft Library
UNR Special Collections

It was in Berkeley where Gloria met Dean Forbes Cline, chief engineer of the Pacific Far East Line, and they were engaged by 1956. They were married on April 13, 1957, at the Trinity Episcopal Church in Reno. In 1958, Gloria completed her doctorate in Western and Latin American History.

By 1960, Gloria was working at Sacramento State College in the history department. She still interacted heavily with conferences and the larger historical culture, being a founding member of the Annual Conference of History of Western America. She uplifted other women in the history profession, even being dubbed "Gloria and her all-girl crew" for the portion of the conference given to women historians, which was seen as abnormal at the time. In 1962, she published a book based on her doctoral thesis, *Exploring the Great Basin*. Gloria had modest expectations for the book, thinking the research would only be of regional interest to Nevada and Western historians. But *Exploring the Great Basin* was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1963, becoming the University of Oklahoma Press's best-selling book at the time, called a groundbreaking interpretive history of the West.

But not all was easy for Gloria during this time. She divorced Dean Cline in 1963, who was 11 years her senior. She also worked extremely hard for her accolades: despite a full teaching load, she kept researching and writing as a priority, sometimes working 16– to 20-hour days to get everything done. She received the Sacramento State College Faculty Research Award in 1965, the first woman ever to do so. She was also planning her next book, which she had been researching for several years. Even with her busy schedule and Sacramento teaching job, she still maintained her interest in Nevada history, speaking at a historical marker dedication ceremony for the 1964 Centennial celebrations and attending the first annual Nevada History Conference, also in 1964.

In 1965, while in London researching for her next book, Gloria met John Charles Harrison. John was an Irish native, frequent traveler, and managing director of C.W.

Harrison Co., a processing firm of marble and granite first established by John's grandfather. They corresponded through letters once Gloria came back to the States, and John visited her in January 1966, proposing to her during his trip. They were married on February 26 in a civil ceremony at Gloria's parents' house. Gloria then resigned from her position at Sacramento State and moved to Europe, following her husband to Ireland. They lived in an early 1800s house in Bray, appropriately historical, and she found a new teaching career lecturing at St. Catharine's College, part of Cambridge University. Gloria came back to visit or lecture in the States often, including the Western History Conference in 1970 which met in Reno that year.

On April 2, 1973, she died unexpectedly at the age of 44, after falling down a flight of stairs in her home. Her second book, *Peter Skene Ogden and the Hudson's Bay Company*, had just been completed and was published posthumously. Because Gloria was the Griffens' only child, they decided to endow the reading room of the Special Collections department in the Getchell Library Building at UNR in Gloria's memory. Gloria's father Robert died from cancer shortly after Gloria, on December 7, 1974. After this loss, Gloria's mother Grace donated the family's collection of books about western Americana, history, and Native Americans. She also donated Gloria's collection of papers and the Robert and Grace Griffen papers after her own death in 1983. The Griffen family heavily appreciated Western history and the pursuit of knowledge and used their grief for their daughter to fund history and liberal arts. In 1987, the University created the Grace Griffen Endowed Chair in American History from Grace's estate. Despite Gloria's early death, she changed Western and Nevada history through her research. Her family has directly supported future historians at UNR in several ways, for over 50 years, to remember and honor her.

Gloria Griffen Harrison is buried in Mountain View Cemetery, Reno, Nevada near her parents Robert and Grace Griffen.



Published Word by Gloria Griffen Cline

1962 *Exploring the Great Basin.* University of Oklahoma Press.

1974 *Peter Skene Ogden and the Hudson's Bay Company*. University of Oklahoma Press.

Researched by Patti Bernard and written by Aubrey Garrard, 2026

Sources of information

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"Gloria Griffen to Attend Convention." *Nevada State Journal* (Reno, Nevada), 21 Dec 1952, p.17.

"History Meet Set in Reno." *Nevada State Journal* (Reno, Nevada), 30 April 1964, p.11.

"Irish Romance Becomes Wedding." *Nevada State Journal* (Reno, Nevada), 8 Mar 1966, p.5. [photo]

"Reading Room Dedicated to Gloria Cline." *Nevada State Journal* (Reno, Nevada), 16 Dec 1974, p.18.

"Reno Artist, Historian Dies at 75." *Nevada State Journal* (Reno, Nevada), 9 Dec 1974, p.14. [Robert Griffen photo]

"Reno Woman is Doctor of Philosophy." *Reno Evening Gazette* (Reno, Nevada), 2 July 1958, p.26. [photo]

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