

## HEADLINE:

Archivist Guy Rocha, a gregarious 'evangelist for Nevada history,' dies at 73

DEK: Colleagues say Rocha took seriously the job of using facts for the public good, sharing his encyclopedic knowledge in newspaper columns and radio shows

## SOCIAL #1:

Guy Rocha, who served as Nevada's state archivist for nearly 30 years and made a name for himself as an authoritative, eager chronicler of the state's history, has died. Read our obituary here: [\[link\]](#)

## Social #2:

Guy Rocha, long-serving state archivist, colorful character and "a man who lived through facts," dies at 73: [\[link\]](#)

Famed Nevada historian Guy Rocha was suspicious of hyperbole and had no trouble calling out journalists who used adjectives like "biggest," "first" or "best" in their stories.

But since his death last Thursday, family, friends and colleagues have struggled to describe him without using superlatives.

"In the news business, you're only as good as your sources," said Martin Griffith, a journalist who covered Reno for three decades for *The Associated Press*, in an interview with *The Nevada Independent*. "And there was no better source than Guy Rocha."

Rocha died at Reno's Renown Regional Medical Center following years of declining health, according to his daughter Victoria. He was 73 years old.

Over his career, Rocha became the voice of record on Nevada's history and a fierce defender of objective truth as a concept. Along with his three decades of service as the state archivist, Rocha hosted his own history-focused radio show and wrote a popular, syndicated "myth busting" column about the state's famous folklore. In 2024, Rocha was [inducted](#) into the Nevada Press Association Hall of Fame.

Rocha was born on Sept. 23, 1951, in Long Beach, California, but was raised in Las Vegas. During his adolescent years at Clark High School, a lifelong love of sports was born. He was a two-time state wrestling champion and, as an adult, played softball and volunteered as a high school wrestling coach. He was inducted into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame in 2009.

After high school, Rocha graduated from Syracuse University with a degree in social studies education and considered becoming a teacher. He decided instead to pursue a master's degree

in American Studies at San Diego State University. He returned to Nevada in 1975 to begin a never-completed Ph.D. at UNR.

Instead, he developed a new passion: chronicling Nevada history. In 1977, Rocha began his three decades in state government with a job at the Nevada State Historical Society. Four years later, he was appointed Nevada's second-ever state archivist, making the job his own as he managed government records dating to the state's founding and directed public historical research projects.

In his 28 years in the role, Rocha [revitalized](#) the agency, fiercely defending it against [budget cuts](#) and expanding its staff. He became an authoritative and entertaining voice on Nevada politics and history and a frequent guest on television and radio programs. His insights spanned every element of Nevada's history, from trivial questions about Marilyn Monroe's [time](#) in Reno to more serious reckonings with the state's treatment of women and workers.

"It wasn't a job to him, it was a calling," said Frank X. Mullen, a longtime reporter with the *Reno Gazette Journal*. "He was like an evangelist for Nevada history."

His obsessive fascination with the state's past ensured he was almost always right — and kept him popular among reporters. Rocha's encyclopedic knowledge of the state "saved me a lot of ink on corrections," Mullen told *The Indy*.

Journalists were not the only ones who looked to Guy for his insights. Politicians from the late Senate Majority Leader [Harry Reid](#) (D-NV) to former Gov. [Brian Sandoval](#) (R) also sought context from Rocha on proposed legislation or political fights.

Rocha's work was underpinned by his long-held belief in the immutability of facts and his idea that "the truth was recoverable and understandable," said Sarah Jones, his supervisor at the state archives from 2001 to 2007.

At a 2009 retirement event for him, Rocha said his [motto](#) was, "We are entitled to our opinions, but not our own facts."

Jones said his insistence on truth-telling was universal and untethered to his political or personal preferences. She recalled a controversy in 2003 where then-President George W. Bush [mispronounced](#) "Nevada" at a campaign event. Rocha raised the issue in the press, explaining the correct pronunciation of the state's name and why it was important.

"He literally got death threats over that," Jones said. "But the truth really mattered to him. He wasn't going to shine it up for politics."

Griffith similarly described Rocha as having an intense commitment to sharing the facts he uncovered while overseeing the state archives. In 2006, Griffith wrote an [article](#) about Mark Twain's involvement in fundraising for a new church in Carson City. Rocha made a discovery

about Twain that inspired him to leave five separate voicemails on Griffith's phone, the only way he saw fit to communicate what he had learned.

"He kept calling back until he finished the story," Griffith said. "He just could not quit."

As his career progressed, Rocha became something of a celebrity in Nevada, known for his print, radio and television appearances. He was the "original media influencer," said Jason Hidalgo, a reporter with the *Reno Gazette Journal*.

"He loved the limelight in all forms," Victoria Rocha said. He collected eclectic vests from around the world, she said, and proudly wore them. He loved to dance and sing, occasionally drawing odd looks. But the attention never bothered Rocha.

Frankie Sue Del Papa, Nevada's former secretary of state, recalled Rocha belting out Frank Sinatra's *New York, New York* at a karaoke-themed fundraising party for the Nevada Historical Society. A journalist turned toward Del Papa and asked who was giving such a colorful performance. Del Papa was delighted to answer: "Why, that's the state archivist!"

But Rocha's outsized personality was never overpowering, said loved ones. Griffith described him as able to connect with anyone, from the state's most powerful politicians to wait staff he befriended while out to lunch.

Hidalgo, of the *Reno Gazette Journal*, first met Rocha when he was a new reporter. Their frequent calls proved especially helpful for someone not yet familiar with the state. But their relationship soon went beyond fact-checking: Rocha would often email Hidalgo unprompted, not to correct a fact but to commend him for his stories.

"He always made you feel important," Hidalgo said.

Nor did Rocha's enjoyment of attention ever distract him from what he viewed as his life's purpose: advocating for the people of Nevada. He was proud of his work preserving the documents of Nevada's past and felt that they were vitally important to a democratic, just society.

"The rights of the people of Nevada are stored here," Rocha [said](#) of the state archives.

He believed his role transcended that of a passive chronicler of a long-gone past. His view was that "the archivist was an activist," said Sarah Jones, with the responsibility to use facts to improve people's lives. Rocha's work shed light on many parts of Nevada history, from his contributions to the Nevada Women's History Project — which elevated the stories of strong female figures from Nevada and secured a statue of Northern Paiute activist Sarah Winnemucca in the U.S. Capitol building — to new projects studying the state's involvement in Japanese internment and Native American boarding schools.

Victoria said her father especially lamented forgotten elements of Nevada's labor history. He co-authored a 1986 book titled *The Ignoble Conspiracy: Radicalism on Trial in Nevada*, about how unionized workers' political voices were silenced. Rocha fought for Nevada's past to be understood as more complex than the well-known tall tales about casinos or cowboys.

"Nevada was a state he felt deserved better press," she said. "He was a very proud Nevadan."

In a 2013 retrospective [interview](#) on his career, Rocha explained his love for his job was wedded to his broader goal of embracing the nuances of history: "Here's Nevada," he said. "It's those things, and it's all these other things too."

After he retired in February 2009, Rocha dove even more deeply into his goal of pursuing justice for Nevadans. His fascination with the state's labor and environmental histories made him especially interested in mining, an industry he felt both built and exploited the state. He pushed multiple times to end eminent domain, the practice which granted mining companies the right to seize private citizens' land for commercial purposes.

In 2011, Rocha [teamed up](#) with state Sen. Sheila Leslie (D-Reno) as she introduced a bill to ban eminent domain. Leslie said Rocha's knowledge of Nevada's mining history and his public testimony in support of the bill were critical to its success.

"Nobody doubted a word he had to say," Leslie said. She was careful when recounting the story, emphasizing that Rocha was "a man who lived through facts" and "would want me to say the right dates." SB86 [passed](#) with only one opposing vote.

Rocha's loved ones say his voice will be especially missed today, not only because of his humor and warmth but also because of the perspective he could have brought in a time of heightened disagreement over the meaning of truth.

"He would be on the front lines" defending facts in today's political battles, said Mullen. "He would be up there swinging."

Rocha is survived by his daughter, Victoria, his son, Shane, and his brother, Jim. Victoria Rocha is currently planning a celebration of life for Guy. *The Nevada Independent* will update this article with details when they are available.