



CULVER CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER VOL. 47 NO. 3

FALL 2026

FROM RANCHO TO SHOPPING CENTER TO MOVIE SET

BY JAMES KISLINGBURY

Not too long ago I was watching the 1974 horror film *Messiah of Evil*. The film briefly features a young Walter Hill (best known for directing *48 Hrs* (1982) and producing the *Alien* series) and directed by Gloria Katz and Willard Hyuck Jr., a couple that co-wrote *American Graffiti* (1973), *Star Wars* (1977), and, of

all things, *Howard the Duck* (1986). As I watched it, amidst the gore and uneven acting, a lightbulb went off in my head. "Hey, I know that street!"

The street in question was the central corridor of the Culver Center shopping center. Amongst the horrors of *Messiah of Evil* is the neon and sodium-

soaked signage of one of the first strip malls in Culver City.

Amidst the blood, guts, and baffling direction are the storefronts of the Culver Center shopping center. While much has changed, including the businesses, the signage, and more than a few actual buildings, the Culver Center is still there (and is now, fortunately, vampire-free).

I figured it was a great excuse to go through the archives to see what other vintage views we have of the shopping center.

The Culver Center is a shopping center braced by Washington Boulevard and Venice Boulevard to its north and south, and Overland to its east. Construction started in February of 1949 and opened to three days of fanfare in October of that year. Developed

continued on inside page ➔



LEFT: Culver Center stands in for small-town Main St. in *Ada*.

BELOW: This late-60s photo shows the Culver Center during its retail heyday.



GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING & PROGRAM



MGM's Award-winning, Star-studded TV Series ...*Almost Lost Presents: Mr. Novak*

**Veterans Memorial Building
Tuesday, October 27 @ 7PM**

If it wasn't for author Chuck Harter's re-discovery of this 1960s TV series, it would have been lost in locked studio vaults.

He was impressed with the story themes that are still relevant today, as well as the outstanding cast and directors who went on to become stars. The show garnered 47 awards, including a Peabody award honoring powerful, inspiring storytelling. After spending years

researching the show and creators, he wrote the definitive book about the production, *Mr. Novak: An Acclaimed Television Series*.

His book convinced the Vice-President of Warner Bros to release the show on DVD, and *Mr. Novak* was re-discovered for the first time since it aired in 1963. *Mr. Novak* is the first dramatic presentation of life in high school, with a realistic portrayal of teachers and students dealing with social themes that everyone can identify with. Clips and photos will be shown, and Harter will guide you through the classic show's incredible history.

This event is free to the public.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Greetings CC History lovers! I'm taking this opportunity to let you know that I will be leaving the position of President at the end of 2026. Upon reflection, it has been a wonderful two years and a fulfilling learning experience. I am grateful to have held this position because I've gotten to know our City and tell its story.

I have had the opportunity to lead many tours of Culver City, as well as guiding visitors through our museum. It was my goal to expand the museum's availability; for the last two years, Maureen Fleming and I have alternated Sundays each month to provide greater museum access.

I have particularly enjoyed spending

time with our Culver City interns (students at Culver High) who bring fresh ideas to our work. I have had many conversations with longtime residents who shared their experiences in Culver City prior to my forty plus years here as a resident, and learned something from each of them while meeting wonderful people.

I never knew about Santa's Lane, the costumes from movies and television filmed in Culver City, or the origin of Fiesta La Ballona. I am proud of our well-attended quarterly programs that provide interesting speakers on a variety of topics that appeal to members. I'm also proud of the outreach we have done at community events such as the Car Show, Book Fair and Art Festival.

I would like to thank all the Board members for their support, as well as our members and donors. I urge all of you to continue your support of the Culver City Historical Society because we truly have an incredible past that needs to be shared.

I remain committed to the goals and work of the Culver City Historical Society moving forward.

— Jack Bommarito

OUR MISSION

The Culver City Historical Society was created for the purpose of collecting, preserving, and exhibiting the history, cultural, and civic accomplishments of Culver City and its environs.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Lawrence Alexander, Gigi Dornfest, Moira Doyle, Bob & Grazia Hayes, The Meshek Family, Rick Spears, Robert Starkman, Dave Tavres and Patricia Zingale

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Jack Bommarito	President
Hope M. Parrish.....	President Emeritus
Mark Morris...VP Programs/Media Archives	
Maureen Fleming	VP Museum/Curator
Open	VP Development
Mara Bommarito	Secretary
Carolyn Wispe Burns	Treasurer
Michael Laase	Parliamentarian
Open	Membership Chair
Beverly Peterson.....	Membership Co-Chair
Valerie Meyer	Costumes Chair
Ron Peterson.....	In-House Photographer
Anissa Di Vincente	Webmaster
Michael Chiabauda	Photo Archives
Open	Historic Sites Chair
Andrew Weissman.....	Government Liaison
Holly Strother	Newsletter Designer

ARCHIVE/RESEARCH VOLUNTEERS

Hope M. Parrish, Dana Benton, Tami Eskridge, Amelia Kremer High, Joshua Insel, James Kislingbury, Steve Newton, Kate Ni, Michael Potterton, Julia Smith, Nicole Tovar, and Susannah Mae Young

INTERNS

Josiah Joya and Iliana Lua

PAST PROGRAM



Maureen Fleming, Mike Escarzaga, Donnie Norden, Mark Morris and Jack Bommarito

Donnie Norden packed the house sharing an "Insider's Tour of Desilu." It was a fun and entertaining evening!

YouTube @ CulverCityHistory:
search "CCHS Desilu"

WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE GENEROSITY OF



COSTUMES IN THE BUILDING

TWO COSTUME MYSTERIES NOW SOLVED!

Before audiences remember the dialogue, they remember the silhouette. A sweeping gown, a red candy-striped blazer or fabulously beaded dress become as recognizable as the actors who wore them on the silver screen.

Out of our costumes in the collection, about 25 remain unidentified. Recently, Historical Society member Annette Tossounian identified a swimsuit costume worn by Shirley MacLaine in the 1964 film *The Yellow Rolls Royce*, previously thought to have been a piece worn by Esther Williams.

Using the recently rediscovered auction catalogs from MGM and the help of members like you, we hope to continue solving the mysteries of our beloved MGM costume collection.



During my time volunteering at the Historical Society, I spent hours familiarizing myself with the costumes. I then took a different approach to identify the mystery costumes.

We recently rediscovered early 70s catalogs from the MGM auctions. After digitizing over 100 pages of auction items, I began the work of matching our costumes to catalog descriptions. This was a challenge, as there were no photographs in the catalog. The descriptions consisted of only two sentences describing each garment.

This task required substantial knowledge in garment construction, historical fashion trends, and our collection's costumes. I was thrilled to identify a garment in the catalog from a film called *The Pirate*. It was described as "pearl grey marquisette over silk taffeta, edging and latticework of grey silk satin, appliques of crocheted and silk ribbon flowers."

This was a perfect match to a gown in our collection! We were lucky to have a star's name, Gladys Cooper, handwritten on the garment. Gladys Cooper appears in *The Pirate* in a scene with Judy Garland, wearing our mystery costume as a nightgown.



While this process can be tedious, using the catalogs as a tool to identify a costume's shapes and attributes can serve as a great guide to identifying many more costumes in our collection.

— Nicole Tovar

[Please visit our website for full story and color photos.](#)

HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS

HAPPY 75TH TO OUR VETERANS MEMORIAL BUILDING



The Veterans Memorial Building, one of the most often-used and iconic structures in Culver City, celebrated its 75th Anniversary this year.

Culver City acquired a major portion of the land, known as Exposition Park, in 1938. After WWII, it was officially designated as Veterans Memorial Park on August 8, 1949. A bond was passed by Culver City residents, as there was a need for a community recreation center, restaurant, stage, and gymnasium. The so-called "Tourist Tower" promised great views of MGM's backlot sets.

The cornerstone was laid on April 15, 1950, and our Veterans Memorial building was dedicated on March 9, 1951. The entry proudly exhibits a growing number of markers, placed to honor and remember residents — veterans who served our country and fought for our freedom.

→ *Culver Center continued from front page*

by Touchstone Brothers, the center existed as an example of postwar prosperity that (almost) all Americans could enjoy, featuring a Van de Kamp's bakery, a Karl's shoe store, Joe Wellington's Culver City Drugs, and even a JCPenney (only one of 139 in the state!), among others.

1974 isn't the only time Culver Center was featured in a motion picture, either. In 1961 it was used as the Main Street of a small Alabama town in the Dean Martin picture, *Ada*. The street (now a parking lot) was dressed up with period-appropriate automobiles, and a banner telling us to vote for "Bo Gillis" was strung across the street.

While *Messiah of Evil* might not be the most distinguished moment in Culver City history (or in the careers of the people involved), it still represents a vision of our city that is, for better or worse, long gone. Without talents like Katz and Hyuck taking the time and the money to make a movie, we might not have this record. Like much of what we have in our archive you never know how, if, or when something is going to be important until it is — and every once in a while, it also involves vampires!



TOP: A 1962 aerial shot of Culver Center, taken for a study conducted by the Culver City Planning Department.

ABOVE: *Messiah of Evil*, filmed in 1974, used Culver Center as a prominent film location.

CULVER CITY APPOINTS TOMÁS HERRERA-MISHLER AS DIRECTOR OF PRCS



Our new Director of Parks, Recreation & Community Services (PRCS) is Tomás Herrera-Mishler. He will help shape the future of Culver City's parks, recreation programs,

senior and social services, and community-centered initiatives. A seasoned executive and licensed Landscape Architect, Herrera-Mishler brings an extensive portfolio of major park, public landscape, and tourism planning projects.

MARK'S CHOICE

Taboo Topics on TV:
The Man Who Started It All

Andrew Fenady reveals the show that brought taboo topics to TV long before *60 Minutes* was on the air.

**YouTube @ CulverCityHistory:
search "Fenady Taboo Topics"**

Our YouTube channel
is becoming very popular!

In August, it had more than
70,000 views
and added over
800 new subscribers!

MEET COMMISSIONER VAN JOHNSON



We welcome Van Johnson, our newly-appointed commissioner of Cultural Affairs for Culver City. Van will be a great addition, and we look forward to working together!

MEMORY LANE



REMEMBERING PRONTO MARKET

Growing up on Jackson Avenue, my daily walk to St. Augustine School often included a stop at Pronto Market to stock up on some candy, such as Junior Mints and Sugar Babies and other snacks.

Pronto Market was the forerunner of Trader Joe's and was located, along with a few other businesses, in the footprint of the current One Culver building.

I remember spending one year making very quick stops at Pronto before

dashing home to watch my favorite program, *Dark Shadows*. As a teenager and an avid Agatha Christie fan, I could always purchase her paperbacks for just one dollar at Pronto Market.

In my mind's eye, when I look at the tallest building in downtown Culver City, I can still see good old Pronto Market.

— Mara Bommarito

IN MEMORIAM



Jeanne Conklin

We have lost a friend, member, and invaluable longtime volunteer of the Culver City Historical Society, Jeanne Conklin. Jeanne was a devoted Wife, Mother of two, Grandmother of two, Aunt, and wonderful friend. She always had a welcoming smile and a kind word for everyone.

Jeanne was born in San Francisco and grew up in Temple City where she met her husband Kenny of 64 years. She and Kenny settled on Albright Avenue in the early 70s, and in 1985 she met her dearest and best friend Tami Eskridge.

Jeanne and Tami walked this city every morning together for 30 years. You could always see them walking in a direction of a Starbucks or the Grand Casino Bakery. She volunteered with the Las Angelitas del

Pueblo near Olvera Street for many years before volunteering at the CCHS in 2008, becoming our Secretary.

Jeanne has had many roles in our Society. Many of you know her, as she would always be alongside Tami greeting at meetings. Jeanne was not only Secretary of the Society, but she was Membership Chair for the past 10 years. Whether she was sending a Welcome Letter or a Friendly Reminder, Jeanne knew who each of you were and cared about you. She was truly the spirit of this organization.

I met Jeanne and Tami in 2008 when I joined the Society. We became fast friends, and these two together gave me great support as VP of Programs and President. Jeanne is leaving a huge void in our Society and also in our hearts. Our condolences go out to her husband Kenny, her family, Tami and Chuck Eskridge and to all who knew her.

— Hope Parrish



On June 29, Earl Eskridge, a lifelong Culver City resident, passed away at the age of 98.

Born August 26, 1927, Earl was a dynamic member of this community since he came home from duty after WWII. He dedicated his life to his family, friends and Culver City. Earl was active in service clubs and organizations for over 80 years. With his love for sports and baseball, Earl began the CC Little League back in the 1950s. He worked at the 4th of July fireworks show presented by the Culver City Exchange Club for many years, from its inception.

His dedication to crafting beautiful flower arrangements made Culver City Flower Shop the go-to spot for many. Earl's dedication and service to Culver City will leave an enduring legacy for many years to come.



Earl Eskridge



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MARK YOUR CALENDAR

ARC OPEN SUNDAYS

1ST, 2ND, 3RD & 4TH SUNDAYS (CLOSED 5TH SUNDAYS); 12-3PM
October-December; Closed Nov. 29, Dec. 20 & 27
BEGINNING JANUARY 2027: OPEN 1ST & 3RD SUNDAYS ONLY

OCTOBER 10

CULVER CITY ARTS FESTIVAL
11am-7pm; Arts District

OCTOBER 10

LA AS SUBJECT – ARCHIVES BAZAAR CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY OF LA
10am-3pm; Golden Eagle Ballroom

OCTOBER 11-17

SISTER CITY DELEGATION VISIT
Young adults from Iksan City, South Korea visit Culver City

OCTOBER 27

CCHS GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING & PROGRAM
7pm; Veterans Memorial Building

DECEMBER 3

TREE LIGHTING: CITY OF CULVER CITY
5pm-8:30pm, Culver Steps

These fine Culver City area businesses support our work to preserve Culver City history for future generations. Show your support with your patronage of their services and products.

BENEFACTORS

Freeman Properties.....	Stuart Freeman	(310) 839-7593
Leonardo Wilborn	Leonardo Wilborn	
Meghan Sahli-Wells & Karim Sahli.....	The Sahli Family	
The Wende Museum.....	Justin Jampol	(310) 216-1600

CORPORATE & NON PROFIT SPONSORS

Culver City Exchange Club.....	Dr. Bob Montgomery	(310) 499-4840
The Culver Hotel.....	Melina Alunni	(310) 558-9400
History For Hire.....	Pam and Jim Elyea	(818) 765-7767
Sony Pictures Entertainment	Kristin Cavanaugh	(310) 244-5368
Marcus Accounting Services.....	Richard A. Marcus	(310) 721-9908

BUSINESS MEMBERS

Anne Tower Productions, Inc.....	Anne Tower	(310) 699-9261
Cavanaugh Realtors.....	Dannie Cavanaugh	(310) 837-7161
Culver City Downtown Business Assn.....	Darrel Menthe	(310) 202-6060
George Petrelli Famous Steaks	Marie Petrelli	(310) 902-5899
Göran Eriksson / Techtrans	Göran Eriksson	(310) 841-2901
JLF Appraisals & Estates.....	Joel and Linda Forman	(310) 837-7455
Ken Harada, D.D.S.....	Ken Harada	(310) 837-5121
Law Offices of Ronald K. Ziff	Ronald K. Ziff	(323) 342-2819
MHB Sports, Entm't & Advisory Svc.....	Marc Brodnax	(323) 864-4417
MJB Fine Homes & Realty.....	Melanie Brodnax	(310) 736-6224
OpulNet / OpulNet.com.....	Michael J. Lupo	(860) 951-2513
Richard S. Hibbs, C.P.A.....	Richard Hibbs	(310) 836-2029
Santa Maria BBQ	Jim Rodrigues	(310) 930-5174
Sorrento Italian Market.....	Albert Vera	(310) 391-7654
Steller & Skoog.....	Jack & Charlyn Barton	(714) 343-7756
Tower Insurance Associates	Janice Beighey	(310) 837-6101
Wells Fargo Home Mortgage.....	Jeff Cooper	(310) 344-8033



RENEW OR BECOME A MEMBER OF THE CULVER CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY TODAY!

Preserve the "Heart of Screenland" history – support the Culver City Historical Society Archives and Resource Center (ARC). We can't do it without you!

☐ NEW MEMBER ☐ RENEWAL

- ☐ Benefactor (\$1,000+)
- ☐ Corporate Sponsor (\$500)
- ☐ Family Lifetime Member (\$500)
- ☐ Individual Lifetime Member (\$300)
- ☐ Patron Member (\$100)
- ☐ Business Member (\$50)
- ☐ Family Member (\$35)
- ☐ Individual Member (\$25)
- ☐ Non Profit Organization (\$15)
- ☐ Youth Member (\$10)

Name/Company _____
Mailing Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____
Email _____ Phone _____
Voluntary Contribution to Museum Fund \$ _____
Voluntary Contribution to Julie Lugo Cerra Scholarship Fund \$ _____

Please indicate membership type and enclose your check payable to:
The Culver City Historical Society, P.O. Box 1356, Culver City, CA 90232
Or join online at CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org/membership

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