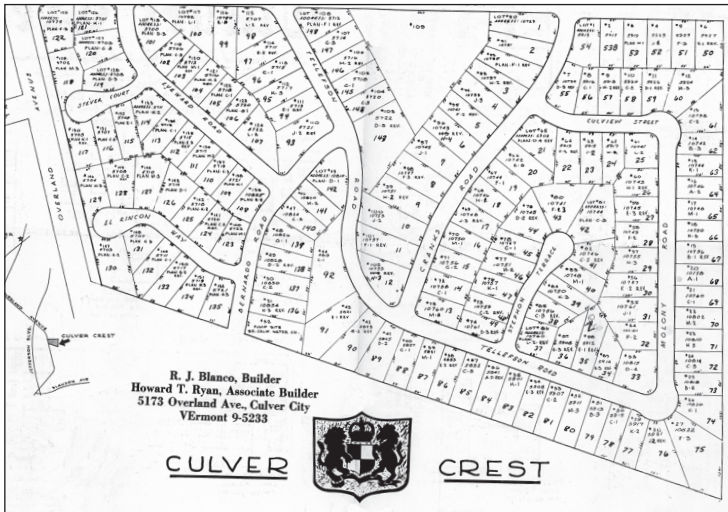




CULVER CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER VOL. 47 NO. 1

SPRING 2026



THE NAMES OF CULVER CREST

BY JAMES KISLINGBURY

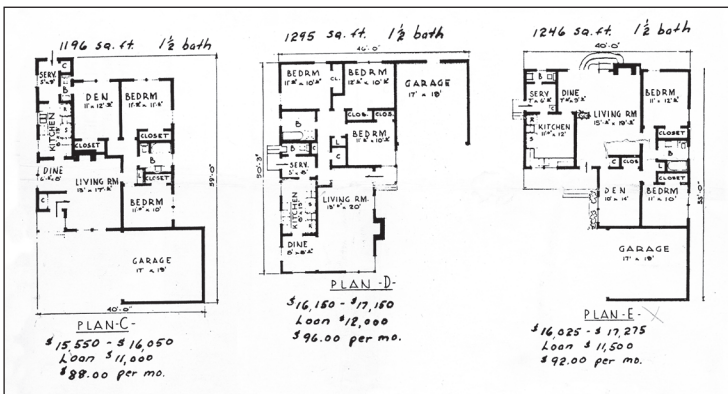
The story of Culver City has been one shaped by different figures over its history, and we see many of their names plastered across the city. There's Ince, Youngworth, Dixon, and the city's namesake, Culver. Two names perhaps under-discussed, considering their impact, are Lewis Astin Crank and R.J. Blanco.

Between 1952 and 1956 the pair — Crank, a businessman and developer with a somewhat colorful past, and Blanco, a veteran contractor — developed what would become the Culver Crest/Blanco Park neighborhoods. Culver Crest was a chic, postwar development, offering tract homes that were considered large for the time and provided a view of the city that no other property could. Blanco Park homes were modest and affordable for most.

For their efforts, Blanco, Crank, and their associates left their names throughout the city. There is, of course, Blanco Park on Sawtelle, as well as Cranks Road. There's also a handful of other notable names throughout the neighborhood, including Tellefson Road, named after Mike Tellefson, past city attorney, council member and mayor. Lugo Way honors the Lugo family, whose long history in the La Ballona Valley goes back to the days of the Spanish land grants.

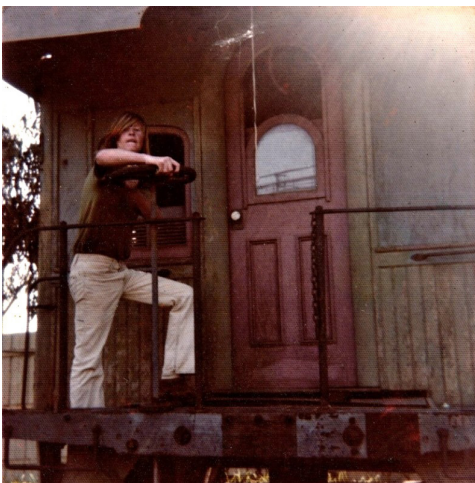
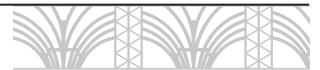
Perhaps most interesting are Esterina Way and Linda Way, named for Lewis's first wife Esther and daughter Linda

continued on inside page →



Lewis Crank's Loma Vista company developed 120 lots on the Crest, selling 20 lots at a time per year. The 13 predesigned floor plans (three shown above) ranged from 1,000-1,403 sq. ft. The homes were considered large for the era, and sat on 1/3-acre lots.

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING & PROGRAM



Phantom of the Backlots Secret Studio Tour Veterans Memorial Building Tuesday, April 28 @ 7PM

Donnie Norden, aka "Phantom of the Backlots," spent years secretly exploring behind the scenes of movie studios — literally. He is a longtime resident of Culver City and author of a popular book series which chronicles his real-life experiences on the studio backlots.

Donnie enjoyed a long career working for the studios, including over 30 years at

Universal. His obsession with the backlots, starting with MGM, goes back fifty years. It all started the day he found a hole in the fence. That day, that Donnie became a studio explorer, caretaker and, unknown to him at the time, historian.

Come join us for this free program and relive a chapter in Culver City's rich film history as Donnie shares his unique adventures, pictures and memorabilia from the MGM backlot during the 1970s. Let's go through "A Hole in the Fence." Shall we?

This event is free to the public.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Greetings fellow Culver City history lovers! Spring is upon us, and it is the season to spread the word about Culver City Historical Society and the many exciting events in our city.

We had a booth at the Screenland 5K, and another at the Culver City Book Festival at the Wende Museum on March 28th. In addition, we will have a booth on May 9th at the Culver City Auto Show.

At each one of these venues, we have a booth with a display of historical photos and our merchandise for sale. It is a wonderful opportunity to meet and talk to people and acquaint them with who the CCHS is and what we do.

Lots of people stop to ask questions about a variety of topics related to the movie industry and Culver City history in general. If Hope Parrish is around, they are sure to get a precise and detailed answer!

Also, we seek to recruit new CCHS members. We are going to have an exciting summer getting ready to work with the City to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Fiesta La Ballona. After all, if you want to know about our local history, look no farther than the Culver City Historical Society! The Fiesta itself has a fascinating history that we will be presenting during Fiesta weekend.

Our membership has been declining each year and we need the help of all our current members to help bolster our numbers. Members get so much for so little, like our quarterly programs and a newsletter packed full of information every season. Please think of someone you can invite to our next program in April, and we'll be sure to dazzle them!

Looking forward to seeing all of you at our next program, or as you stroll by our booth at one of the City events.

— 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

Andrew & Mallory Gier
Craig & Mary Schoenbaum

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Jack BommaritoPresident
Hope M. Parrish.....President Emeritus
Mark Morris...VP Programs/Media Archives
Maureen Fleming VP Museum
Currently VacantVP Development
Mara BommaritoSecretary
Carolyn Wispe Burns.....Treasurer
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Valerie Meyer Costumes Chair
Ron Peterson.....In-House Photographer
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Hope M. Parrish.....Historic Sites Chair
Andrew Weissman.....Government Liaison
Holly Strother Newsletter Designer

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Hope M. Parrish, Tami Eskridge,
Jeanne Conklin, Michael Potterton,
Dana Benton, Dennis Parrish,
Joshua Insel, Kate Ni, Steve Newton,
James Kisingbury, Kelly Stencil
and Susannah Mae Young

INTERNS

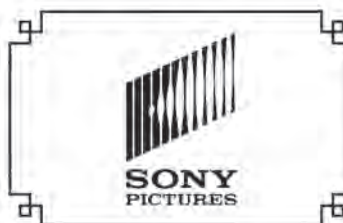
Sophia Vegas, Samanta Pandey,
Hailey Garcia, Josiah Joya
and Cole Fekert

GRACIOUS THANKS TO

The Harry H. Culver Family
The Freeman Family
The Eskridge Family
The Zermeno Family
The Machado Family
The Newton Family
The June Caldwell
The Pitti Family
The Lupe Smith/Ramos Family
The Tolkien Family
The Dan Coombs Family
The Bushnell Family
The Don Ericsson Family
The Henderson Family
The Goodwyn Family

The Society is honored to be caretakers of these families' keepsakes, along with the treasured items of other families. Thank you for trusting us with this history.
— Hope

WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE GENEROSITY OF



COSTUMES IN THE BUILDING



Have you seen me onscreen? This unidentified dress from our MGM collection is a stunner! The two-layered dress has a beige overdress with silver and gold beaded leaf design, raglan sleeves and drapes at back. The brick red inner dress has a tiny gold leaf pattern. In front, the shorter top beige layer has an arch hem; the longer bottom red layer has a tulip hem. Both layers extend to form a short train in the back. If you see this dress in an MGM film, please contact Valerie at: info@culvercityhistoricalsociety.org

HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS

Loyola Marymount University traces its origins back to St. Vincent's College for Boys, founded in 1865 by the Vincentian Fathers. The first classes were held in the Lugo Adobe House at the southeast end of Olvera Street in Los Angeles. Two years later, the school moved to Hill Street. In 1887, St. Vincent's College moved again to a new campus on Grand Avenue and Washington Boulevard.

When St. Vincent's College closed in 1911, members of the Society of Jesus opened the high school division of their newly founded Los Angeles College. Due to rapid growth, the college moved to Venice Blvd. in 1917. A year later the school was incorporated as Loyola College of Los Angeles. Graduate instruction began in 1920 with the foundation of a separate law school.

Real estate developer Harry H. Culver offered approximately 100 acres of land on the Del Rey Hills bluffs to Loyola College in October 1927, with the move taking place in 1928. The land was offered to establish a new campus in what is now the Westchester area of Los Angeles, provided the college built two major buildings within two years.

The school achieved university status one year later, becoming Loyola University of Los Angeles. Loyola University and



TOP: Lillian and Harry Culver, Archbishop Edward Hanna and Bishop John Cantwell attend the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Loyola University of Los Angeles campus, May 20, 1928.

BOTTOM: The 50' tall LMU letters on the Del Rey bluff facing Playa Vista.

Marymount College, partnered with St. Joseph College of Orange, began affiliation in 1968 and officially merged into Loyola Marymount University in 1973. The university's campus has since expanded to roughly 142 acres.

PAST PROGRAM



Junior Warden Sam Banister; Past Master Jason Berry; Current Worshipful Master Hayk Musheghyan; Culver City Historical Society President Jack Bommarito

Thank you to CC Foshay Lodge 467 for hosting a wonderful evening for our community and Society members. All marveled at the limestone hall built in 1928 and its amazing collection. Sitting in the Lodge's inner sanctum, we learned about the fascinating history of freemasonry in Culver City.

MARK'S CHOICE

Tales From
Behind the Cameras:
Movie Pioneers Tell All

bit.ly/4rQtCQR

from his second wife, Alungalelei Fifita. Esther Crank has her own connections to southern California history, as she was the sister (and alleged silent partner) of famed gambler/gangster/gadfly Tony Cornero.

“Tony the Hat” is best known for his role as the “admiral” of a small fleet of gambling ships that sailed on Santa Monica Bay in the early 1930s. Culver City comes back into the picture in 1946 when Edmund G. Brown (future attorney general and governor) alleged that LAC Chemicals on National Ave. was a front for an illegal distillery that was owned (in name only) by Lewis, Tony’s mother and one of his sisters.

These more salacious aspects of Crank’s youth shouldn’t overshadow the rest of his life. In 1945, Lewis Crank pur-

chased 30 acres of land from Grace Moore, opera star and MGM actress. The area atop the Baldwin Hills included a beautiful Mediterranean-style home built in 1928 by former Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate Leo V. Youngworth. Lewis and his wife Esther lived at the estate until 1954. When they moved to a new home, Crank sold the mansion to the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles. This would become Marycrest Manor.

Blanco went on to sponsor a local women’s softball team, while Crank got into equestrian sports and boat racing (he even re-used *Esterina* as the name of his boat). After raising their children, Lewis and second wife Alungalelei relocated to her native country. Lewis

passed away in 1990 and is buried in Kolovai, Tongatapu, Tonga alongside his wife.

Besides the neighborhood Lewis Crank helped build and name, another nod to his legacy is his children, residents of Culver City for many years.

This is by no means a complete collection of our city streets, or even those of Culver Crest/Blanco Park, but it is a healthy reminder that history is often something we take for granted. At least in this case, somebody was kind enough to attach a name to it.

R.J. Blanco and other significant figures of Culver City history will be detailed in future columns.

SPOTLIGHT

A COMMON ARTISTIC VISION BETWEEN TWO MEN



Original 1928 sketches of Harry H. Culver Company's proposed plans for the art and crafts center's twenty-acre site on Coombs Avenue.

the building of nineteen schools which will represent almost every of learning, ranging from different music schools – violin, voice and piano – dramatic school, dancing academies, everyday grade schools to the Lutheran & Loyola universities that are to be built west of Culver City in the Del Rey Hills.”

Harry’s vision came to a sudden halt, and the reasons are unclear. Postwar, this section became a single-family neighborhood.

As Justin Jampol, founder of the Wende Cold War Museum, was just beginning his quest for an arts and cultural center, I had to share my finding with him. A century ago, a man with a vision knew the importance for higher education and the arts in our city.

Today, a hundred years later, Justin Jampol has given our city a wonderful museum space with gardens, reinventing the VFW space into the Glorvyn Kaufman Arts Center for all to enjoy. Coincidence? I think not.

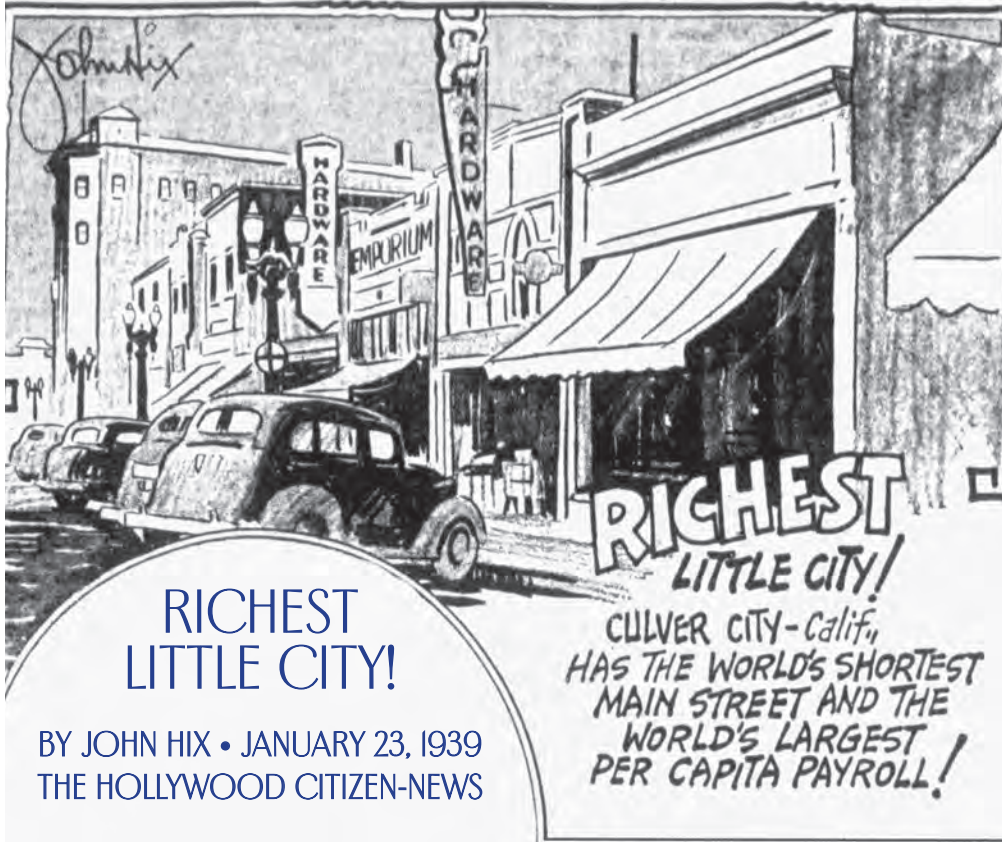
I came across an article written February 5, 1928. Its headline read: *Arts Center Projected*.

“Involving more than \$500,000, an educational and art center consisting of 20 studios and shops to be announced for immediate construction by the Harry H. Culver Company on a twenty-acre site a short distance off Culver Boulevard on Coombs Avenue southwest of Culver City. The announcement was made

by Earl D. Eastham, general sales director of the company.

The new development, which will be at the entrance of the Culver Company’s “University Gateway Tract” will only be a short distance from the business section of Culver City. Overland Boulevard will connect the art and craft center with the older business district. Plans are about completed for

CULVER'S CORNER



RICHEST LITTLE CITY!

BY JOHN HIX • JANUARY 23, 1939
THE HOLLYWOOD CITIZEN-NEWS

“Although Culver City Calif, has but 8000 population, its payroll runs well into 32 Million dollars each year – an average of \$4000 for each man, woman and child.

Only 3.27 square miles in area, Culver City contains a number of large Motion Picture Studios employing thousands of

persons many of whom reside in Los Angeles, Hollywood and other adjacent communities. Just as strange is the fact that Culver City’s Main St. is credited with being the shortest in the world, extending only 325 feet!”



Introducing our Historical Society volunteers: **Kelly Stencel, Susannah Mae Young, and Cole Fekert.** They represented the Culver City Historical Society at the Screenland 5K!

Congratulations to Mike Cohen and all the Screenland 5K volunteers and participants for making the 10th annual 5K another great success!



Congratulations to Coach Rick Prieto!

You deserve every bit of this!

GO CENTAURS!

ANNIVERSARIES

1916

- Culver Grammar opens with two bungalows at what is 9441 Culver Blvd.
- Culver City Parent Teacher Assoc. (PTA) formed by Mrs. Dan Coombs and the Principal.

1936

- Our current City Seal was adopted. It includes our new City flower, the Lantana, chosen by our Woman’s Club (Est.1920)



1946

- RKO purchases 40 acres after a long lease with the City.

1956

- Culver City Municipal Court opens on Overland (now a bioscience lab).

1966

- Kaizuka, Japan and Culver City began their partnership as Sister Cities.

1976

- America celebrates 200 years.
- Hope, Mara, Beverly and Margie graduate from Culver High. (Just seeing if you were actually reading this. HA!)

1986

- MGM’s Main Lot (Lot One) is sold to Lorimar Productions.
- Leo the Lion gets raised on top of the Filmland Building (now One Culver).

2006

- The Bone Yard Dog Park opens.

2016

- Culver City begins its year-long celebration for our City’s Centennial in 2017.



P.O. Box 1356
 Culver City, CA 90232
 info@CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org
 (310) 253-6941

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

ARC OPEN SUNDAYS

1ST, 2ND, 3RD & 4TH SUNDAYS; 12-3PM
 April-June; Closed Easter Sunday

APRIL

CULVER CITY SISTER CITY WATER WHEEL CEREMONY
 Details to be announced

MAY 3

A TASTE OF CULVER CITY
 2pm-5pm; Culver Studios Front Lawn

MAY 9

EXCHANGE CLUB: CULVER CITY CAR SHOW
 9am-3pm; Downtown Culver City

JUNE 7

JAVA GALA: 30 YEARS OF AVPA
 6-8pm; The Wende Museum

JULY 4

AMERICA CELEBRATES 250 YEARS
 Happy Birthday!

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

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 Sony Pictures Entertainment.....Kristin Cavanaugh (310) 244-5368
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Anne Tower Productions, Inc.....Anne Tower (310) 699-9261
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 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
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 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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