



Culver City Historical Society Newsletter



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Remembering Hal Roach – “The King of Comedy”

By Marc Wanamaker

One of Culver City's lost landmarks was the Hal Roach Studios, originally located at 8822 West Washington Blvd. (at the corner of Washington & National Blvd.) In 1980 the site was marked with a historical plaque as one of the City's most famous and important studios.

The Hal Roach Company was formed in 1914 and had leased several studio sites in the Los Angeles area until finally settling in Culver City. The original name for Roach's company was “Rolin”, named after Hal Roach and financial backer Dan Linthicum.

After a couple of company closures, Roach's friend, comedian Harold Lloyd, became the fledgling studios lead actor, ensuring the small company's success.

In 1920, Hal Roach formed a new company called “Hal Roach studios” and a new era began. At this time, Harold Lloyd, Charley Chase and Snub Pollard were among the top stars of the company.

By April 1920, the studio consisted of the administration building on Washington Blvd., one large open

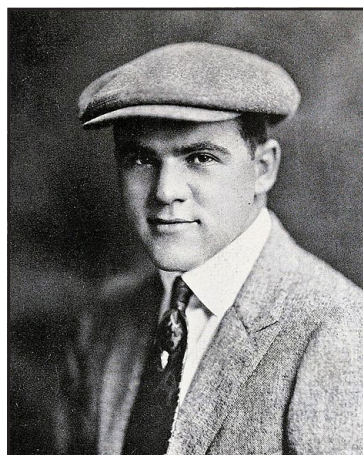
stage, an enclosed stage, a set storage building, a laboratory and department bungalows. There was a back lot with various types of sets that were used over and over again. By May, there was a “pool” water tank installed and some other departmental buildings.

In January of 1922, actress Ruth Roland was making Roach “serial chapter plays” while a new concrete stage was being built. In September, the first of “Our Gang” comedies was produced and by 1923, famed vaudevillian Will Rogers was signed to star in a series of comedies.

Throughout the 1920's such stars as Laurel and Hardy, Charley Chase, Will Rogers, Max Davidson, Snub Pollard, and Our Gang dominated the Roach output, along with Harold Lloyd until he

left the company in 1924.

In May of 1923, Hal Roach purchased a 10-acre ranch near the studio at what is now Robertson Blvd, where he shot films on “location”.



Hal Roach employed a variety of ‘actors’, including the star of one of his films: The Devil Horse (1926) starring Rex “The Wonder Horse”. And it was in September of 1926 that Laurel and Hardy were officially teamed for the film, Duck Soup.

By January 1927, all Roach productions were distributed by MGM Studios, making the Hal Roach Studio the comedy unit of MGM. With the coming of sound pictures, the Hal Roach Company was in the forefront of sound technology and all Roach filmed became ‘sound’ pictures, made in newly constructed ‘sound’ stages.

Continue on page 4.

Upcoming Program

General Membership Meeting, Elections, and Program:

Marc Wanamaker presents: HAL ROACH STUDIOS

Multipurpose Room, Veterans Memorial Building, Tuesday, October 22th at 7PM

One hundred and four years ago The HAL ROACH COMEDY COMPANY opened a studio at Washington and National Boulevards. This studio was known as “The Lot that Laughter Built” where such screen icons as **Harold Lloyd, Our Gang, Laurel and Hardy, Charlie Chase** and other comedy stars made Culver City their home. The Roach studio opened in 1920 and closed in 1959 almost a forty-year run as one of the most successful comedy studios in film history. During WWII the studio was converted into a military facility from 1943-1948 making training films. After the war, the studio entered the world of Television. The overall mission for Roach was to nurture talent and its star players, that spent the prime of their careers on this Culver Lot. The Roach Studios turned out genuinely original material such as the screwball classic *Topper* (1937), and the serious story *Of Mice and Men* (1940), followed by *One Million B.C.* (1940). Join us as Marc Wanamaker presents **The Hal Roach Studio** and the legacy it left as one of the most famous film studios in film history, which took place in Culver City.

President's Message



Dear Members, Sponsors, and Friends,
Well, as 2024 is winding down, and we move into Fall, we will have our Elections of Officers at the next General Membership meeting, in preparation for the changing of the guard in January.

Here are your Officer Nominees. **For President** – Jack Bommarito, **Co-Treasurers** – Beverly Peterson / Caroline Wispe Burns, **Secretary** – Mara Bommarito. We still have 2-3 positions that need filling to complete the Officers on the board. I hope that within our membership we have some volunteers. **VP – Programs** as many know Dennis is stepping down. If you like to uncover local history and meet local historians, this might be

for you. We need to continue our quarterly programs. **Co-VP's of Development**, which is fundraising and finding new items for our stores department. Non- Officer's positions available: Newsletter Content editor. Membership Chair. Docents to assist in the museum and with downtown tours. If you are interested, please reach out to our nomination committee at info@culvercityhistoricalsociety.org. We would love to hear from you.

October brings continued 100th-year celebrations. The NEW Culver Theater will be screening many MGM movie classics every Monday night until the end of the year.

Let us not forget the Culver Hotel which celebrated its 100th year, on September 4th. I think Maya and her team have some fun things up their sleeves! See both of their websites for more information.

We want to thank the Class of 1974 for including a stop at the Historical Society, for their 50th Class Reunion weekend. We love it when the room is filled with Culver High Grads!!

We want to thank Robert Greening for his very generous donation of Helms Bakery photo albums, framed photos, and plaques, that were his father, Harvey's. We immediately put it on display.

We are thrilled our new friend Dean Ericsson is donating many of his father Don Ericsson's personal items to the Collection. Dean is also the grandson of Dan Patacchia! Dean has also offered, Dan's scrapbooks and personal memorabilia from his time working within our city to the Collection.

Hope M. Parrish



Dennis Parrish-VP Programs, Hope Parrish, Eve Mott-CCHS Intern, Alexandria Abramian, Eve's very proud Mother!

Dennis, with the assistance of our two lovely interns Eve Mott and Maren Brown, worked very hard on their presentation of the Culver Hotel. The room was filled with guests wanting to hear all that they uncovered. Sadly, Maren caught a cold and was unable to present with Eve. Both ladies are off to college. We wish them all the best!

You can view this on our YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/X6anzvDVgPY?si=crYmftp53bHxuxUT>

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.

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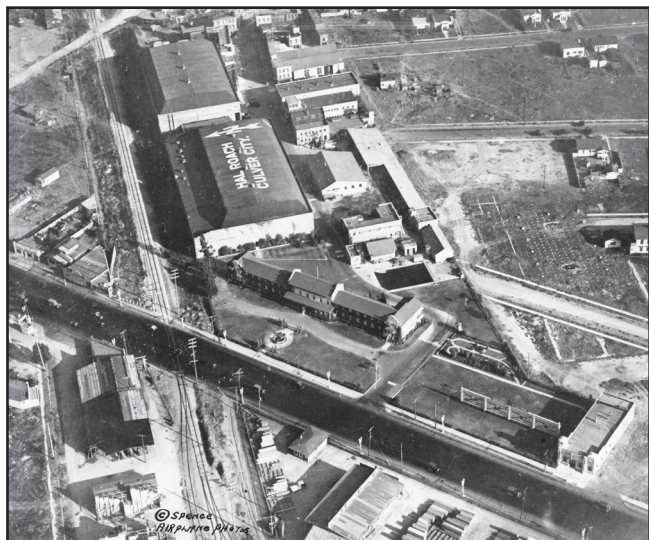
INMEMORIAM

Carlos Lugo
Roberta Marsh
John Riordan
George York

OTHER WAYS TO DONATE

If you are a Ralphs shopper and have an online account you can designate the Culver City Historical Society as your "Community Contribution."
Every dollar counts! www.ralphs.com/i/community/community-contribution-program

REMEMBERING HAL ROACH (CONT.)



Hal Roach Studio – 1928 – Phase one.
You can see part of the P&E Camp across the street with
the railroad tracks where the Shay Hotel is today.



Hal Roach Studio – 1959 – Doubled in size.
This aerial, taken 3 years before it closed for good.

The 1930's was the golden era for the Roach Studios with a star line-up that included some of the most popular comedians around: Laurel and Hardy, Charley Chase, Our Gang, Harry Langdon, Thelma Todd, Patsy Kelly and Zasu Pitts.

In 1937, Roach began producing "A" class feature films, the first being the classic Topper, starring Constance Bennett and Carey Grant. By the end of the 1930's, Roach had produced such films as: Zenobia starring Oliver Hardy, Captain Fury with June Lang, Of Mice and Men starring Burgess Meredith and Lon Chaney Jr., and the Housekeeper's daughter with Joan Bennett.

The Roach Studios continued making feature films into the 1940's until the Army-Air Force took over the entire lot, nicknaming it "Fort Roach. Here, training and propaganda films were made by many of the popular set, including a popular young actor named Ronald Reagan.

Following the war, the Roach Studio resumed its feature film production activity with the construction of new stages and facilities. Other production companies also located on the lot. Hal Roach Jr. led the company into television production, over seeing such productions as Life with Father – The Stu Erwin Show, My Little Margie, Rocket Squad, Amos 'N' Andy, Screen Directors Playhouse, Blondie, Abbott and Castello and The Lone Ranger.

In April of 1959, the Hal Roach Studios was closed due to bankruptcy. Hal Sr. came back to try to get the studio rolling again, but by December of 1962, the studio was permanently closed. In August 1963, the studio was finally demolished after several auctions and sales of the company's assets.

Though Hal Roach Sr. would live to see his 100th birthday, the final demise of his "Laugh Factory" was truly the end of a remarkable era of film history.

THANK YOU TO



FOR THEIR DONATION!

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Mark's Video of the Season: Watch *Halloween Spooktacular Festival -1996* at
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uki264leiGY>



Thank you, Stephanie DaVall & Culver City's PRCS team for suggesting our collaboration for "Movies in the park" – The Wizard of Oz!!! It was such a fun event; we would love to do it again! If you missed this past summer's series, keep an eye out for next summer's lineup!

Costumes in the Building



This costume came with our MGM Collection. Valerie needs your help with who designed the costume, who wore it, and the film it may have been featured in. Anyone who comes up with the identification will win a book of their choice!



August 1980: Scott Carpenter (Mercury 7 Astronaut), Baby Nick, Daughter Maria, Wife Lucille, Hal, Grandson Matt holding Grandpa's hand, Justin, Daughter Jeannie, & Daughter Kathleen Bridget

If you have ever wondered why there is a marker under the Magical Ficus tree at National and Washington here is the dedication day photo. This Plaque is important to our Film community, "The Sons of the Desert" our film History especially when telling the story of Culver City. We cannot forget the importance of Hal Roach and his contribution to the Motion Picture Industry and Culver City.

Spotlight



Pedro Gonzalez Gonzalez (May 24, 1925 – February 6, 2006)

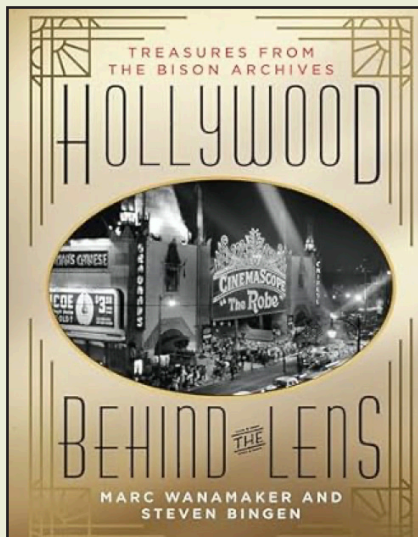
Pedro, his wife Leandra (of nearly 64 years) and their three children were longtime Culver City Residents.

Upon seeing Pedro's highly amusing appearance on Groucho Marx's "You Bet Your Life" John Wayne signed Pedro to a contract with his production company. Pedro appeared alongside the Duke in such films as Wings of the Hawk, The High and the Mighty, The Wings of Eagles, Rio Bravo, McLintock!, Hellfighters and Chisum.

Pedro became one of the era's few recognized Mexican Americans on the big screen and television and influenced stars like Cheech Marin and Cuba Gooding Jr. to pursue careers in acting. Mayor Richard Riordan awarded Pedro with a Certificate of Appreciation for the Latinos in Hollywood. He was also posthumously awarded a very well-deserved Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Su espíritu encantador sigue vivo en nuestros corazones. ¡Gracias Pedro!

Culver's Corner



Hollywood Behind the Lens

By Marc Wanamaker and Steven Bingen

"Los Angeles is a city that runs from its own past" explains Historian and Bison Archives owner Marc Wanamaker. Many of Hollywood's legendary sets and props, mansions, theaters, restaurants, nightclubs, hotels, and even the studios and the films they produced are now either gone or have been redeveloped, repurposed, or remade beyond recognition. Even more disarmingly, the physical ephemera associated with such items is often MIA as well. Photographs, files, maps, documents, menus, production paperwork, records, manuscripts, everything from matchbooks to movie magazines, and entire movie backlots have now been lost in the backwash of dubious progress, short-sighted corporate mindsets, and civic indifference. Fortunately, for the last fifty years, in the very epicenter of Hollywood, thanks to Wanamaker, there has existed a haven where over 70,000 of these items, physically or photographically, have been collected and protected. These artifacts tell the story of Hollywood's glorious past, as well as its uncertain future as the hub of filmmaking in America.



Valerie Meyer & Hope enjoying a day at the small book fair, hosted by Jennifer Caspar of the Village Well and our Culver City Arts Foundation. Thank you to Justin Jampol for providing the Wende Patio for this wonderful event!



Museum Archive Team - Annie Mahlik, Jeanne Conklin & Tami Eskridge, (Elizabeth Voncannon – not shown).
Your efforts are what keep our Society running!
We appreciate you all so much!

Historical Highlight



Stan Laurel, Hal Roach, and Oliver Hardy

We have to appreciate Hal Roach and his vision without it, Laurel and Hardy most likely would have never existed.
He is the genius behind this team!!



Dennis & Hope had a lovely visit with June Caldwell and her daughter Karen. June's office is like an MGM Museum!! We are all very excited to share June's 100th Birthday this coming December.

Watch June share her stories about her days at MGM:
https://youtu.be/zVIHi1L_UWI?si=6UJ0m6HHXEx6pGf5



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

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

ARC OPEN DATES: 1st and 3rd Sundays, 1–3PM

Oct. 6th and 20th, Nov. 3rd and 17th, Dec. 1st and 15th

October 4th: Titos Fiesta Mexicana

Titos Tacos on Washington

October 5th: Culver City Art Walk & Roll

Arts District, 11AM - 7PM

October 10th – 13th: Lone Pine Film Festival

Lone Pine, California

October 19th: LA as Subject

USC, Doheney Library, 10AM - 3PM

November 14th – 17th: AVPA Theater - "Puffs"

Kirk Douglas Theater, 7PM - 9PM

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Show your support by your patronage of their services and products.

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Renew or Become a Member of the Culver City Historical Society Today!

Join others in preserving the history of the "Heart of Screenland" and support the Culver City Historical Society Archives and Resource Center (ARC). We can't preserve local history without you!

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