As we celebrate Culver City’s Centennial, it’s natural to wonder how the city came to be, and what it was like before 1917.

A quick history of pre-incorporated Culver City: Home to the Gabrieliños (née Tongva) native peoples, it was part of the ranchos that subdivided present-day Los Angeles County in the early 1800s. Barley, beans, and grapes were the major cash crops, along with cattle and horses, but soon motion pictures became the city’s industry. Harry Culver had already pinpointed the area that would make his real estate fortunes due to it being halfway between downtown Los Angeles and Abbot Kinney’s “Venice of America” seaside resort, with the Pacific Electric Railway “Short Line” depot at Venice and Bagley Avenue already in place, and announced his plans for a city at the California Club on July 22, 1913. Then Culver famously saw Thomas Ince filming a Western along Ballona Creek, convinced Ince to move his studio from Pacific Palisades to Washington Blvd. and Jasmine in 1915 where the colonnades of Ince Triangle Studios still stand, and “The Heart of Screenland” was off and running.

To hear the Los Angeles Evening Herald tell it, the impetus for Harry Culver to seek a vote of incorporation for his new city wasn’t to found a city bearing his name, to make his fortune, or to improve his standing in the region. Instead, it was the birth of his daughter.

Please 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!

Business Member Roster

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

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The Culver Studios.................................Michael Godfather (310) 202-1234
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Please check type of membership and enclose your check payable to:
The Culver City Historical Society, P.O. Box 3428, Culver City, CA 90231-3428

Voluntary Contribution to Museum Fund $ ________________

Very soon after Culver City was incorporated in 1917, the Culver City Fire Department was created to protect the city’s citizens and their property. Our program will feature Culver City’s Fire Chief David L. White who will speak about today’s Fire Department and offer a PowerPoint presentation of its history.

The public is invited to this free program. The entrance to the ARC is from the back parking lot.

The Archives will be open that evening for you to come and see the latest exhibits.

Benefactor ($1,000)
Corporate Sponsor ($500)
Family Lifetime Member ($300)
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Business Member ($50)
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Renewal
In early May, the Society accepted a proclamation from the Culver City Council in recognition of Historic Preservation Month. The National Trust for Historic Preservation’s theme this year is “This Place Matters,” which perfectly describes our feelings about “The Heart of Screenland” as we celebrate our Centennial year. (Jeremy Green)

Our April 19 General Meeting and Program paid tribute to the Freeman family, whose businesses have been an integral part of Culver City’s downtown for 90 years. Stu Freeman, a local businessman and past president of the Culver City Historical Society, and his sister, Sandra Wager, proudly show their family pictured in the background.

(Photos by Sandra Wager)
While we “suffered” through a cold winter, I received a most interesting email. (Much more interesting than the usual post-holidays 50% off code from The Gap). Former mayor Paul Jacobs recently met someone whom he wanted us to meet, a collector of letters. This gentleman had a letter that he thought would be of interest to us. Intrigued, Vice President of the ARC/Museum, Art Litman, and Historic Sites chair, Julie Lugo Cerra, and I agreed to meet them both at the ARC on a Sunday afternoon.

Once we were all seated around our worktable, Art set the video on his phone to record and we were off, asking Dennis Shapiro a myriad of questions— from what types of letters he collects (he has amassed letters from U.S. presidents #1 through #44) to how he is connected to Culver City (his son is a prominent rabbi, as we’ll get to meet them both at the ARC on a Sunday afternoon).

Intrigued, Vice President of the ARC/Museum, Art Litman, and Historic Sites chair, Julie Lugo Cerra, and I agreed to meet Dennis Shapiro—a member of the Shapiro family in Culver City on a permanent basis, as Zach is the rabbi at Temple Akiba. His parents seasonally spend time on this coast. We encourage you to come into the Archives to see this amazing letter in person. An excerpt is shown here only to whet your appetite to visit the Archives to see this amazing letter in person. An excerpt is shown here only to whet your appetite to visit the Archives to see this amazing letter in person.

The letter in question included a letter based on its content, not just on signature below. Mr. Shapiro stated that he evaluates whether to collect a letter based on its content, not just on signature below. Mr. Shapiro stated that he evaluates whether to collect a letter based on its content, not just on signature below.) Mr. Shapiro then into reading a couple of amusing passages out loud, as a one Mr. Culver encouraged Mr. Warren Doane from the Hal Roach Studio to forward a petition out loud, as a one Mr. Culver encouraged Mr. Warren Doane from the Hal Roach Studio to forward a petition

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Answer: The fonts/script came from the lettering on the landmark tower and neon sign of the 1947 Culver Theatre, which is now the Kirk Douglas Theatre.

Notes From Your City Historian
By Julie Lugo Cerra

The Culver CityBus Will Celebrate 90 Years

Although Harry Culver’s early ads boasted “All Roads Lead to Culver City,” one needed transportation around the town after arrival. By the late 1920s, the Evening Star News pointed out a drawback in the system as the “burdensome rates charged by the Pacific Electric.” Mayor Reve Houck, after exploring options, announced that the city, under a provision of the state constitution, could operate its own transportation service! Mayor Houck and the Board of Trustees, recognizing the need for inexpensive public transportation, brought to life the second oldest municipally-owned bus line in the state of California! On March 3, 2018, Culver City will have provided 90 years of continuous bus service to its citizens. According to his daughter, Alene Houck Johnson, Mayor Houck was very concerned that the rented buses might be sabotaged. Legend has it that Houck then financed the first bus. Bus transportation was enthusiastically supported by the community that voted for a bond to finance our own municipal bus line!

In celebration of our Centennial, your Culver City Historical Society was delighted to work with Culver CityBus by furnishing a choice of vintage photos for a Centennial “bus wrap,” and for their Limited Edition Centennial TAP (transit access pass) card!
Harry H. Culver, our city founder. Culver City was incorporated on September 20, 1917.
(Culver City Historical Society Collection)

Downtown Culver City looking east. The Hull Building is pictured in the foreground and the Culver Hotel can be seen in the background. Traffic begins!
(Culver City Historical Society Collection)

Helm's Bakers drivers line up to deliver fresh baked goods from their bakery, which was located on Venice Boulevard. In 1932 Helms provided bread for the Olympic Village in Baldwin Hills. The electric sign still on the rooftop of this building features the five rings of the Olympic logo. Today these buildings are filled with popular restaurants and shops.
(Culver City Historical Society Collection)

This building served as the Culver City Library until the early 1970s when a new Los Angeles County Library was built at 4975 Overland Avenue. It then became Culver City’s first Senior Center and now is home to the Culver City Teen Center.
(Culver City Historical Society Photo Collection)

The Culver Theatre opened in 1947 in “The Heart of Screenland.” Today this building houses the Kirk Douglas Theatre, and continues to bring entertainment to surrounding communities.
(Culver City Historical Society Collection)

The first La Ballona Fiesta participants in front of City Hall. The fiesta was founded as a celebration of local heritage by the Culver City Chamber of Commerce.
(Culver City Historical Society Collection)

Robert Frost Auditorium is completed at the secondary school site.
(Architectural Resource Group)

The city’s four entries in the Rose Parade: 1985 “Premier;” 1986 “Kings of Comedy” (awarded the Theme Trophy); 1987 “Movie Magic;” and 1988 “Fantasy on Film” (awarded the Director’s Trophy) conveyed to the world that Culver City is “The Heart of Screenland.”

Our new City Hall at 8710 Culver Boulevard is dedicated.
(City of Culver City)

The 94-foot high “Rainbow Sculpture” is unveiled at Sony Pictures Studios as part of Culver City’s Public Art program. This eye-catching sculpture by Multimedia artist Tony Tasset pays homage to 1939’s “The Wizard of Oz,” filmed on the Sony lot when it was M-G-M.
(Sony Pictures Entertainment)
1917
Harry H. Culver, our city founder. Culver City was incorporated on September 25, 1917. (Culver City Historical Society Collection)

1920s
Downtown Culver City looking east. The Hull Building is pictured in the foreground and the Culver Hotel can be seen in the background. Traffic begins! (Culver City Historical Society Collection)

1930s
Helms Bakeries drivers line up to deliver fresh baked goods from their bakery, which was located on Venice Boulevard. In 1932 Helms provided bread for the Olympic Village in Baldwin Hills. The electric sign still on the rooftop of this building features the five rings of the Olympic logo. Today these buildings are filled with popular restaurants and shops. (Culver City Historical Society Collection)

1940s
The Culver Theatre opens in 1947 in “The Heart of Screenland.” Today this building houses the Kirk Douglas Theatre, and continues to bring entertainment to surrounding communities. (Culver City Historical Society Collection)

1950s
The first La Ballona Fiesta participants in front of City Hall. The fiesta was founded as a celebration of local heritage by the Culver City Chamber of Commerce. (Culver City Historical Society Collection)

1960s
Robert Frost Auditorium is completed at the secondary school site. (Architectural Resource Group)

1970s
This building served as the Culver City Library until the early 1970s when a new Los Angeles County Library was built at 4975 Overland Avenue. It then became Culver City’s first Senior Center and now is home to the Culver City Teen Center. (Culver City Historical Society Photo Collection)

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2017
Centennial logo. Happy Birthday, Culver City! (Culver City Centennial Celebration Committee)

1990s
Our new City Hall at 9710 Culver Boulevard is dedicated. (City of Culver City)

2000s
The 94-foot high “Rainbow sculpture” is unveiled at Sony Pictures Studios as part of Culver City’s Public Art program. This eye-catching sculpture, by Multimedia artist Tony Tasset, pays homage to 1939’s “The Wizard of Oz,” filmed on the Sony lot when it was M-G-M. (Sony Pictures Entertainment)
A Very Generous Gift

By Michelle Bernardin

While we ‘suffered’ through a cold winter, I received a most interesting email. (Much more interesting than the usual post-holidays 50% off code from The Gap.) Former mayor Paul Jacobs recently met someone whom he wanted us to meet, a collector of letters. This gentleman had a letter that he thought would be of interest to us. Intrigued, Vice President of the ARC/Museum, Art Litman, and Historic Sites chair, Julie Lugo Cerra, and I agreed to meet them both at the ARC on a Sunday afternoon.

Once we were all seated around our worktable, Art set the video on his phone to record and we were off, asking Dennis Shapiro a myriad of questions – from what types of letters he collects (he has amassed letters from U.S. presidents #1 through #44) to how he is connected to Culver City (his son is a prominent rabbi, as we’ll get to below). Mr. Shapiro stated that he evaluates whether to collect a letter based on its content, not just on signature quality as one might expect. The letter in question included Harry Culver’s signature, but also our founding father’s personality. Mr. Shapiro spoke very passionately about his 30-year hobby, but we know it’s much more than just an interest. It usually is. A very special man, indeed.

At the very end of the conversation, we thanked him for coming in to show us this remarkable letter. He then very proudly said that on behalf of his family, he would like to give the letter to the Historical Society. (I think I might have hugged him a little too hard.) This is the first letter signed by Harry Culver to enter into the Society’s collection. A very special letter, indeed.

Dennis Shapiro generously gifted the letter to the Society in the name of his son, Rabbi Zachary Shapiro, his wife, Susan, and himself. All three were our guests at the April 19 General Meeting and Program, where they officially presented their gift to the membership and could be publicly thanked. I was able to cajole Rabbi Shapiro into reading a couple of amusing passages out loud, as a one Mr. Culver encouraged Mr. Warren Doane from the Hal Roach Studio to forward a petition for better mail delivery. History does repeat itself. A very special evening, indeed.

We are very lucky to have a member of the Shapiro family in Culver City on a permanent basis, as Zach is the rabbi at Temple Akiba. His parents seasonally spend time on this coast. We encourage you to come into the Archives to see this amazing letter in person. An excerpt is shown here only to whet your appetite to visit and take in the wit of Mr. Culver.

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We have also worked out a free public bus tour for the September 16, 2017, Birthday Party in the Park led by Culver City Historical Society docents you probably know! You might even meet a Culver family descendant on the ride! We have a history of doing tours with the city for the Fiesta in earlier times. Check our website for details at www.CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org or call our information line at (310) 253-6941.

Today, Culver CityBus boards approximately 5.8 million passengers each year for safe rides on its fleet of compressed natural gas (CNG) buses. In 2012, the City of Culver City was named the 3rd Best Municipal Fleet in North America out of 38,000 public fleets.

Question: Do you know why the CulverCityBus logo is so recognizable? (answer below)

Special Thanks to Art Ida and Dia Turner of CCBus for their help.

Join us – Be a part of the fun!

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Dear Members and Friends, Happy Summer!

I haven’t shared many personal moments through this public letter, but since our last newsletter was published, I became a homeowner. This does not amount to much for the purposes of typical President Messages, other than the pathways of homeownership and historic preservation intersected with this purchase and it was an interesting test of my beliefs. The irony does not go unnoticed that May was national Historic Preservation Month. If you are interested in hearing more of my tale, come sit by me, and I’ll have a story to share.

We hope you enjoy this expanded newsletter issue, celebrating our Centennial. Please enjoy the photos, and additional articles. (Extra points will be given if you notice the new subtle changes to our newsletter design.)

As we celebrate the 100th birthday of our city’s incorporation, please calendar Saturday afternoon, September 16. We will bring back the Society’s historic bus tours that used to happen during Fiesta La Ballona. While the Culver City Centennial Committee’s 100th Birthday Party in Vets Park will be going on from 11am to 3pm, we will have our tours at designated times. Visit our website: www.CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org/bustours for updated information. Tickets will be free, and there might be surprise guests! We are grateful to partner with the city’s Transportation Department to bring this tour back for the birthday party.

Visit our website and like or follow us on the social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) to stay connected with us! As always, thank you for supporting our Historical Society! We cannot do this without you.

#ThisPlaceMatters

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Continued on page 7

UPCOMING EVENTS

July 19, 2017 General Meeting and Program
The History of the Culver City Fire Department
Multipurpose Room, Veterans Memorial Building, 7PM

Very soon after Culver City was incorporated in 1917, the Culver City Fire Department was created to protect the city’s citizens and their property. Our program will feature Culver City’s Fire Chief David L. White who will speak about today’s Fire Department and offer a PowerPoint presentation of its history. The public is invited to this free program. The entrance to the ARC is from the back parking lot. The Archives will be open that evening for you to come and see the latest exhibits.

Culver City Fire Finds Itself
By Ryan Vincent

Open land in 1914, once occupied by ranchos.
(Culver City Historical Society Collection)

A headline on August 13, 1917, in the Herald read,
Increase Culver City Population by 1;
Ask Incorporation.

“That the population of Culver City had increased over night from 500 to 581 and that this was the main reason for the petition for incorporation of Culver City as a city of the sixth class, was the unique plea of Harry S. Culver to the board of county supervisors today. The increase in the population, Mr. Culver announced, was a new Culver, Miss Patricia by name and one day old.”