



# CULVER CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

Volume 38, No. 3  
Summer 2017

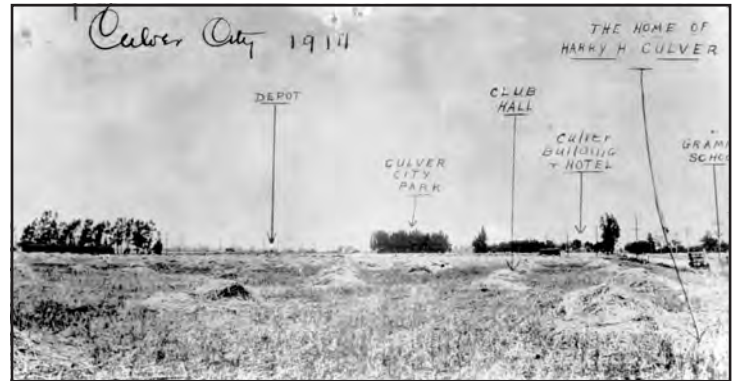
### Culver City Finds Itself

By Ryan Vincent

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.



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 560 to 561 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."

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.



Fire Chief David L. White  
(Culver City Fire Department)

# YOUR PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Michelle Bernardin



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](http://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 your Historical Society! We cannot do this without you.

#ThisPlaceMatters



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 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.

## Newsletter Editor

Joy Jacobs

## OFFICERS & COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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Stu Freeman, Immediate Past President

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Julie Lugo Cerra, Historic Sites Chair

Jeanne Conklin, Membership Chair

Steven J. Rose, Government Liaison

Kevin Lachoff, Photographer

## HOW TO CONTACT US

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[info@CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org](mailto:info@CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org)

P.O. Box 3428

Culver City, CA 90231-3428

## STAY CONNECTED

[CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org](http://CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org)

[facebook.com/CulverCityHistoricalSociety](https://facebook.com/CulverCityHistoricalSociety)

[twitter.com/histofculvrcity](https://twitter.com/histofculvrcity)

[instagram.com/culvercityhistoricalsociety](https://instagram.com/culvercityhistoricalsociety)

## MEMBERSHIP

The Culver City Historical Society exists because of the involvement and generosity of people like you. Please help strengthen our voice for preserving Culver City's architectural and cultural heritage by becoming a member.

[CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org/membership](http://CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org/membership)

## In Memoriam

Scott Wyant

## Welcome Our New Members

Emelie Gerard

Walter Harris

Toni Owen

Joyce (Bloom) Schneider

Sue Slutzky

## 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!

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 descendent 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](http://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 Culver CityBus 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!

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.



Our Centennial Tap card.



Mayor Reve Houck stepping into the Culver City Bus, c.1927  
(Culver City Historical Society Collection)



The Centennial Wrap Bus with vintage photos from the Culver City Historical Society  
(Culver CityBus)



# CELEBRATING 100 YEARS

## Culver City Highlights Over Our 10 Decades



**1917**

Harry H. Culver, our city founder. Culver City was incorporated on September 20, 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)





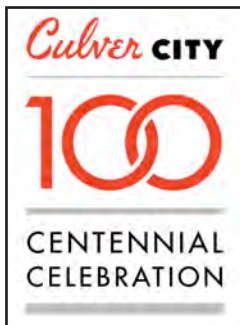
**1960s**

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



**2017**

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



**1980s**

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."



**1990s**

Our new City Hall at 9770 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.

HARRY H. CULVER  
CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA

March 26, 1927.

Mr. Warren Doane,  
c/o Hal Roach Studio,  
Culver City, California.

Dear Warren :

It appears that the Postal Department at Washington is not only upsetting the program here in this community but is assuming an attitude of defiance in connection with the local postoffice situation.

If you will be kind enough to delegate to someone the responsibility of getting the signatures, and return the signed petition to my office Monday evening, or Tuesday morning at the latest, I shall appreciate it and we will proceed to get just as many more signatures as possible through several different channels.

Yours sincerely,

HHC/FS

*Harry H. Culver*



Society President Michelle Bernardin receives Harry Culver’s letter from Dennis Shapiro. Also pictured are Susan Shapiro and Rabbi Zachary Shapiro of Temple Akiba. (George Bernardin)

On September 8, 1917, the *Herald* mentioned that the election was being held: "Polls opened at 6 this morning and will close this evening at 7. There are 560 residents in Culver City. Harry Culver, the founder of Culver City, predicted that the vote in favor of incorporation would be unanimous."

The next entry in the *Herald* about the nascent city was on September 12, 1917, with the headline,

### Culver City Ready for Big Festival.

"The Culver City Chamber of Commerce is planning an all-day carnival to celebrate the city's incorporation and the sixteen-acre addition to the Triangle Film corporation's studio at that city, already the biggest studio in the world."



Lillian and Patricia Culver  
(Culver City Historical Society Collection)

In 1918 Ince Triangle Studios were sold to Samuel Goldwyn, with Ince already having moved to what is now The Culver Studios, with "The Mansion" (or "Colonial Administration Building") the first to be built on the lot, and in 1919 Hal Roach built his studio on Washington across from what is now the Culver City Expo Line station. In 1924 Goldwyn Pictures merged with Metro Pictures and Louis B. Mayer Pictures, forming Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, better known as M-G-M.

As for what Culver City was like prior to incorporation, the best we have is the photo on page one, with 1914 written on the photo itself by an anonymous cartographer. Culver Grammar School, noted on the right of the photo, is now home to the Culver City Unified School District offices, next to Linwood E. Howe Elementary. Harry Culver's home was originally located on Delmas Terrace before it was moved to Cheviot Hills. The Culver Building and Hotel of course is the iconic triangular building at Culver and Main streets, which opened as the Hotel Hunt in 1924. "Club Hall" became the Legion Building, built in 1930, which still stands on Hughes Avenue, just south of Venice. Culver City Park is what's now Media Park, near Venice and Culver boulevards. And the depot is what's now the Expo Line's Culver City Station.

Just as it's hard to imagine Culver City back when it was barley and bean fields, it's impossible to conceive of what the area will look like in another hundred years. We can only hope that it will still be going strong, and that its magnificent history will continue to be preserved and appreciated by people such as yourselves, our most valued members of the Culver City Historical Society.



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.

(George Bernardin)



P.O. Box 3428  
Culver City, CA 90231-3428

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

### July 19: General Meeting and Program

Multipurpose Room, VMB, 7PM

### Aug. 25-27: Fiesta La Ballona in Vets Park

(The ARC will be open from 12-4PM on Sat. and Sun.)

### Sept. 16: Centennial Closing Birthday Party

in Vets Park and Historic Bus Tours, 11AM-3PM

### Sept. 20: Happy 100th, Culver City!

### Oct. 18: General Meeting and Program

Multipurpose Room, VMB, 7PM

### ARC OPEN DATES

#### 1st and 3rd Sundays, 1-3PM

July 2, July 16, August 6, August 20, Sept. 3,  
Sept. 17, Oct. 1, Oct. 15

## 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.

#### Supporting Benefactor Sponsor

The Culver Studios ..... Michael Goldfarb (310) 202-1234

#### Supporting Corporate Sponsors

Hillside Memorial Park and Mortuary ..... Paul Goldstein (310) 641-0707

Sony Pictures Entertainment ..... Kristin Cavanaugh (310) 244-4000

#### Supporting Business Members

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Cavanaugh Realtors ..... Dannie Cavanaugh (310) 837-7161

Culver Center Flower Shop ..... Mike Eskridge (310) 839-2344

Culver City Animal Hospital ..... Dean Gebroe (310) 836-4551

Freeman Properties ..... Stuart Freeman (310) 839-7593

George Petrelli Famous Steaks ..... Marie Petrelli (310) 398-9777

Goran Eriksson / Techtrans ..... Goran Eriksson (310) 841-2901

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Keller Williams Silicon Beach ..... Baron Bruno (424) 465-3225

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## 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!

- ☐ Benefactor (\$1,000)
- ☐ Corporate Sponsor (\$500)
- ☐ Family Lifetime Member (\$300)
- ☐ Patron Member (\$100)
- ☐ Business Member (\$50)
- ☐ Family Member (\$30)
- ☐ Individual Member (\$20)
- ☐ Non Profit Organization (\$15)
- ☐ New Member
- ☐ Renewal

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Contact Person \_\_\_\_\_

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Email \_\_\_\_\_

Voluntary Contribution to Museum Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

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