

Culver Historical Highlights

VOLUME 18 No. 3

Published by the Culver City Historical Society

FALL 1997

"LAUREL & HARDY" PLAQUE DEDICATION

by Marc Wanamaker

In July of this year, an important ceremony took place in front of Stellar Hardware on Main Street in tribute to the city's film heritage. Laurel & Hardy Sons of the Desert International made it possible through its "Way Out West" Tent to hold a commemorative plaque dedication honoring the beloved comedy duo and their work on the streets of Culver City. It was part of the Tent's 30th Anniversary that also included a tour to explore the city's many film sites.

Stan Laurel's daughter, Lois Laurel Hawes (see related story, p.3), was on hand to give interviews, meet the loyal following and unveil the plaque that reads:

On this site, in October of 1927, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy filmed scenes from their comedy classic, "Leave 'em Laughing."

Human Services Director Syd Kronenthal arranged for the plaque and ceremony with the sanction of the Culver City Council and the cooperation of the owners of Stellar Hardware where the plaque was permanently placed.



photo by Mark Wanamaker

Ron Barber, one of the owners of Stellar Hardware which was established on Main Street in 1923, said they were honored and delighted to place the Laurel & Hardy plaque on their building, confirming their commitment to the efforts to bring Culver City's history to the public.

After the ceremony with Laurel & Hardy lookalikes meeting the fans and acting out some Laurel & Hardy *shtick*, the entire crowd walked to the back of the building for a group photo in front of the wonderful mural of the pair painted by Francois Bardol over the entire rear of the structure.

THE GABRIELINOS

by Lupe Smith

The Garbrielino Indians extinct? Don't you believe it! Contrary to published reports in several books and articles, the Garbrielinos or Tongvas, their original name, are alive and well all over Southern California and beyond. In my limb of the family tree alone there are 31 direct descendants and more coming. Multiply that by the other nine families in the branch and

you can easily come up with over 300 - - and that's only from one branch!

"Tongva" means "people of the earth." The name Gabrielino was given to them by the Spaniards to identify them with the San Gabriel Mission which they helped to build.

The ancestral tribal territory encompassed the entire Los Angeles basin and parts of Orange County, from the San Bernardino and San Gabriel Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, from south of the Santa Monica Mountains

to Aliso Creek in Orange County. They also occupied three of the Channel Islands as well as Santa Catalina, San Clemente and San Nicolas, and made excursions to Santa Barbara Island.

Clearly, the Gabrielinos/Tongvas were the original inhabitants of Culver City, which is in an area then known as Saa Angna ("ngna" was a common ending for village names; the last "n" being dropped later as in Topanga, Tujunga, and Cahuenga in translation).

(cont'd. page 3)

NOVEMBER 19th GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING: ELECTIONS!!!

The Historical Society's quarterly General Membership Meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 19 at 7:00 p.m. in the Lethbridge Garden Room at the Veterans Memorial Building, 4117 Overland Avenue.

This is "Election Night" for the Historical Society and we ask the entire membership to come out to support and vote for the future of the CCHS as we move toward the 21st Century!

The evening will also feature guest speaker, Miriam Mack of the Culver City Redevelopment Agency, who will speak on "Culver City Today." Refreshments will be served.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Hal Horne



Well here it is: my penultimate President's Message. Much has happened the past four years, but I'll focus more on that in February. Now, I want to focus on this month and the next two years.

November 19 is our next General Membership Meeting and our biennial election of officers. Up for consideration are the positions of President, Vice President Programs, Vice President Museum, Vice President Ways & Means, Secretary and Treasurer.

Your participation is so very important -- this point cannot be overstated. We are now poised to explore and take advantage of new challenges and opportunities. Among the key projects that must be undertaken during the next two years:

- **Establish a permanent home to catalog and display our collection.** This will and must be done, independent of City government. We will need to form a new partnership with private business, individuals and, yes, the City. Ultimately, however, WE in the Culver City Historical Society must take the lead to create our own future and home.

- **Explore new ways to raise funds to support our many projects,** among which are the Museum and the marking of additional historical sites such as the Culver Hotel, Ivy Substation and the Washington Building.

- **Create and continue an aggressive outreach program to entice more residents and business to become Historical Society members.** With a resident population of nearly 40,000, there is something amiss when only 200 (less than 1%) are dues-paying members.

- **Sponsor new and exciting programs for the people of Culver City.** This may include special "speaker" meetings in addition to our regular meetings; as well as expanded, enhanced outreach programs to our schools.

This may be the last time I'll say this officially: It's YOUR Historical Society. It requires all of us to do what we can to volunteer some of our time, talent and resources to make it succeed, to establish the home/Museum we all want and to make all of us proud to be living in the "Heart of Screenland."

Please attend the November 19th meeting and participate.

Notes from Your City Historian

by Julie Lugo Cerra



HELMS BUILDING MARKED

On September 20, the 80th anniversary of Culver City's incorporation, the CCHS unveiled a bronze marker commemorating the Helms Building as Historic Site #9, and in typically Helms style, members of the Helms family attended in support but declined to be introduced over their co-workers. It was wonderful to have so many current and former elected officials present and a strong showing of our membership.

Among those thanked by CCHS Historic sites chair Sam Cerra were the Marks family (building owner) for their cooperation and generosity, and those who helped with the event: Stu Freeman, Pat Culver Battle (daughter of city founder Harry Culver), our Madrina Clarita Young (who provided the 1917 California flag which has been used to unveil each of our markers), and Mayor Albert Vera and the City. Randi Joseph, our City Public Information Officer, was on hand to distribute free 80th anniversary commemorative pins. Special

thanks also went to Lee Bixler and the staff of The Antique Guild for hosting the reception which followed the unveiling.

A Brief History

Poor health caused Paul Helms to retire from running his small bakery in Buffalo NY and move his family to California in 1926.

Helms began to build the Zig-Zag Moderne style structure between Washington and Venice Boulevards in 1930, and on March 2, 1931, he opened Helms Bakery with 32 employees and 11 coaches. In 1932, Helms won a contract to supply bread for the Olympics in Los Angeles. The early coaches sported the Olympic symbol which is still recognizable on the historic sign atop the structure. With Helms' keen interest in athletics, it was not surprising that he established the Helms' Athletic Foundation with the help of his assistant, Bill Schroeder, and Culver City's Director of Human Services, Syd Kronenthal, which became a renowned athletic museum/library. Helms' support to the community is evident still at Culver High School's Helms Field where the Centaurs play football.

Over the years, the bakery grew and the familiar whistle of the Helms Coaches was a delight as the vehicles traversed the Southland as far north as Fresno, east to San Bernardino, south to San Diego and up

Culver Historical Highlights

PO BOX 3428 • CULVER CITY, CA • 90231-3428
(310) 838-1073

The Culver City Historical Society, founded in 1980, is a non-profit membership organization created for the purpose of collecting, preserving and exhibiting the history of Culver City and its cultural and civic accomplishments.

The CCHS Newsletter is published quarterly.

Publisher.....Lee Bixler
Editor.....Judy Stangler
Contributing Editor.....Ross Hawkins
Printed by.....B & B Printing

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Hal Horne..... President
Lupe Smith.....1st VP, Program
Cathy Zermeno.....2nd VP, Museum
Ross Hawkins.....3rd VP, Ways & Means
Esther Tam.....Secretary pro tem
Joan Jakubowski..... Treasurer
Bonnie Walsh..... Parliamentarian
Linda Edell.....Membership
Judy Stangler.....Pub. Rels. /Newsletter
Sam Cerra.....Sites

EDITOR'S BOX

It has been very gratifying to receive the wonderful response to our "new" *Culver Historical Highlights* format. Such support and encouragement is not only great to get, but helps us make the newsletter an interactive information source useful for both the telling of stories and encouraging research.

We especially want to thank those readers who wrote or called to correct and/or add to the information and facts covered in the last issue, such as the clarification that Carl Pitti's ranch was in Blair Hills, not Fox Hills. This is the sort of response we welcome as it becomes invaluable to the accuracy and resources of the CCHS. Thanks, too, from Julie Lugo Cerra to all of the folks who called with information on Mary Lou Richardson.

Please continue to let us know your opinions and comments on the articles presented in the newsletter and what you'd like to see covered in future issues.

to the moon! In 1969, an aggressive marketing campaign garnered Helms a contract to furnish the first bread on the moon, carried by Apollo 11.

It has often been claimed that the secret of Helms' success lay in the admiration and respect of his employees, whom he referred to as his "co-worker family" and addressed by first name. A major employer in the city, Helms Bakery closed in August, 1969 due to changed lifestyle patterns and economic pressures.

The Helms Building is still a viable commercial industrial center whose occupants advertise as "The Helms Furniture District" and includes The Antique Guild (which displays Helms memorabilia), Homestead House, The Jazz Bakery and much more!

REEL LIFE IN CULVER CITY



by Ross Hawkins

LOIS LAUREL HAWES

As director of REEL LIFE IN CULVER CITY, I have been interviewing many people on their experiences and perspectives on the history of Culver City and the film industry that helped found it. This past July, I was invited to attend the 30th Anniversary of the Laurel and Hardy Sons of the Desert "Way Out West" Tent held in our city.

I had the great pleasure of speaking with Lois Laurel Hawes who talked about her life as the daughter of one of the most beloved comedians that ever graced the screen, Stan Laurel, half of the incredible team of Laurel and Hardy.

"The Hal Roach Studio was my playground," Ms. Hawes said. She fondly remembered being chauffeured to the studio, and of the time when she was about 2 years old and her father told her not to touch the Lux Soap flakes that doubled as snow on the set during the filming of *BELOW ZERO*. She noted that Mr. Roach was a very kind man and that the entire studio staff had a great deal of respect for him.

Ms. Hawes recalled that Oliver "Babe" Hardy trusted his partner Stan with most of the decisions regarding their productions. She said that her father had many intimate parties at their home with such famed personalities as comedians Edgar Kennedy, Harry Landon and Harold Lloyd, director Mack Sennett, and even Joseph P. Kennedy and Gloria Swanson.

HAL ROACH ALUMNI INTERVIEWED

I was also very fortunate to conduct interviews with Dorothy Deborba, who worked in the *OUR GANG* series of films at the Hal Roach Studios from 1930-34; Frank Coghlan, Jr., who worked as a child actor, first at the DeMille Studios in Culver City in 1925 and later played an extra in an *OUR GANG* film; and Tony Caruso, who played character roles throughout much of his career at most of the major studios in Los Angeles.



Comments and insights were also provided by Richard Bann, L&H and Hal Roach biographer, and Marc Wanamaker, film historian and owner of Bison Archives.

RED SKELTON: THE GREAT CLOWN

Upon hearing that comedian Red Skelton had passed away, I recalled with great fondness the July, 1995 press conference held to interview the legendary comic at his 82nd birthday celebration at John Ascuaga's Nugget Hotel & Casino in Sparks, NV. It was clear to all that "The Clown" was well and his wit and comic timing were as sharp as ever.

I covered the event for REEL LIFE as all but two of the movies Skelton appeared in during the 1940s and 50s were made in Culver City, either at M-G-M or RKO studios. Also, for several years he was co-owner with John Wayne of the Culver Hotel.

I join the rest of the world who will remember The Clown for his talent, warmth and generosity and his human sense of humor.

CCHS Looking for Help

Do you have or know people who have film and memorabilia treasures which may be sitting in their garages or attics? The CCHS and REEL LIFE IN CULVER CITY are searching for film footage and background documents for this extraordinary film history. Please contact Ross Hawkins for more information or leads at (310) 839-5725.

**We've Moved! Come visit the new CCHS memorabilia display at
The Antique Guild in the historic Helms Building at 3225 Helms Avenue
between Venice and Washington Boulevards
(display case compliments of Glendale Federal Bank).**

CCHS SAYS GOODBYE TO FRIENDS

LAWRENCE HOUSTON

Lawrence (Larry) Houston was an athletic coach, a high school principal and an Olympic official. Larry first worked with the Olympics for the 1932 Los Angeles games and helped to bring the games back to L.A. in 1984. He was inducted into the Amateur Athletic Hall of Fame in 1989 for his 62 years of volunteer service.

Larry taught in Los Angeles schools where he launched a program of rotating portable swimming pools to elementary school playgrounds so that children could be taught to swim. He liked to tell the story of how he paddled an unruly boy at Hollywood High named James Baumgarten who later changed his name to James Garner. In his interview for HISTORIC CULVER CITY, Larry recalled that at the age of nine he was picked to be an extra in a Mary Pickford movie and as a boy scout rode on the shoulder of Douglas Fairbanks during a WWI bond drive.

This kind and charming gentleman passed away in May at his home in Woodland Hills at the age of 91.

EDWARD EVANS

Born in Costa Rica, and growing up in New York, Edward Evans worked as cameraman and news director for RKO Pathe before World War II. During the war he was a combat photographer and was briefly stationed in Culver City at Fort Roach where he taught camera technique for the Motion Picture Unit.

In 1996 Ed shared his experiences with the CCHS as a guest speaker providing the Society with a copy of his book, "Combat Photographer," and a silk scarf issued to him during the China-Burma-India campaign.

Ed lived in Oceanside, CA and died in August, survived by his wife Ann and two sons.

(THE GABRIELINOS cont'd.)

There are several groups who are actively teaching and publishing the culture and history of our people. One such group is the Gabrielino/Tongva Springs Foundation at University High School, site of the Tongva village of Kuruvungna, where I serve as Vice President. On October 4th, we held a "Before Columbus Day" celebration. It was a wonderful event with Native American dancers, Indian-made articles, Indian fry bread and other foods, and lots of good fellowship among our people as well as numerous visitors from all over the Southland.

There is a group in Catalina called the Ti-At Society after the plank boats our ancestors used to paddle from the mainland to the islands. There is the Gabrielino/Tongva Tribal Council in San Gabriel, and the Mother Earth Clan in Riverside. There are also groups in Baldwin Park and Orange County. Right here in Culver City we have the Gabrielino/Tongva Indians of California as well as the Coalition of Gabrielino/Tongva People. All of these groups are dedicated to educating the public about our people, especially teaching the children about our history and culture.

So you see, we are far from extinct. We've been here for centuries and will be for centuries to come.

Look for the Red dot on your Address Label!

If you find a red dot on the address label of this newsletter, it means it's time to **RENEW** your membership in the Culver City Historical Society.

We've included a handy tear-off...Just fill it out and mail it along with your check and then we can keep you up-to-date!

We can't do it without you!

☐ I am a new member.

☐ I wish to renew my membership.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ Zip _____

Type of membership, Check one:

☐ Patron Member \$100.00

☐ Business Member \$50.00

☐ Service Group \$20.00

☐ Individual Member \$15.00

☐ Individual Lifetime Member \$250.00

☐ Please contact me to work on a committee.

☐ Lifetime Family Membership \$500.00

Checks are payable to: **The Culver City Historical Society P.O. Box 3428 Culver City, California 90231-3428**

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.

Alliance Bank

Ames Company

Blechman-Milstein Medical Group

Cavanaugh Realtors

Culver Center Flowers

Culver City Import Group

Freeman Property Management

G & H Computers

JW Party Pictures/Photo Lab

Curtis S. Reis 410-9281

David Oliver 836-2637

Robyn Coit 838-3834

Esther Tarn 837-7161

Earl Eskridge 839-2344

Larry E. Miller 559-4200

Stuart Freeman 839-7593

Leonard McDonald 836-8698

Jeff Wilson 915-1640

John Riordan Plumbing

Maguire Thomas Partners

Newton Plumbing

Oliver McMillan

Park Place Escrow

Robert E. Sapien & Associates

Spartan Supply Company

Sony Pictures Entertainment

The Antique Guild

John Riordan 838-4656

Sibyl Buchanan 822-0074

Jack Newton 839-1131

Paul Buss (619)457-1697

Patricia Parker 441-3755

Robert Sapien 836-3901

Rick Betts 837-5351

Lee Bixler 838-3131

Culver City Historical Society

Post office Box 3428 • Culver City, CA • 90231-3428

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID

Permit No. 146
Culver City, CA