

Culver Historical Highlights

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CCHS KICKS OFF MUSEUM CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

NOVEMBER 18th MEETING TO BEGIN MAJOR FUNDRAISING DRIVE

THE STUDIO DRIVE-IN 1948 - 1998

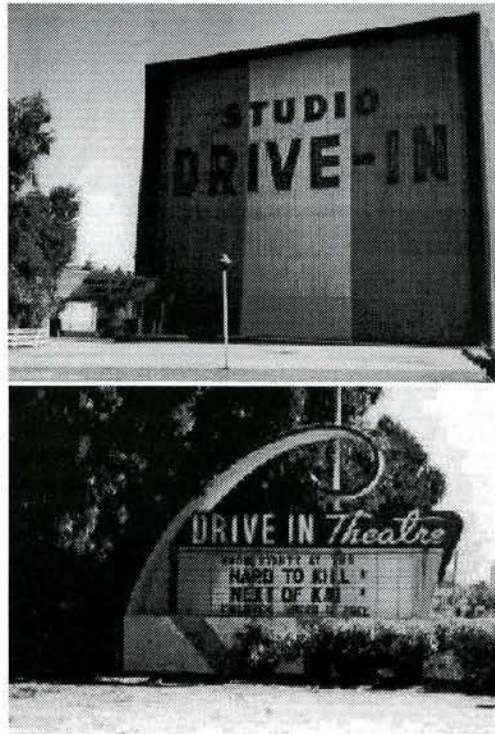
You Can't Take it With You, the madcap comedy classic starring James Stewart, Jean Arthur and Lionel Barrymore, is believed to have been the first movie screened at Culver City's Studio Drive-In when it opened in 1948. The last movies shown were *The Fugitive* and *True Romance*, before it closed in September, 1993.

Nearly fifty years of continuous operation is now a memory. On Monday, September 21st, the wrecking ball toppled the huge screen which had stood as a landmark of an earlier era for half a century.

The drive-in opened as a Pacific Theater, on a long term lease from the Machado family on property which was part of the original Rancho La Ballona land grant (which ran all the way to Playa del Rey).

The Studio Drive-In, located at 5250 Sepulveda Boulevard at the corner of Jefferson Boulevard, had a vehicle capacity of 700, and the mandatory snack bar and children's playground. It was an essential part of the city's social life with families and young couples making going to the drive-in a weekly habit.

But times and economics changed and the property became too valuable for the Pacific Theaters to maintain as a one-screen drive-in, competing against mall multiplex theaters. At that time, general manager of Pacific Theaters,



Photos courtesy of Craig Morton

Jay Swerdlow, commented, "We feel quite badly. We are emotionally attached to these drive-ins, but the business has changed."

The Culver City Redevelopment Agency purchased the property for \$10 million in the late 1980s, and, in 1993, dedicated a new street, Machado Road - a connector road between Sepulveda and Jefferson Boulevards, separating the drive-in land from the Jefferson Branch of the Culver City Post Office.

DRIVE-IN cont'd. pg. 3

MUSEUM CAPITAL CAMPAIGN TO KICK-OFF WITH DISCUSSION AT NOVEMBER GENERAL MEETING

It has been the goal and continued drive of the CCHS to one day open the doors of a Culver City Community Museum. When Lu Herrera accepted the position as the Society's new President, she made it clear that her prime objective was to see a museum open and flourishing in Culver City.

To make this dream a reality, the CCHS will announce its "Museum Campaign Kick-Off" at the Society's General Membership Meeting on Wednesday, November 18.

The meeting will be highlighted by a panel discussion entitled "A Museum for Culver City" which will analyze the perils, pitfalls and rewards of creating a city museum. Topics will include evaluating the real importance of having a city museum, the challenges of raising community support, various avenues of fundraising, and the scope of the museum's collection and presentation.

The discussion will be moderated by Culver City Historian, Julie Lugo Cerra, and the distinguished panel members, representing local museums and archives, include:

Russell Davis, prominent member of the Pacific Railroad Society. Mr. Davis was instrumental in the search and securing of the site for the Pacific Railroad Museum, now housed in the former Santa Fe depot in San Dimas, CA.

MUSEUM cont'd. pg. 3

NOVEMBER 18TH GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

The CCHS General Membership Meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 18 at 7:00 pm in the Lethbridge Garden Room at the Veterans Memorial Building, 4117 Overland Avenue. Please note that this is a date change due to the Thanksgiving holiday.

Join us at this very important meeting and the official kick-off of the campaign for the Culver City Community Museum. A panel discussion on "A Museum for Culver City" will highlight the evening and evaluate the importance of establishing a museum to preserve our rich and unique heritage. City Historian Julie Lugo Cerra will moderate and the guests -- representing historical societies, museum and archives -- include Russell Davis, Louise Gabriel, Walter Haskell and Marvin Paige. [Note: Please review insert of By-Laws changes for membership vote.]

Refreshments will be served and the public is invited. For more information call (310) 838-1073.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Lu Herrera



For my column this month, I thought a recent letter I wrote to Mayor Sandi Levin and Members of the City Council would tell you all how strongly I feel about the importance of our having a Culver City Community Museum and how dedicated I am to making it a reality:

Dear Mayor Levin and Members of the City Council:

As the new president of your Culver City Historical Society, I am making a much needed Community Museum the principal goal for my two year term. Syd Kronenthal, my "right hand man," has committed to work with me towards this end. As we are all aware, Culver City, the Heart of Screenland,

has a rich history which should be shared.

The Society has collected historic memorabilia and continues to catalog photos and other donated items for display. We have storage space provided by two local merchants, but the precious items are also sprinkled throughout the city, in government offices and in homes. There is no single space to store, protect and display the history of Culver City.

Our Society, since its incorporation in 1980 has taken preservation of local history very seriously. We continue to mark historic sites with bronze markers, the last of which was the historic Helms Building as you may remember. We work with the city to offer bus tours at the annual Fiesta La Ballona, as well as programs and tours for school children. Just this week, our members have picked up speakers from the Studio Drive-In as well as pieces of the screen itself after demolition Monday, which was arranged by the CCRA and the developer, The Lee Group. These items will be used for display, but also for fundraising for the museum.

We read with interest the staff report in July which mentioned the possibility of museum space in the new parking structure in the Downtown development. On behalf of the Society, I would like to pursue that option. The Society can offer the expertise, volunteer hours and fundraising efforts to partner with the City of Culver City. Please advise me how we can begin this process.

Sincerely yours, *Lu Herrera*

Notes from Your City Historian by Julie Lugo Cerra



• "One man's trash is another man's treasure"—and that is why our Society's Ways and Means guy, Stu Freeman, was out picking up speakers from the Studio Drive-In. The next day, who was seen going through rubble, with permission of course? None other than your Historic Sites Chair, Sam Cerra. Sam retrieved pieces of the drive-in's 50-year-old screen - it was plaster on a wire mesh backing. Knowing these boys, look for some creative packaging of these bits of nostalgia to raise needed funds for the Society: Museum. Museum. Museum!

• **Timeline:** We made it through another birthday in Culver City: September 20th was the city's 81st anniversary of incorporation.

• **Machado Family Celebrates:** I had the privilege of attending the Machado Family Picnic at the Centinela Adobe recently. My great grandfather, Francisco Lugo, married Vicenta Machado, one of the children of Jose Agustin Machado. Agustin and one of his brothers, Ygnacio, founded Rancho La Ballona with Felipe and Tomas Talamantes.

Other relatives in attendance were Fred Machado and his family. Fred is a descendant of Agustin Machado's eldest child, Juan Bautista Machado. The father of Agustin and Ygnacio was Jose Manuel

Machado, a *soldado* (soldier) who was present when the pueblo of Los Angeles was founded in 1781.

Other relatives enjoying the day were Christina Machado Essex and our Madrina, Clarita Marquez Young.

There was also a Machado Reunion in October, and we all attended that as well. Oscar Machado and his wife came up from the San Diego area. Oscar worked for the city as did his brother Carlo (now deceased). One of Carlo's sons, Mike, was there with his family, too. Oscar and Carlo were the sons of Agustin Machado's youngest (and 15th) child, Jose de La Luz Machado, who lived on Overland Ave.

The beautiful day was enhanced by great food and wonderful entertainment in the Spanish/Mexican tradition with music and dancers from Loyola-Marymount University. And, of course, Mr. and Mrs. Jim Robertson were working hard as usual. So, if you are tied to the Machados, give "cuz" Freddie a call for info on the next Machado event

• *For those of us who grew up here*, we are always sad to see "bits of our childhood" slip away. Culver Center Stationers is closing and the owners of Southern California Nursery, a 50-year Culver City institution, are talking about retiring by the end of the year and selling the property. We will miss them both!

• *Quote from a Harry H. Culver Co. ad* from a December 13, 1913 Culver City Call newspaper:

"All Roads Lead to Culver City - the home city. If you should sit on the shady veranda of a Culver City home -- could sense the

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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.

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EDITOR'S BOX

This month's editorial comments come from CCHS Board member Stu Freeman.

We will soon be getting an important addition to downtown Culver City. In the next 24 months, the firm of DDR OliverMcMillan will be building a retail, dining and theatre complex adjacent to the Culver Hotel. I am very excited about this because I feel that for the first time in many years a vibrant and exciting Downtown will emerge.

It is my opinion, and, hopefully many of you will agree, that this new development should incorporate the rich film legacy of our city into the very core of this project. We have an extraordinary opportunity to do something that no other development can duplicate by using props, backdrops, reproductions and replicas of items from some of the classic films made in Culver City: *The Wizard of Oz*, *Gone With the Wind*, *King Kong* and so many others.

If you agree, please write to our Mayor, Councilmembers and the Redevelopment Agency encouraging them not to miss this once in a lifetime opportunity to build something that will let the world know that Culver City is truly the "Heart of Screenland."

*

Correction: We apologize for the misspelling of Martha and Sol Sigall's name in the last issue of *Culver Historical Highlights*.

fresh tonic ocean air, see the delicate color-shades of the distant mountains and feel the comfortable, uncrowded, homey atmosphere of the place you wouldn't wonder at Culver City's wonderful record of growth and development. Culver City has suburban transportation facilities unequaled on the Pacific Coast."

• *And the Winner is.....*

Miriam Mack who knew actor Jeff Chandler's reel name was Ira Grosel. Miriam wins a copy of the new "Fire Burn & Cauldron Bubble" cookbook.

REEL LIFE IN CULVER CITY

by Ross Hawkins



TWO FRIENDS

I would like to pay tribute to two wonderful gentlemen who have given me support and encouragement in the making of *Culver City: The Reel Hollywood* - actors Roddy McDowall and Edward Ashley.

It was Edward Ashley who introduced me to Roddy McDowall in late 1996. Roddy's parents had been friends of Ashley and his wife, Rennie, and the Ashleys had met the young actor during the filming of *The White Cliffs of Dover* at M-G-M in 1943. (A piece of trivia: the film, starring Irene Dunne and Herbert Marshall, was the first time Roddy and Elizabeth Taylor appeared in a film together.)

Edward and I hoped that Roddy would consider becoming the Host-Narrator of the first episode of the documentary as he had a tremendous archive of old films and photos of the early days of the industry and was quite knowledgeable about the period.

I sent him a copy of the script and a demo reel for the documentary. He called me, saying that he was definitely interested in the project, but would like to be the Host-Narrator for the entire film. I, of course, was delighted, but this was not to be.

Roddy died of a cancer on October 3rd at the age of 70. The last time we spoke was earlier this year. Edward's wife Rennie had passed away and Edward was in the hospital, his health frail. Roddy was going to New York, but asked me to call and let him know how Edward was doing. He was extremely concerned for his old friend. I apologized for the fact that the project was taking longer than expected to materialize, but he was understanding, saying there was no need to apologize and that "these things take time."

I am told that the Motion Picture Academy will receive Roddy's marvelous collection of stills and films. Unfortunately, they won't have all the wonderful memories of those who so highly admired Roddy McDowall for the gentleman he was.

Edward Ashley has become a dear friend and the Australian-born actor has introduced me to many people who have contributed to our film, providing wonderful anecdotes and personal momentos that have added immeasurable color to the story.

A respected actor for more than 65 years, Edward made his American film debut in the 1940 classic, *Pride & Prejudice*, with Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier, who

was a close friend. His film credits include *Come Live With Me* with James Stewart and Heddy Lamarr, *Bittersweet* with Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald, and *The Black Swan* with Tyrone Power and Maureen O'Hara. Other credits include *Nocturne*, *Love*



EDWARD ASHLEY

Honor & Goodbye, *Macao*, *Elephant Walk*, and *Darby's Rangers*.

He is currently writing a book about his life in show business and his travels and adventures around the world - which included being a jackeroo (cowboy) on a large Australian sheep station, a race driver and a stunt man.

Edward Ashley is quite a man and quite a friend, and we both join the world in mourning the loss of another unique talent, Roddy McDowall.

DRIVE-IN cont'd.

Earlier suggested uses of the now 9-acre site have included the building of single-family housing, reopening a revamped, new drive-in by Sunset Screens, and even the creation of a "doggie park." In 1996, with the real estate market rebounding, the CCRA received fifteen development proposals, including three studio proposals, the building of a hotel, and a variety of residential-use proposals.

The winning bid came from The Braemer/Lee /Eras Group which offered a mixed-use plan, incorporating 57 single-family detached homes in the \$300,000-and-up range, with a 9,000 sq. ft. community park, proclaimed Heritage Park. Also part of the development will be the new home of the ERAS Center, a nationally-acclaimed, non-profit center for students with learning disabilities. The Center will be located on the southern Jefferson side, with the housing up against Dobson to the East and towards Sepulveda to the West. The new development will be called "Classics at

Heritage Park," and phase one of the two-phase project is scheduled for completion in June, 1999.

Good news for our museum: Through the efforts of Stu Freeman, CCRA and The Lee Group have arranged for the drive-in's original in-car speakers to go to the CCHS. Some speakers will be auctioned off at future fundraising events and some will be saved and placed in the city's museum. CCHS Board member Sam Cerra showed great foresight when gathering up pieces of the historic screen which will be packaged and sold as momentos in a similar fashion as the pieces saved from our original City Hall.

It seems particularly appropriate that the loss of the beloved Studio Drive-In should be instrumental in the creation of the long-awaited Culver City Community Museum. [Julie Lugo Cerra, Marcia Torrey-Jay & Sal Garcia contributed to this article.]

MUSEUM cont'd.

Louise Gabriel, President and Founder of the Santa Monica Historical Society Museum. Ms Gabriel has been culturally active in Santa Monica for over forty-five years and has served twenty-three years on the Board of Directors of the Santa Monica Historical Society.

Walter Haskell, a founding member of the Historical Society of Centinela Valley. Mr. Haskell was instrumental in the fundraising campaign which helped to build a Heritage Center on the property of the Centinela Adobe, which was later renamed the Walter Haskell Heritage Center.

Marvin Paige, archivist and owner of Marvin Paige Motion Picture & Television Archives. Mr. Paige has amassed an internationally renowned motion picture archive with an extensive collection of M-G-M memorabilia, and served as consultant on the documentary series, "When the Lion Roars" on the history of M-G-M.

A Q&A with the audience will follow the panel discussion. The meeting is open to the public.

REMINDER

Come visit the CCHS memorabilia display at The Antique Guild in the historic Helms Building at 3225 Helms Ave. between Venice & Washington Blvds.

CCHS SAYS GOODBYE TO FRIENDS

EDITH PRAGER

It is with deep sadness that we report the death of Edith Prager, Secretary to the Culver City Historical Society, on September 30 at her home. For more than 35 years, Edith was a resident of Culver City and an active participant in many civic and community affairs. She also proudly served in the US Marine Corps.

In addition to raising her four daughters - Lana, Meryl, Marsha and Roslyn - Edith was a member of the Neighborhood Preservation Program Advisory Committee, the Redevelopment Preservation Committee, the East Washington Design Charette and the Downtown Charette. Following her recent retirement from full-time employment, she joined and became active in the Culver City Senior Citizens Center.

Edith had a strong and vital sense of civic responsibility, and worked to preserve the history and uniqueness that she believed was Culver City. She was elected Secretary of the Board of the CCHS this past summer, and contributed many ideas to the efforts of the planning of a city museum. Edith Prager's spirit will continue on in the Society's renewed efforts to bring the dream of a Culver City Community Museum to life. She will be missed and remembered fondly.

--- Susan Berg

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.

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Name _____ Phone _____

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