# Culver Historical Highlights

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Fall 2005

### CCHS 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION: A SELL-OUT!

OCTOBER GENERAL MEETING: ELECTIONS!

#### "A CELEBRATION OF THE MOVIES" TO BE SCREENED AT FALL GENERAL MEETING

by Julie Lugo Cerra

#### PRODUCED IN 1989

Do you remember seeing A Celebration of the Movies in 1989 at The Culver Studios?

It was billed as a 50-year homage to the release of the classic Culver Citymade movie, *Gone With the Wind* – and it was one of the biggest events held by the Culver City Historical Society during the first decade of our existence. We had to turn people away!

## STUDIO TOURS, DISPLAYS AND A "CLARK GABLE LOOK-ALIKE CONTEST!

Film Historian and CCHS member Marc Wanamaker took attendees on walking tours of the studio. We had special displays, including Bill Tomkin's unpublished *GWTW* photos, and many special guests.

There was even a "Clark Gable Look-Alike" contest and the emcee was then-Mayor Jozelle Smith. The contest judges were actors Jerry Maren, Jane Withers and casting director Marvin Paige (see photo at right).

#### SOCIETY CELEBRATES MILESTONE WITH MYSTERY TOUR

by Judy Stangler

"Welcome to your Vintage Excursion through Culver City History!" Thus began a delightful journey, literally and figuratively, through the streets and decades of the "City of Opportunities," as Culver City was once described by its founder, Harry H. Culver. And it was a "sold-out" affair!

The event, created to celebrate the Culver City Historical Society's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, was shrouded in *mystery*. No one outside the planning committee (this writer included!) had a clue as to what was in store – other than being given a confirmation which designated where and at what time the *mystery history* tour would begin and that dinner would await the travelers at the end of the journey. And what a journey it was!

We did know that there would be four "points" along the itinerary at which we were required to stop, each leading us toward the final destination. To ensure that all points were visited, we were given a playing card at each stop by a member of the *Screenland A's of Culver City* Model A car club – our "poker hand" – on which we signed our name as verification. Each "Point" was a marked CCHS "Historical Site." The Society has marked ten sites to date with informative bronze plaques. (cont'd on page 3 and see Centerfold photo spread.)



Additionally, there was a memorabilia auction along with old-fashioned refreshments.

#### IT'S ALL ON TAPE!

Apple Box Productions arranged for a film crew to video the event and it will be featured at our October meeting. Julie Lugo Cerra had the pleasure of interviewing many of the stars, including Jerry Maren, who sang the famous "Lollipop Song" from The Wizard of Oz to her!

Patrick Curtis who played Melanie's "baby," was also a great interview – though he was only 6-weeks-old when he did that "acting job!" (cont'd on page 6.)

## OCTOBER 19<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING: ELECTIONS! ~ Special Screening of "A Celebration of the Movies" ~

- ► The Culver City Historical Society's Fall General Membership Meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 19<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm in the Lethridge Garden Room at the Veterans Memorial Building, 4117 Overland Avenue. This is "Election Night" to chose the Society's next slate of officers and we ask the entire membership to come out to support and vote for the next Board which will lead us through the next two years.
- ► Continuing the year-long celebration of the Society's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, "A Celebration of the Movies" which was produced in 1989 and originally shown at The Culver Studio as one of the first major events the Society presented will be screened as the highlight of the program (see story above).
- ▶ Please join us for this important and entertaining meeting. The public is invited to enjoy the free program (note: only active members will be able to vote) and students are encouraged to attend. Refreshments will be served following the program. For more information, please call Anita Shapiro at (310) 837-7853.

#### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Steven J. Rose



Our October 19th General Membership meeting will be our biannual election of officers according to the by-laws of the Society. The Nominating Committee is appointed by the president and made up of three Society members a Board member, a committee chair and a member from the general membership. This year, Anita Shapiro, Robert Duitsman and Carol Schwab have been chosen for the Nominating Committee, and will present their report to the general membership at the October 19th meeting.

For those interested in being nominated for a position on the Society's Board, please contact anyone one of the three members or all three by either e-mail or telephone. Here are their contacts:

Bob Duitsman: email: duitsy@yahoo.com and tel: (310) 645-6223.

Carol Schwab: email carol.schwab@culvercity.org and tel: (310) 253-5660.

Anita Shapiro: email: anitagirls@aol.com and tel: (310) 837-7853.

Our program for the evening will be a delightful video of a tour of the historic Culver Studios, taped to document one of our early and highly successful fundraisers. Made in 1989, A Celebration of the Movies, was coordinated by former school board member, Diane Pannone, who arranged for the video to be made for the special event.

Remember: Get involved and become a part of history! I encourage you to call the Nominating Committee and submit your name for consideration - we need your active and creative support!

Best regards,

#### Notes from **Your City** Historian

by Julie Lugo Cerra



#### **CC HISTORIC STRUCTURES LIST**

In the course of my research, I find that some additions to the list of historic structures in Culver City might be appropriate, and there is provision in the code for such action. First, let me say that at least we have a list!

Culver City, to its credit, contracted with 30th Street Architects to complete a survey of Culver City's historic structures in the 1980s. (Not all cities have surveyed their structures - even Los Angeles does not yet have a list.)

The most intense detail was recorded on the existing studios, probably because of the early acknowledgement of the historic importance of the studios along with their cooperation/records. We are, after all, "The Heart of Screenland," and our city founder, Harry Culver, nurtured a sound economic base, which included the movie studios.

#### **HPAC STUDIES**

The Historic Preservation Advisory Committee (HPAC), city staff and the council at the time, studied the historic buildings surveyed. The process took the best examples of historic structures

to the council for final approval. The intention was clearly to preserve, reasonably, our cultural resources.

By the time the HPAC brought the historic survey and final document to the council for approval in 1991, it definitively acted to preserve, but not adversely constrain residents or impede Only exteriors were commerce. protected. "Balance," Harry Culver's mantra, was still key. That appears to be why the Significant Residential units were removed, for example.

#### CCHS CELEBRATES 25TH AT "THE NAMELESS CAFÉ"

However, 30th Street Architects, who were not familiar with the local area, coupled with our strange boundaries, might have missed a few structures on city streets. The building we visited for our 25th Anniversary celebration on Washington Boulevard could be a candidate in my opinion.

Built in 1927 - and there are records in the city to validate that date - it was overlooked for some reason. It relates back to early Culver City when our reputation for nightclubs, gambling, entertainment and bootlegged spirits, were a sign of the times.

Today it has come full circle. Known in the '50s as "the Nameless Café," today it is the wonderful "Con Sabor -Club Tropical" - the subject of media coverage with its stellar jazz, flamenco dancing and other musical delights along with a mighty fine menu!

#### Culber Historical Highlights

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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.

The CCHS Newsletter is published quarterly.

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#### Editor's Column

I have often been chided about my overt chauvinism toward living and growing up in Culver City! I am unabashedly proud of our city and its heritage, and I was recently reminded of this when a few of my high school pals got together for lunch and, of course, began reminiscing.

What struck me most was the kind of people we all turned out to be. Not just professionally (doctors, lawyers, bankers, teachers, etc.), but all with a social & civic conscience. We spoke of our education and what fabulous teachers we had had who couldn't have done more to prepare us for "life after high school!" We also recalled the wonderful programs our parks and civic organizations provided us "after school."

I mention this because these memories are not only special to us, but they also provide a continuing dialogue with our present neighborhoods and with those still to come. The CC Historical Society was "created for the purpose of collecting, preserving and exhibiting the history of Culver City and its cultural & civic accomplishments for future This is not just our generations." Mission Statement, it is something all of our members fully support and actively pursue.

On this, our 25th Anniversary, I think we can all be especially proud of the years of hard work, perseverance and dedication - and look confidently to the next 25!

Remember, it's YOUR Historical Society—we can't succeed without YOU!

## REEL LIFE

#### IN CULVER CITY

by Ross Hawkins

#### RAMONA MOSELLE PASSES

In past columns, I have used many of the wonderful first-hand accounts and reminiscences of retired CC Fire Dept. Battalion Chief, Ray Moselle, including his work on the "burning of Atlanta" on RKO's backlot for *Gone With the Wind*. One of the guiding hands and rocks of support that encouraged and bolstered Ray throughout the years, was his beloved wife, Ramona, who passed away on August 26<sup>th</sup>. She was 89.

Ray and Ramona met at Hamilton High, both graduating in the summer of 1935, and married in February, 1936. The Moselles were just short of celebrating their 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.



#### HAL ROACH WAS A NEIGHBOR

It turns out that Ramona had quite a story of her own, beginning in the very early days of Culver City.

Her father, Ignacio Layana, emigrated from

Spain and owned a 31-acre ranch in what is now Beverlywood. He also leased 150 acres nearby where he grew lima beans.

In a recent Hamilton High reunion interview, Ramona recalled that her parents' ranch was next to the Hal Roach ranch which the Roach Studios often used for exteriors. Roach rented animals from the family and occasionally used the Layana Ranch for exterior filming as well.

When I asked her if she had seen Laurel and Hardy or The Little Rascals filming, she laughed and said that her father didn't want her and her sisters "anywhere near the film crews or actors." When the Roach Studio people came on the ranch, the girls were ordered indoors and the blinds on the windows were closed!

#### 1932 OLYMPICS BRINGS RAY TO LA

Ray hopped a freight train in Milwaukee and came to Los Angels in 1932 so that he and his brother Benny

#### "Mystery Tour" (cont'd.) .

My personal itinerary began at "Point D" which is Historical Site #8: The Lugo Ranch. I was navigator for former CCHS Board member, Stu Freeman, who squired us around in his vintage 1968 replica of the elegant '30s Cord automobile -- we certainly drove in style!

From here, we traveled east on Jefferson Blvd. to Duquesne Ave., turning north to Culver Blvd. and to "Point A" which is Historicaß Site #1: City Hall. After picking up our second card, we continued east on Culver, passing the Town Plaza (and the new bronze Lion Fountain near the Culver Hotel) and onto Washington Blvd. to "Point B" which is Historic Site #7: The Culver Studios, picking up another card from members of the Screenland A's car club.

The Studios are bordered by Ince Blvd. which we moved onto, traveling south to Lucerne Ave., turning west back to Duquesne. From Duquesne, we turned at Farragut Drive, continuing west to Madison and then north on Madison to Washington Blvd. again. We drove west until we came to "Point C" which is Historical Site #10: La Ballona School and picked up one more card.

Along this route we passed the Paramount Laundry Bldg.; the "Egyptian House;" the Coombs, Pitti and Cereghino houses; the Thalberg Bldg. & Sony Pictures Plaza; St. Augustine's Church; the Colonnade which is now part of Sony Picture Studios; and Culver Center.

Heading toward our final mystery "point" for dinner, we drove west to Sepulveda Blvd., east on Braddock Dr. back to Duquesne, north to Venice Blvd.,

east to National Blvd. and back to Washington Blvd., passing Tellefson & Carlon parks, the Kirk Douglas Theatre, the Ivy Substation, and the Hall Roach Studio marker.

Turning east at Washington, and passing the famed Helms Building and The Beacon, we arrived at our final destination: "Nameless Café" at 8641 Washington Blvd. built in 1927 and now the site of the popular "Con Sabor ~ Club Tropical." Picking up our final card (neither of us had a good hand!), we entered the restaurant and continued this wonderful evening dining with friends, eniovina terrific Latin music. concluding with a raffle and an auction (Stu was the high bidder on two signed posters of the George Barris' "Cruisin' Back to the '50s" Culver City car shows!).



JUDY STANGLER & STU FREEMAN & HIS PRIZE!

This is just a sketch of what fun we all shared and of how much work Co-Chairs Julie Lugo Cerra and Cathy Zermeno and their committee put into making our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary truly a night to remember!

For a complete list of the CCHS Historical Sites, go to the City of Culver City website at: http://www.culvercity.org/cityinfo/history/hist\_sites.html

could see the Summer Olympics here. Ray and Benny lived together above the Culver City Boxing Arena, where Culver Center is now.

Benny later became a professional prizefighter, a stunt man and a character in movies and television. He had a running part as a bartender in the last season of TV's "The Dick Powell Show."

Ray put himself through high school by working at odd jobs at MGM Studios, and because he was an excellent baseball player and athlete, he would often get picked to work on W.S. Van Dyke's film crews.

#### FROM THE MOVIES TO THE CCFD

Ray remembers that Ramona always encouraged him to better himself. After they were married, Ray found that the work at the studios was too undependable to raise a family so he joined the Culver City Fire Department.

Though officially employed by the CCFD, Ray still worked closely with the

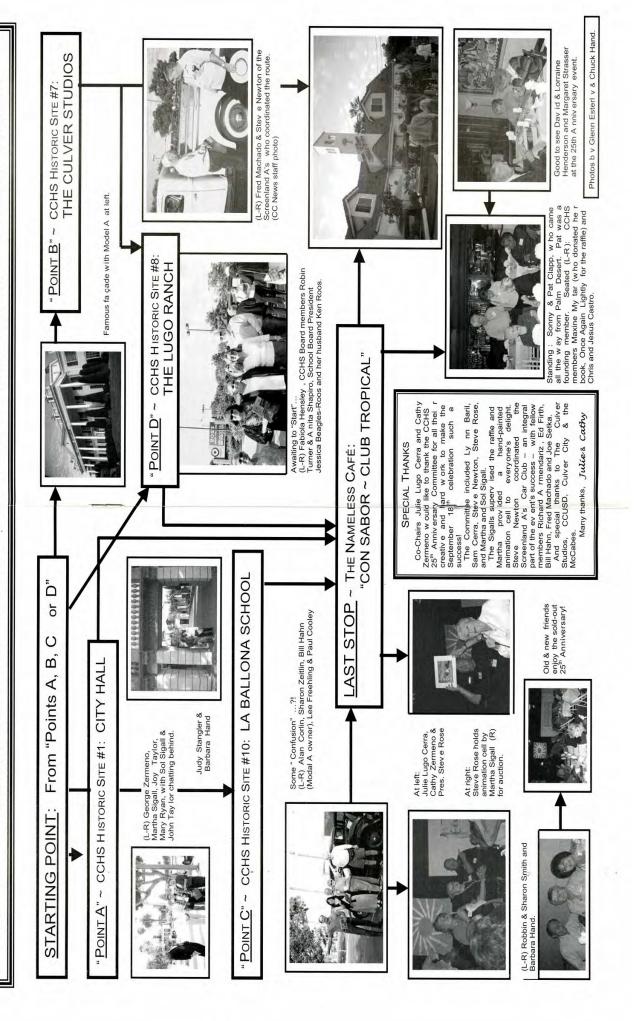
film industry, whether keeping the "burning of Atlanta" from spreading to the newly-built *Tara*, or overseeing another famous fire sequence: the last scene in *Citizen Kane* where "Rosebud" is finally revealed.

Ramona Moselle loved her family, especially her grandchildren, and remained close to her sisters all of her life. In addition to her husband, she is survived by sons, Raymond and Richard, daughter-in-law Nancy, grandchildren Amanda Ray, Vanessa, Bryan and Natalie, and sisters Felisa and Isabel. Services were held at Holy Cross Cemetery.

RAY & RAMONA



# DINNER Ø TOUR HISTORY MYSTERY **ANNIVERSARY 25TH** SOCIETY'S HISTORICAL



#### Museum Notes

by Robin Turner, Museum Chair

#### IT ALL TAKES TIME .....

I've been asked about the current status of our museum and wanted to let everyone know that we are indeed still moving forward. It all just takes more time than we'd like – so please take heart and stick with us!

President Steve Rose has been working closely with the Bank of the West's administrators and talking to several contractors (all of whom are busier than ever). While the space has much potential, it also has many challenges and everything has to be up to code and have full access before we can open our doors to the public.

We are heartened by the interest and support of not only the CCHS membership, but the community at large and know that the time spent in planning and preparing will pay off with many dividends down the road.

In the near future, I hope to be setting up volunteer work teams to start on the archiving, filing and categorizing of our wonderful collection of memorabilia and documents, and I look forward to working with many of you and several projects.

In the meantime, please visit the Gragg sculpture exhibit in the CCHS display case at the eastside of the downtown Pacific Culver Stadium 12 cinema complex. A new set of sculptures will be rotated into the case very soon.

~ Robin

#### GIVE THE GIFT OF HISTORY!

Consider giving a CC Historical Society membership as a gift ~ birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, any occasion!

#### MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Remember, <u>all</u> memberships are up for renewal in January, 2006.

Please send your renewal TODAY!

#### "Celebration" (cont'd.)



"Munchkin" Jerry Maren with fan.

## CCHS MEMBERS PULLED TOGETHER TO MAKE IT A SUCCESS!

Julie Lugo Cerra chaired the event and Joy Jacobs took on the reins of publicity, arranging for the publicity shots to include the prop department's church window from *GWTW*.

Other committee members included Mike Balkman, Pat Clapp, Marti Diviak, Debi Edell, Rosalind La Briola and Diane Pannone.

#### DON'T BE LATE!

The screening of A Celebration of the Movies at the October 19<sup>th</sup> General Membership Meeting continues our memorable year of celebrating the Society's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The tape runs 37 minutes – so don't be late!

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The Nominating Committee will also report to the Society at the meeting and new officers will be elected for the upcoming term, which begins in January, 2006.

# "CULVER CITY HEART OF SCREENLAND" LICENSE PLATE FRAMES

Back by popular demand, we again have the CCHS "Culver City Heart of Screenland" license plate frames for sale. They are \$10 per pair and can be picked up or mailed for \$3 s/h.

They were particularly popular at this year's Fiesta La Ballona – and we want to thank the folks at the Culver City Store for sharing space with the Society and making these available.

For more information, please call Susan Deen at (310) 559-5991. For mailing, make check payable to the "Culver City Historical Society" and mail to: CC Historical Society, P.O. Box 3428, Culver City, CA 90231-3428.

#### IN MEMORIUM:

We are sadden to have recently lost two very good friends of the Culver City Historical Society, both of whom contributed a great deal to its growth and success.

#### **ESTHER TARN**

Esther Tarn was a founding member of the CC Historical Society along with her husband, Bill. Esther was a stickler for parliamentary procedure. She had been active in PTA and Council PTA in town, and served a term on the CCUSD Board of Education and she sat on the Education Committee. She was a very active lady -- a realtor (for Dan Cavanaugh Realtors), and a member of the Guidance Clinic Guild among others.

#### LEE BIXLER

Lee Bixler was the past publisher of Culver Historical Highlights and worked closely with Editor Judy Stangler to enhance and enlarge the scope and presentation of the newsletter. As owner of the former Antique Guild which was housed in the famed Helms Building (CCHS Hist. Site #9), he also maintained a Helms memorabilia display and a restored Helms Bakery Coach.

The Society offers its warmest regards and deep sympathy to the friends and families of Esther Tam and Lee Bixler.

#### "LION'S FOUNTAIN" UNVEILED IN CULVER TOWN PLAZA

On Sunday, September 11, 2005, the new "The Lion's Fountain" was unveiled in Town Plaza, downtown Culver City. This magnificent lion sculpture is "surrounded by a high-powered, animated water fountain equipped with forty jets that shoot streams of water high into the air." The Lion's Fountain was created by Douglas Olmsted Freeman.

For more information, see the City of Culver City's website at: http://www.culvercity.org/Lion2005.html.

Photo courtesy of City of Culver City



#### WHAT THEY WERE THINKING

by Sandy Burton

#### BERT FREEMAN & THE HULL BUILDING

In a letter written to Charley Lugo from Bert Freeman – on his "FREEMAN FURNITURE COMPANY ~ Your Friendly Store" stationary, dated September 15, 1982 – Bert wanted to put down the history of The Hull Building with dates and historic information for the Culver City Building Department on the occasion of the building being designated the Society's Historic Site #2.

Dr. Foster Hull was the second City Health Officer and built The Hull Building on the NE corner of Watseka Ave. and Washington Blvd. in 1925 as the first hospital in Culver City. Hit by the Depression in the 1930s, the building was acquired by Bert's father, Louis Freeman, and the family still retains ownership.



BERT WITH HULL BLDG. BEHIND

According to Bert, Dr. Hull "lived a few feet north" of what was the empty space which later

became the spot for the now-existing building.

Bert's letter refers to the many occupants that have been a part of The Hull Building's history. While first used as a hospital, it later "housed a mortuary, operated by Victor Staar." Bert also mentions that for the first few years, the building had a stream of tenants including: "the Chudacoff family whose Sunset Drugs occupied only the corner, while a flower shop and a café known as Columbos occupied the other half of the ground floor." On the second floor, several doctors and dentists rented the space, along with a dance studio!

Then, during the 1930s, "the occupants moved because there were no elevators." So, Louis Freeman changed the format of the second floor to be used for "sleeping rooms for single people." About that time, "The Culver City Moose Lodge resided in a room that was converted from a studio."

The drug store "stayed in the building until the 1950s and was operated by Joe Wellington, [but] Joe moved to Culver Center when it opened."

The Hull Building shook in the famous 1933 earthquake but did not lose, "[the] loss of a pain of glass," according to Bert. Since then, he added, "the reinforced steel beams and re-development requirements make the building one of the sturdiest of its kind in the area." Burt referred to the design as "Neo-Romanesque." He

# REMEMBERING... "SEPULVEDA/JEFFERSON" PART 3

by Steve Rose

The Westfield Fox Hills Mall at the corner of Sepulveda Blvd and Slauson Ave. was not always one of Culver City's leading sales tax generators.

In the early 1960's the mall area was a decaying area of a mix of small manufacturers, service stations (now more aptly called simply "gas stations") and a combination of retail stores. The area also had a couple of horse stables, and a go-kart business.

The main concern for this area was the almost-annual flooding of the intersection at Sepulveda & Slauson that happened during winter rainstorms. During the '50's and '60's, many Culver High School students would earn extra money by towing cars that stalled in the 1-2 feet flooded intersection!

Many of the businesses in the area were there to help a small post-war community, welcoming new residents to become a part of the American success story. These businesses have names still recognized today and others are long forgotten. Among these include: Sizzler Steak House,





"WORLD FAMOUS AIRPORT CAFÉ"

JOE PETRELLI'S STEAK HOUSE ~

POMPEIAN ROOM. (above: interior and ashtray)

finished the typewritten letter with, "As you see I am not an historian besides being a burn typist."

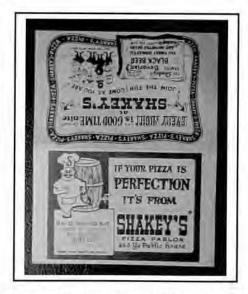
[For more information on the Hull Bldg. see: http://www.culvercity.org/cityinfo/history/hullbuildg.html] ###

Richfield Oil (now ARCO), Red Greentree's Union 76, World Wide Travel, Builders Square, Westchester Animal Hospital, Flowers by Daniel Skinner, Hal Thompson Realty, Stillman Rubber, Robert Cox Engineering, Shakey's Pizza, Woody's Smorgasburger and Joe Petrelli's Famous Steaks.



WOODY'S SMORGASBURGER





In those days, Culver City was a community whose residents also worked at local businesses such as Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Hughes Tool Co., Hughes Aircraft and Douglas Aircraft. The business community reflected its needs, like today's Mall is reflecting the shopping needs of a larger community.

[Ed. Note: "Remembering" is an occasional series of personal recollections by Culver City locals. We welcome yours!]

| Become a Member of the Culver Join others in preserving the history of the "Heart of Screenland" and the efforts  Types of Mem                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | s to create the Culver City Heritage Museum. We can't do it without you!                                                  |
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#### **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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