

Culver Historical Highlights

VOLUME 24 No. 2

Published by the Culver City Historical Society

SPRING 2003

NEW CULVER CITY SENIOR CENTER OPENS

SITE AT 4095 OVERLAND AVENUE HAS RICH HISTORY

CITY OFFICIALS & COMMUNITY WELCOME NEW SENIOR CENTER

On Saturday, March 22, 2003, the Culver City Senior Center was officially welcomed by city officials and an exuberant community in a gala Grand Opening celebration.

Among those on hand to open the long-awaited new site were Los Angeles County



Rendering of New CC Senior Center.

Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke (whose father worked at MGM), Speaker of the California State Assembly Herb Wesson (with his lovely wife, Fabian), State Senator Kevin Murray, and U.S. Congresswoman Dianne Watson. Supervisor Burke presented the Center with a check for \$80,000 from the County toward completion costs. Don Rogers, Director of Parks, Recreation, and Community Services, emceed the event.

Greeting the visiting dignitaries were Culver City's Mayor Carol Gross and the Culver City Council members Alan Corlin, Steve Rose, Gary Silbiger and Albert Vera, along with past Council members Richard Alexander, John Carl Brogdon, James Boulgarides, Steven Gourley, Jozelle Smith, Ed and Marla Wolkowitz, Mike Balkman family members,

(cont'd on page 3)

4095 OVERLAND AVENUE ONCE MGM'S BUSY LOT #2

by Julie Lugo Cerra

After the Gabrielino Indians traversed this land from nearby villages, the Machado and Talamantes families claimed it in 1819 as a part of their Rancho La Ballona. In 1913, Harry Culver announced his plans to create Culver City, which was incorporated in 1917.

By the 1930s, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios acquired the property that became known as

MGM's Lot #2. This 37-acre studio back lot extended from Overland Avenue on the east to Elenda Street on the west and from Culver Boulevard on the south to what was Montana and Arizona Avenues on the north.

Vehicles drove from MGM's main lot on the eastside of Overland into this "land of make-believe" which was crammed with outdoor sets. There were several "New York" streets: "Fifth Avenue," "Eastside Street," "Park Avenue" and "Brownstone Street." There was

(cont'd on page 3)

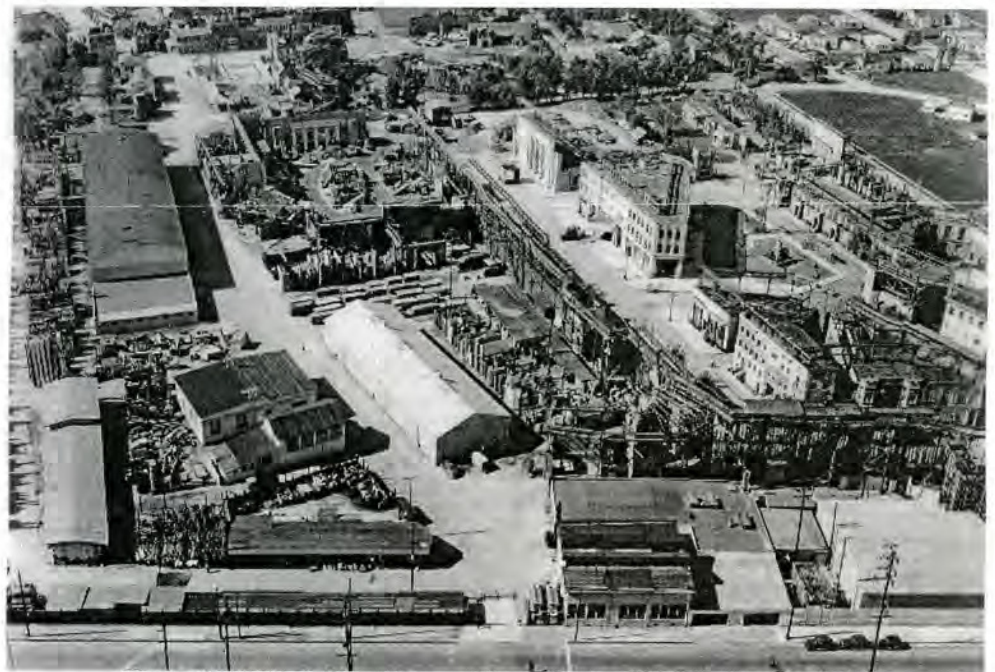


Photo of MGM Lot #2 looking west from Overland Ave. (bottom) c. 1940s.

Lower quadrant is now the site of new CC Senior Center. (courtesy of Julie Lugo Cerra)

APRIL 16TH GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

SPECIAL GUEST FILM DIRECTOR JOSEPH NEWMAN TO DISCUSS EARLY CULVER CITY

The next General Membership Meeting of the Culver City Historical Society will be held on Wednesday, April 16, 2003 at 7:00 pm in the Lethbridge Garden Room at the Veterans Memorial Building, 4117 Overland Avenue, Culver City.

Our planned guest speaker for the Spring General Meeting will be motion picture and television director, Joseph Newman. Mr. Newman, who is 94-years-young, will tell of his many years at M-G-M Studios, moving from office boy to film director. As one might imagine, he has loads of anecdotes and memories to share!

Please join us for a wonderful evening of reminiscences of our City's early days. The public is invited to enjoy the free program and students are encouraged to attend. Refreshments will be served following the program.

For more information, please call Ross Hawkins at (310) 287-4558.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Steven Rose



Spring is here! And with it comes our April General Membership Meeting with special guest speaker, film and TV director, Joseph Newman. I know you'll enjoy hearing about local filmmaking in the early days from someone who witnessed them firsthand!

Your Board members are also looking forward to a very active summer as the Society turns its efforts to two exciting programs for the weeklong Fiesta La Ballona.

First is a proposed walking tour of downtown Culver City for both Culverites and visitors to the Fiesta. The tours will be all-encompassing, explaining the history of the area as well as previewing what the future will bring to downtown Culver City. We thank Julie Lugo Cerra, the City Historian and past president of the Society, for generating this idea.

A second program under works is an event to honor local resident, Carl Pitti, whose family moved to Culver City in the '20s and who, like his father before him, was a noted stuntman in movies for many years. Scheduled for Friday, August 22nd, plans are in the works for a western-themed barbeque and film clips from some of Carl's movies. Mark your calendars for this wonderful tribute to one of the great cowboy stuntmen of the movies.

We have several committees and taskforces which are working to make the Society a better organization, but we also need our members to take an active part. Your involvement will reap rewards not only for the Society's future but for personal satisfaction as well. So get involved and participate!

Looking forward to seeing you all on April 16th for our quarterly meeting!



Notes from Your City Historian

by Julie Lugo Cerra



In January, the Cultural Affairs Commission took action on a Community Cultural Plan for our city, which includes historic preservation and art in public places. The two can often be naturally integrated and they are important to the vitality of our community. At the March 24th City Council meeting, the goals of the Cultural Plan were passed and the Cultural Affairs Commission will now flesh out the plan, with proposed action for the next five years. Good news!

LOCAL HIGH SCHOOLS PLAN EVENTS

- Hami High Alumni will get together for the annual All Alumni Picnic at Alexander Hamilton High School grounds on May 17th. For more information, call Barbara Hyten Greenstein at (310) 474-8996. Our own Eloise Langley McNerney is known as the "Queen of Memorabilia" at this event. Tours of the school will begin at 11:30 am that day.

- Culver High Grads, Classes 1961-65 Your reunion is coming up, too. Mark your calendars for May 3, 2003.

People are just so special – take the Hahns for example. I received a call from a young woman in Alaska who was trying to find a photo of her natural father when he was young, but with no success. We were able to verify that her father had attended Venice High School, and with the help of the Hahns who found the yearbook from Venice that pictured him, this young woman now has the precious memory of being able to see her father as a young man. And, it was a family venture – the yearbook belonged to the Hahn's daughter! Thank you, folks!!!

In February, I joined Bob Lopez and Joe Barnes, fellow Los Pobladores members, to attend a seminar at Loyola-Marymount University. The event, titled "Mapping Los Angeles," was co-sponsored by the California Historical Society and the California Mapping Society. I was delighted to discover some interesting information on Ballona Creek as well as the Ballona partition map which was found and donated to LMY by Fred Machado. (Just a reminder: May is Historic Preservation Month!)

Culver 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

What a rich history we have – and so alive!

Julie's piece on MGM's Lot #2 (pg.1) is a fascinating chronicle of a major slice of Culver City real estate and of Culver City history. From the early Rancho days, through the early filmmaking period to today, this piece of land has reflected so many developments and now we have the wonderful new Culver City Senior Center!

We have received some wonderful items to add to the Society's ever-growing memorabilia collections. Thanks go to Linda [Christianson] Marshall (a local gal I had the good fortune to meet through eBay!) for the copies of philatelic memorabilia of Harry Culver and his family, including a Christmas postcard postmarked 1918 and addressed to Patricia from Grandma and Grandpa! You're both great!

Our warmest wishes and condolences go to Cathy Zermeno and her family on the recent passing of her brother.

On behalf of the Society, I want to thank Susan Berg for her dedication and the incredible work she has accomplished on the archiving and cataloging of our wonderful collections. Due to other commitments, we're losing Susan as Museum Cataloging Chair, but we know we have her continued support as we move forward.

Remember, it's *your* Historical Society – we can't succeed without you!

REEL LIFE IN CULVER CITY

by Ross Hawkins



DIRECTOR JOSEPH NEWMAN TO SPEAK APRIL 16TH

On April 16, at our General Spring Meeting, our guest speaker will be motion picture and television director Joseph Newman. While I wrote about Mr. Newman in my last column, let me add that it will be a wonderful opportunity to hear about the early days of filmmaking in Culver City and at MGM.

Of particular note, Mr. Newman moved to Culver City with his family in 1919. He began working as an office boy at MGM in 1924, handing out box lunches to the extras who were playing the spectators for the chariot race in the 1925 version of *Ben Hur*. He also worked as an assistant director on *The Big Parade* and *David Copperfield*. He later began directing for the MGM shorts department and directed his first feature film, *Northwest Rangers*, in 1942.

THE SOCIETY THANKS:

Richard Mera, from West Los Angeles Community College, who designed the flyer for our March 29 event at WLAC. Our guest speaker was Major Ralph Ramirez from the California State Military Museum, who introduced Lt. Col. Edwin Ramsey who had been a guerrilla commander in the Philippines after the fall of Bataan until the liberation of the Philippines in 1944. It was a rousing morning!

And Efrem Violin who provided the photograph of Neil Rubenstein for our Winter issue.

DID YOU IDENTIFY THE PHOTO?

The answer to "Do you know who these boys are on horseback?" on page 7 of the last CCHS newsletter: Carl and Paul Pitti. Longtime residents of Culver City, this photo of the boys was taken at Will Rogers' ranch in Pacific Palisades where their father, Ben Pitti, worked as Rogers' bodyguard and ranch hand. Ben taught the Rogers' children how to ride and rope. Carl grew up to be an actor, stuntman and instructor at MGM. He will be honored by the Society at a special event on Friday, August 22 (more information to follow). ##

SENIOR CENTER (Cont'd. from page 1)

other city commissioners and city staff. Dr. Laura McGaughey, Supt. of CCUSD, was there, along with School Board members Jessica Beagles-Roos and Sandra Davis. The Center's first Director, Jody Hall Essert, was on hand as well as "Mr. Culver City," Syd Kronenthal, who looked great in bright red suspenders!

A representative from Gov. Davis' office presented a proclamation to the Center, and a letter of congratulations from President Bush was read.

A DREAM REALIZED

"This Senior Center was designed with a variety of spaces which can adapt to many

different activities," said Mayor Gross. "In doing so, it provides our seniors with a great many choices while enjoying a comfortable setting in which to meet and socialize with one another."

Situated on a three-acre site, the new 27,000 square foot building upholds Culver City's tradition of design excellence in public architecture and includes the following amenities: abundant off-street parking, 7,400 square feet of meeting and assembly space, a full-service kitchen for catering and private functions with a daily nutrition program, billiards room, crafts room, and picturesque courtyard and veranda. With existing membership from over 50 different zip codes and over 101 programs and services, the Culver City Senior Center stands to become the regional hub for senior services for the entire Westside.

For over 25 years, the Culver City Senior Center staff has provided nationally recognized programs and services to seniors and disabled residents throughout our community. And so much more is planned for the future, promises Renee Feiger, Senior & Social Services Manager.

For more information about the Senior Center, please call (310) 253-6700. ##



"Path of life," a bronze artwork by Ms. De L'Esprie, mark's entrance to the new Senior Center

MGM LOT #2 (Cont'd. from page 1)

a pool for Esther Williams, a jungle for *Tarzan* and a Cartoon Building where Hanna and Barbera got their start.

The facades, constructed for filming movies and TV, were mostly stucco-covered wood, and overhead wires could pull canvas across to make night scenes in daylight hours. Lot #2 included sets from classic films like *Ben Hur*, *The Good Earth*, *Andy Hardy*, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, *Father of the Bride*, *Singin' in the Rain*, *The Philadelphia Story* and *National Velvet*.

There was a Verona set, later burned for the *Combat* TV series in the 1960s, formal gardens, a Courthouse, a three-sided house of worship, and a bridge used for productions like *Gigi* and *The Three Musketeers*. A Town Square and Main Street could become Anytown, U.S.A.

This historic studio lot was sold to Goldrich & Kest in the early 1970s, demolished, and developed into Studio Estates, Palm Court and Studio Royale. The site of the new Senior Center remained empty until an Interim City Hall was located there in December 1989, during the construction of a new City Hall. It continued in operation until June 17, 1995, when the new City Hall was dedicated. ##

"LIVING HISTORY" PROJECT PREVIEWED

The Culver City Historical Society previewed their "Living History" Project at the Sony Black Box Theatre for the Society's annual meeting in January. Students at Culver High volunteered to play historic figures in 10-minute vignettes, bringing our history alive. The high school students brought the characters to life starting with Culver City third grade students, where the study of community begins. The volunteers will receive Community Service Credit for their efforts.

There were so many volunteers to portray city founder Harry Culver, that four stu-



CCHS Pres. Steve Rose (center) with CC High School Students at first "Living History" presentation. L-R: Katherine Mahan, Brian Walker, Iman Sylvain, Charles Hall, Goldah Tafari, D'Andra Nelson and Adelia Williamson

dents took turns giving his 1913 speech, with another student acting as a resident to introduce and close the program. The first four scripts were written to familiarize locals with the Native Americans (Gabrielinos), the Machados (founders of Rancho La Ballona), Harry Culver, and Pat Culver Battle, who was "interviewed" on her father as a public figure.

This project, spawned from an idea of Society President Steven Rose, is a partnership with the Culver City Unified School District. Joan Jakubowski and Julie Lugo Cerra wrote the first four scripts after meeting with CCUSD Supt. Laura McGaughey, Asst. Supt. Tom Dase and Culver High Principal, Franca dell'Olio.

The Society plans to integrate some historic "living" figures into our walking tour for the August Fiesta La Ballona. This is yet another way the Culver City Historical Society works to preserve our local history. ##

CCHS "THROWS" & COLLECTIBLE GREETING CARDS GREAT GIFTS

Call (310) 287-4558.

Those who do not remember the
past are condemned to repeat it.

~ George Santayana

CALENDAR

APRIL 16: GEN. MEM. MEETING
May: Preservation Month
May 3: CC High reunion
May 17: Hami All Alumni Picnic
Aug. 18-24: Fiesta La Ballona

Become a member of the Culver City Historical Society Today!

Join others in preserving the history of the "Heart of Screenland" and the efforts to create the Culver City Heritage Museum. We can't do it without you!

TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP

- | | |
|---|---|
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Patron Member (\$100) | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Member (\$50) |
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Contributions of both historic and social significance as well as monetary donations are encouraged, and the CCHS
IRS tax exempt status may make such contributions tax deductible.

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Please show YOUR support by your patronage of their services and products.

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