

Culver Historical Highlights

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WASHINGTON STREETSCAPE DEDICATED

Carlson Park: A Real "Victory"

by Julie Lugo Cerra

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In recent times, people just assumed that "victory" referred to our victory in World War I. In a 1990 interview with Alene Houck Johnson, the daughter of Mayor Reve Houck who served in the '20s, she recanted the story of the naming process. According to Alene, the city fathers were soliciting suggestions to name the park. It was Mrs. Houck, the mayor's wife, who suggested Victory Park. Contrary to common belief, her reasoning was that "It was a



(L-R) Ed Wolkowitz, Richard Marcus, David Hauptman, actress Betty Garrett, Mayor Sandi Levin, Jody Hall-Esser, Albert Vera.



"Heart of Screenland" Redevelopment Project Brings Out Stars

"It's the eastern gateway into the city. We wanted to make it very distinct. We also wanted to make Washington Boulevard more pedestrian-friendly and more attractive to the [area's] businesses," said Margaret Liu, the city's redevelopment project manager.

To that end, the Washington Streetscape Project was officially dedicated by our city fathers on Saturday, May 30 with food, music and entertainment. A number of film stars who have worked at the various Culver City studios also came out for the celebration and were photographed at the tree surrounds of the films they have appeared in. The surrounds are placed on our own Hollywood-type "Walk of Fame" which lines the boulevard. For the renovation, a movie theme was chosen to honor the city's 80-year history with the film industry as well as beautify the area.

It was a great day, full of fun and fond memories as the adjoining photos show. (see accompanying story by City Historian, Julie Lugo Cerra.)



(clockwise from top) Actors Martin Landau, Kathryn Grayson, *On The Town* surround, Nanett Fabray, Margaret O'Brien.

picnic in the park

It's that time of year again - the CCHS Annual Potluck Picnic and General Membership Meeting. This year we will "convene" at Carlson Park in Culver City (at Braddock Drive, between Motor and Le Bourget Avenues) on Wednesday evening, August 26th beginning at 5:00 pm.

The public, young and old alike, are invited to come out for an old-fashioned picnic with family, friends and neighbors, and enjoy a display of memorabilia from "Uncle Syd" Kronenthal, recently retired Director of Human Resources for the City of Culver City.

As this is a potluck picnic, picnickers are asked to bring a main dish, salad or dessert for six people plus themselves. Plates, utensils and soft drinks will be provided by the CCHS. For more information or if you would like to help with the picnic planning, please call Ross Hawkins at (310) 839-5725.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Lu Herrera



It's Summertime and the living should be easy and relaxed, filled with happy times and memories. The CCHS is doing its part with its Annual Potluck Picnic, this year to be held at Carlson Park on Wednesday evening, August 26.

I encourage you all to come out, relax on a summer's eve with family and friends for a good old-fashioned picnic. As this will also be a General Membership Meeting, you will have the opportunity of visiting with the CCHS Board and learning more about what the Society is doing, the work of its various committees and its fundraising plans for our museum.

We hope you will bring not only a potluck food item, but lots of ideas and suggestions for future CCHS events and activities. We need your support as volunteers to help in our research of historic sites, the archiving of historic documents, and the planning of CCHS events and outreach programs. Remember, I'm always available and can be reached at (310) 838-1073.

Notes from Your City Historian

by Julie Lugo Cerra



• It was clearly the "Heart of Screenland" when the Washington Streetscape Project was dedicated on May 30, 1998 (see photos on front page). Participating in festivities that included our own "Walk of Fame" tree surrounds inscribed with movies they made were Kathryn Grayson, Betty Garrett, Margaret O'Brien, Martin Landau, and Nanette Fabray. Film archivist Marvin Paige and Tony Anselmo, the voice of Donald Duck, were added bonuses.

Former Councilmember Mike Balkman was summoned to kick off the event with the current CCRA/Councilmembers: Sandi Levin, (Mayor), Richard Marcus, (Vice Mayor), Ed Wolkowitz (Agency Chair), David Hauptman and Albert Vera.

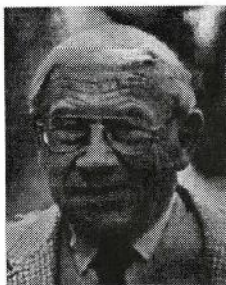
In addition to city/agency staff headed by CAO Jody Hall-Esser, visiting officials included Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, L.A. County Supervisor, 2nd District, Herb Wesson from Burke's office, Kevin Murray, Assemblymember, 47th District, and Joey Hill from Murray's office.

More than one of the stars remarked about the positive changes made by Culver City Redevelopment as they each received a key to the city and a commendation. They toured the area in the trolley, stopping to have photos taken at their own tree surrounds. More than once, Vice Mayor Marcus surprised everyone with his musical ability when he joined the stars in

songs from the movies. Live music was provided for the event by the Benn Clatworthy Jazz Quartet, and other activities including a scavenger hunt, a fencing demonstration by the Westside Family Center, an art display and a trolley tour. Raffles and refreshments rounded out the event.

To check out the 62 tree surrounds, take a walk east on Washington Blvd. beginning at National Blvd. The project also includes a banner program, new bus shelters and the Ballona Creek Towers.

• Syd Kronenthal retired with 52 years of service to the City of Culver City on June 30, 1998. Kronenthal, for whom a park was renamed, eased out of his position, by accepting a commendation from the City Council at a ceremony on June 22, 1998, with a reception in the Daniel L. Patacchia Conference Room at City Hall following. If you need him, "Uncle Syd" is still around, and can be reached on his city number as he works to catalog his collection of memorabilia. (see photo). He will also be working more closely on CCHS projects in the future. Don Rogers now occupies the position of Director of Human Services.



• As City Historian, I receive some pretty interesting questions. The latest call to make me smile required that I locate the burial place of actor Jeff Chandler. (If you guessed Hillside Memorial Park, you are right! But what was his real name? Hint: Ira _____.)

Culver Historical Highlights

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(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.

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EDITOR'S BOX

With each new issue of Culver Historical Highlights, we hope to bring new features and special interest columns that we think will add to the informational and historical research that this newsletter aims for. CCHS Historic Sites Chair, Sam Cerra, begins his occasional column, "Historic Sites Update," which will focus on the work and research being done to uncover and designate the historic and cultural landmarks of our city.

While not yet formalized, we will soon have a regular column of events and activities around the Southland which will acknowledge some of the interesting items on the calendars of our sister historical societies and other such organizations. In this issue, we highlight the annual Los Pobladores reenactment walk, honoring the original settlers of Los Angeles. Please call (310) 838-1073, if you are interested in organizing a group from Culver City to take part.

And let us know your thoughts and opinions on what you've found on these pages and what you would like to see in future issues - we want your support and input to make this newsletter interactive and vital to the community.

Historic Sites Update

by Sam Cerra

The Historic Sites Committee's ongoing work is to research and explore historic sites, some of which the society will mark with a bronze plaque. A site qualifies if it is at least 50 years old and has historic significance.

Among of the sites we are currently researching are Camp Latham (a civil war camp which was located on the present site of Rotary Plaza) and The Culver Hotel. To nominate a site, please send written information to: Historic Sites Committee, c/o Sam Cerra, Chair Culver City Historical Society, P. O. Box 3428, Culver City, CA 90231-3428. If you have any information, or wish to join our committee, please contact us at: (310) 558-3818.

REEL LIFE IN CULVER CITY

by Ross Hawkins



Frankly My Dear, We Still Give A D...!

On Wednesday, June 24, I was invited by John Smith of New Line Cinema to document the premiere of the new digitally re-mastered technicolor print of David O. Selznick's masterpiece, *Gone With The Wind*.

The red carpet was rolled out for the last remaining cast members of the fifty-nine year-old classic at the Motion Picture Academy on Wilshire Boulevard, with members of the Fourth Estate out in full force to interview them. Of the people who worked behind the camera on the film, only Marcella Radwin, Selznick's personal secretary was alive and able to attend.

Ms. Radwin has just written a book and, with a twinkle in her eye, told of how she adored Selznick but was finally forced to chose between her job and her husband.

"It was two-o'clock in the morning and David was still in a story conference," she recalled. "I had been promised that I could leave at seven. Finally, after my husband demanded, 'make your choice - it's me or him!' I called David and said, 'I'm leaving, Mr. Selznick.' 'You are?' was his reply. 'You don't understand, Mr. Selznick - I'm leaving for good!'"

Actress Evelyn Keyes, who played Scarlett O'Hara's younger sister and who actually was born and raised in Atlanta, attended the premiere and recalled how Cecil B. De Mille had sent her to diction coaches to rid her of her Southern accent.

Fred Crane, who played one of the Tareyton twins seen in the opening sequence was a virtual font of film lore about the movie. According to Crane, the opening sequence was actually filmed three times. In the first version, their hair came out looking pink and he, and the late George Reeves, "both looked like Harpo Marx," hinting the this may have accounted for why director George Cukor got the axe and not because of Clark Gable's complaints as legend would have it.

After principal photography was completed, the first scene was reshot.

"It looked fine, but the script supervisor was advised by a consultant 'that no seventeen-year-old Southern girl would be sitting outside with two young men showing that much bosom.' So they reshot the scene again and Ms. Leigh was more modestly attired."

This coming December will mark the 60th Anniversary of the beginning of filming of *Gone With The Wind*, and, hopefully, Culver City will have some sort of celebration to recall the night that half the town showed up at the outskirts of the backlot of what is now the Sony Culver Studios to watch the biggest barbecue the city had ever seen.

Fiesta Fun

by Stu Freeman

The 1998 Fiesta La Ballona was a great success for all and especially for the CCHS.



For several years, the Society has had a booth to display memorabilia, answer questions of city history and let the community know of the rich and fascinating story of Culver City. In its continuing efforts to build a city museum, the Society raised funds through the sales of collectible items including postcards, license plates, and its very popular video tape, *Historic Culver City*, which had several public screenings on Saturday.

This year we were extremely fortunate

to have two original animation cels donated for a drawing by their creator and longtime CCHS member, Martha Siegel. Martha has had a long and prestigious career in animation, notably working on the *Tom & Jerry* cartoons.

We were also delighted to once again have on display the 1962 Helms Bakery Coach loaned by Lee Bixler, owner of The Antique Guild, who was on hand to answer questions and reminisce about the "tasty" history of the Helms Bakery. Thanks, Lee - you're becoming a permanent fixture at the Fiesta!

I want to personally thank the following for their time and energy and hard-work in helping to make this year's Fiesta one of the best: Susan Berg, Lou and Janet Block, Sam Cerra, Ross Hawkins, Lu Herrera, Edna and Ralph Larkin, Jackie McCandless, Edith Prager, Judy Stangler, and special thanks to Martha and Sol Siegel.

Thanks to everyone!

Los Pobladores Walk

Retrace L.A. Founders Footprints

On Monday, Sept. 7th, to celebrate the 217 birthday of El Pueblo de la Reina de los Angeles, or more commonly known as Los Angeles, the reenactment of the 1781 trek of the city founders will be again be held. Los Pobladores 200, the descendants of the original settlers, will lead the walk, beginning at the San Gabriel Mission and ending at Olvera Street, an approximate 9-mile route, taking three hours to complete. For more information, please call Robert E. Smith at (310) 326-9556.

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

NAPOLÉON G. PLATO

An era has ended in Culver City with the passing of Napoleon G. Plato on July 9, 1998. Born and raised in Greece, Napoleon moved to Southern California and, in 1933, began his real estate practice in downtown Culver City. For 65 years he witnessed the growth of the Downtown area and all of Culver City from his second floor office at 9400 Washington Boulevard. He watched the Alla Branch Line trains transport passengers along Culver Boulevard from the Red Car Line junction at Venice Boulevard to the beach cities, and he watched Hal Roach film the Laurel and Hardy movies across the street in front of the Adams Hotel.

Napoleon was a tough but fair real estate negotiator and a contemporary of Culver City's founding fathers: Culver City founder Harry Culver; the first land sub-divider in Culver City, Camillo Cereghino; Mayor Dan Coombs, City Attorney Mike Tellefson; and many others. Active to the end, he stopped driving at age 99, but continued to come to his office with his son George every morning until he was past 105.

Our friend, Napoleon Plato, will be greatly missed.

- Susan Berg

ADDENDUM

Due to an error in the formatting of this issue of the *Culver Historic Highlights*, the ending of the front page article, *Carlson Park: A Real "Victory"* by Julie Lugo Cerra, was inadvertently cut off. We apologize for this and here present the article in its entirety.

Carlson Park: A Real "Victory"

by Julie Lugo Cerra,
City Historian, City of Culver City

When Harry Culver established Culver City, his dream of the balanced community began with 1.2 square miles centered around Main Street. There was a park near his office called Media Park, but it was actually in the city of Los Angeles.

Houses began to dot the former "fields" of Ranchos La Ballona and Rincon de los Bueyes and in 1923, a horseracing track opened south of Culver Boulevard. The "track" only lasted a year. In 1924, it was reconstructed to become the famous Speedway, where "Indy" type races took place on a board track. The Speedway was also short-lived and by 1927, according to city records, the sub-dividers of the Speedway property dedicated a 2.66 acre portion of this land for park use at no cost to the city, which is a common development practice (Blair Hills Park, Blanco Park). That was the beginning of "Victory Park."

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referred to our victory in World War I. In a 1990 interview with Alene Houck Johnson, the daughter of Mayor Reve Houck who served in the '20s, she recanted the story of the naming process. According to Alene, the city fathers were soliciting suggestions to name the park. It was Mrs. Houck, the mayor's wife, who suggested Victory Park. Contrary to common belief, her reasoning was that "It was a victory to get a park in Culver City!"

Victory Park was established as a "passive park," where the gazebo was used for festive summer parties. Locals have no shortage of fond memories of childhood birthday celebrations with the park decorated by moms, who served ice cream and cake and organized games of "pin the tail on the donkey."

In 1963, the Chamber of Commerce's historical society placed a marker at the foot of three palm trees commemorating the local heritage. The plaque lists the first seven families in what became Culver City: Machado, Talamantes, Higuera, Ybarra, Lugo, Rocha, and Saenz. And

according to former Parks Director Roy Wells, those trees were transplanted from some of the old ranchos.

In 1964, a medical missionary, Dr. Paul Carlson, lost his life in the Congo and the park was later renamed by the city to honor Dr. Carlson's life work.

Since that time, the park remains a pleasant respite for picnic outings, strolling, jogging, and families taking their small children for walks. The only major change has been an installation of public art in the center. Carlson Park is located on Braddock Drive between Motor and Le Bourget Avenues.

[Editor's note: Mark your calendar for the CCHS Annual Picnic on Wednesday, August 26th to be held at Carlson Park.]

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!

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☐ I wish to renew my membership.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ Zip _____

Type of membership, Check one:

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