

# Culver Historical Highlights

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## THE CULVER TO BECOME THE KIRK DOUGLAS THEATRE Society Supports National Historical Designation

### CULVER THEATRE ALREADY DESIGNATED LOCAL LANDMARK

by Julie Lugo Cerra  
City Historian

The Culver City Redevelopment Agency and Center Theatre Group entered a Disposition and Development Agreement on June 6, 2001 for the renovation and re-use of the Historic Culver Theater for live-performances. On January, 30, 2002 the theater was officially renamed the Kirk Douglas Theatre at a gala press event. The renaming was in honor of Anne and Kirk Douglas' donation of \$2.5 million towards the total estimated renovation cost of \$11 million.

In May, the CCRA staff came to the Historical Society Board, requesting support for their proposed application for State designation of The Culver Theatre. The Board, aware that the theatre already held a local "Landmark" designation, took action to support the Agency if they applied for



ANNE & KIRK DOUGLAS AT  
DEDICATION OF  
THE KIRK DOUGLAS THEATER



THE CULVER THEATER OPENS IN 1947

further historical designation. That action was designed in hopes that the Agency would apply for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Since 1990, when the city adopted the Historic Preservation ordinance, there have been three successful nominations to the national register: The Culver Hotel, The Washington Building and the Citizen Building. The Ivy Substation, on lease from Los Angeles, was awarded that status, after one of our members, David Cameron, made the nomination to save the building.

### THE KIRK DOUGLAS THEATRE

The Kirk Douglas Theatre will house the play development programs of Center Theatre Group's Mark Taper Forum, offering a home for works deemed too intimate for the Taper or for its larger sibling, the Ahmanson Theatre, or that are not yet ready for a larger space. It also would be the home of the Taper's youth productions. "The point of the theater is to give young talent a chance to

(cont'd on page 3)

### FAREWELL TO FRIEND AND PATRON GEORGE SIDNEY

by Ross Hawkins  
Vice President, Programs

The Historical Society has lost one of its dearest friends and patron, famed film director George Sidney who died in May of this year.

George was not only one of the last great directors from the movies' Golden Age, he and his lovely wife, Corinne, were ardent supporters of the Society and among the honored guests at the first "Heart of Screenland Star" Awards ceremony in 1998 which honored Turner Entertainment President Roger Mayer.

Starting out as a child actor in 1927, he appeared in an early film directed by Frank Capra called *For The Love of Mike*, Claudette Colbert's first film. When George asked Capra what he thought of his acting ability, Capra replied, "Listen kid, when you grow up, don't be an actor, be a director."



(cont'd on page 3)

## ANNUAL "PICNIC IN THE PARK" • JULY 16TH GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING •

It's Summer again and time for the annual Culver City Historical Society Picnic - where young and old alike come out for an evening of family fun and good food!

This year's picnic will be held at Veterans Park (NW corner of the park off Culver Blvd. at the B-B-Q pit area) on Tuesday, July 16, 2002, starting at 5:30 pm. The picnic is potluck and members 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 Society.

The public is invited and members are encouraged to bring family and friends. For more information and to let us know what you'll be bringing, or if you would like to help with the picnic planning, please call Ross Hawkins at (310) 204-6920.



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Steve Rose



Your Culver City Historical Society Board of Directors is working hard to bring new projects into working programs to advance the Society on many fronts. We are making plans for a collectible "roadshow" for the Fall that will allow the public to bring a collectible to be assessed. The Board is also planning a major fundraiser for the Spring 2003 to honor a respected "star" from Culver City's film past.

Led by Martha Gunther, the Society will be coming out this Fall with a series of historic note cards that will each be printed in a limited number with a new set of cards coming out every six months following the initial printing. We believe that this venture will not only bring some very exciting new fundraising opportunities but also expand our ability to bring the City's history to the public in another exciting manner.

Our annual summer potluck picnic is coming up this July 16, and I hope to see you out there enjoying a great summer evening at Veterans Park with your fellow members and friends. Just let us know that your coming and what you'll be bringing to share with everyone. You can enjoy the treats of Anita, Cathy, Don, Joan, Julie, Martha, Ross and myself plus many more and especially YOURS! See you all soon in the future making tomorrow's history.....



## Notes from Your City Historian

by Julie Lugo Cerra



### HAPPENINGS

• The John Battle family, after the death of John's mom, Pat Culver Battle, have been working to catalog family photos of our favorite first city family. Pat's grandson Robert is quite the technical guy, and he has sent me a disk with photos, from early ancestors to Harry Culver, Pat Culver and her children. I look forward to sharing them.

• I was pleased to spend some time with Stan Abrams, another wonderful local resource. Not only was he a designer of restaurant interiors, like Ships, but he shared some great memories about times he delivered produce to local restaurants, like the King's Tropical Inn. Many of you, like Stan, help to make history come alive. Putting all these tidbits of memories together will be the foundation for making our Living History Project successful.

• The last large piece of Ygnacio Machado's original Culver City property was sold by the Machado cousins recently. It is located in the Baldwin Hills, near the Raintree development.

• Remember that Machado night is celebrated every September at the Centinela Adobe's Potluck dinner.

• Watch for information on a September Town Hall meeting where public information will be solicited on a Cultural Plan for our city. Help the city plan public art and move on with historic preservation. The Cultural Affairs Commission meets on the second Tuesday of the month at 7pm, generally in the Mike Balkman Council Chambers.

## "CULVER CITY COLLECTIBLES CLINIC" SEPT. 21ST

The Historical Society, in association with West Los Angeles Community College, will be hosting the first "Culver City Collectibles Clinic" on Saturday, September 21, 2002.

Please mark your calendars for our local version of the popular public television's "Antiques Roadshow" which will be held from 10:00 am - 6:00 pm at the WLAC campus in its Fine Arts Gallery and adjoining Quad. Film historian and archivist Marc Wanamaker and actor/collectibles specialist Michael Goodrow will be conducting the clinic.

Wanamaker, CCHS Vice President, Museum, is the owner of Bison Archives and has worked as technical advisor on several major motion pictures including *Blade Runner*, *The Last Tycoon*, and the AMC cable TV series, "The Lot." He is currently researching a book on the history of motion picture studios in the U.S. Micheal Goodrow appeared as a regular on the TV series, "Eight Is Enough." He grew up in Culver City, not far from the Culver Studios. Also on hand to assist will be Culver City Historian Julie Lugo Cerra.

Such items as photo albums, recordings, old movies, paintings, movie posters, scrapbooks, cartoon cells, vintage documents, etc. will be assessed. While the emphasis will focus on Culver City memorabilia, other film and local area items will also be viewed.

For additional information, call the Culver City Historical Society's office at the West Los Angeles College at (310) 287-4558.



## Culver Historical Highlights

PO BOX 3428 • CULVER CITY, CA • 90231-3428  
(310) 287-4558

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 COLUMN

It's been a busy period for your Historical Society: A new CCHS Board beginning its work on such exciting programs as "The Living History Project," the annual Fiesta La Ballona, and the upcoming "Culver City Collectibles Clinic."

First, let us thank everyone who participated in the very successful Fiesta 2002 - all the volunteers, the city tour guides, and especially, Woody & Martha Tolkien who donated the great raffle prize of the miniature, detailed General Store. It was another wonderful Fiesta weekend!

The Society mourns the passing of film industry mogul Lew Wasserman in June. He showed exceptional generosity to our 1998 fundraiser, the first "Heart of Screenland Star" Award honoring Roger Mayer. It shouldn't have come as a surprise as Mr. Wasserman has been an extraordinary cultural and civic philanthropist for most of his career and we were most grateful to have experienced his kindness first-hand. Our condolences go to his wife of 66 years, prominent in her own right, Mrs. Edie Wasserman, and to her family.

And finally, let us add our "Congratulations" to the 2002 Culver City High School graduates, 90% of whom will be continuing their education at either a two- or four-year college or university - fantastic!

Remember, we can't do it without you it's YOUR Culver City Historical Society!



# REEL LIFE IN CULVER CITY

by Ross Hawkins



## DEDICATION OF AVIATION- TRAVEL COMPLEX AT WEST L.A. COLLEGE

West Los Angeles College President Frank Quiambo dedicated the Aviation-Travel Complex at the local campus on Thursday, May 30. Also on hand for the dedication ceremonies were Culver City Chamber President/City Council Member/Historical Society President Steve Rose, Dr. Paul Stansbury, Vice President of Academic Affairs at WLAC, and Larry and Marianne Coulson, Education Coordinators for the Hogan Family Foundation Travel Institute.

WLAC's aviation program opened in 1947 after World War II and was established as the first CAA mechanics-approved school in



California. The 15,000 sq. ft. facility was located at WLA's Airport Campus at 9700 South Sepulveda Blvd. near LAX. In 1997, the new Aviation-Travel Complex was built at the College and is now home to both the Aviation and The Travel and Tourism Departments.

As I toured the department I recalled that while the movie industry provided the glamour for Culver City and the Westside, it was the aviation industry that provided the bread and butter for many Westside families. In 1939, Howard Hughes bought a struggling airline on the verge of bankruptcy called TWA. In 1941, according to Stan Abrams, he was setting up offices at the Culver Hotel, to draw up plans for the hanger that would house the Spruce Goose and other offices at what is now Playa Vista.

World War II brought Hughes, Douglas Aircraft and Lockheed into the area changing the topography of the Westside forever.

### WWI SCRAPBOOK

After I requested information on a World War I scrapbook we had received from an unknown donor in my last column, I had the opportunity of showing the scrapbook and other memorabilia to a group who were meeting with WLAC President Frank Quiambo. One was Ed Levy from Northrop-Grumman Corp. who thought it might be possible he could be of some help in identifying some of the people in the early photos.

He said that one of the photos is an especially rare find of an aerial dogfight circa 1916. Levy said that because the Americans weren't

in the war at that point and the French and English didn't mount cameras on their planes at that time, he was fairly certain that the photo had to be taken from a German plane.

Further, he advised that he had additional information on Jimmy Dickson, a WWI ace who was Harry Culver's pilot in the 1920s. Dickson was killed in a freak accident in 1932 piloting the plane, "The Spirit of Fun," owned by Hal Roach, while in South Africa on a publicity tour for MGM. We'll give you more details in our next edition.

### Culver Theater (cont'd from page 1)

develop," said the veteran movie star, now 85.

The interior of the building, will be overhauled to create a flexible space with about 400 seats and a smaller upstairs facility that would seat 100. The total cost of the project, to be overseen by Culver City-based architect Steven Ehrlich, is estimated between \$7 million and \$8 million.

The theater is tentatively slated for a 2004 opening.

### A LONG HISTORY

The Culver Theater began construction in 1945. It was built in the late Moderne style, and like the Meralta, was a source of jobs for local youth. The ushers and usherettes were uniformed in white shirts, block bow ties, red jackets and gray pants with silver stripes and took direction from their tuxedo-clad managers. "Sneak Previews" were common, and movie stars like Ann-Margret and Elvis slipped in to see movies on occasion.

As the need for single theaters and ushers with flashlights declined, the Principal Theater was sold and reconfigured into a triplex. The Culver underwent changes of ownership, as the Mann chain purchased the theater in the early 1970s, and later, by the Great Western Theatres, Inc., and NCC Theatre Corp. In 1985, the Culver City Redevelopment Agency bought the theatre. The Culver ceased operations in 1989. (Some might remember Ad Chamberlain's print shop located in the back of the theater as well.)

This local landmark remains a symbol of city founder Harry Culver's interest in the industry that provided the economic base for Culver City.

## "HISTORIC SIGHTINGS" SITE #6: MAIN STREET

by Sandy Burton  
Photography Chairman

In 1913, founder Harry Culver announced his plans to form a new city at the California Club in Los Angeles. He then filed the official papers for the establishment of Main Street with the County of Los Angeles soon after.

Culver located his offices on this heavily traveled thoroughfare. At one end of Main Street, he built the Hotel Hunt in 1924. Now called the Culver Hotel, this six-story landmark has been renovated by Catlett Construction.

Main Street is home to many different establishments including the Stellar Bros. Hardware store which has been in business since 1923, and which boasts a fabulous 1-story size painting of Laurel & Hardy on its outside back wall. There are sidewalk cafes: a Mexican restaurant next to an Italian restaurant, and across the street, a European cafe. What a delightful blend of ethnic cultures!



### George Sidney (cont'd from page 1)

George came on the lot at MGM in the early 1930s, working as an assistant director and director of short subjects. He directed Judy Garland's screen test and several "Our Gang" comedies after the gang had moved from the Hal Roach lot to MGM. Some of his best remembered films are the classic musicals *Showboat*, *The Harvey Girls* and *Anchors Aweigh*.

I was told by casting director Marvin Paige that Sidney helped finance Hanna and Barbera when MGM brass made the decision that the world had seen enough of "Tom & Jerry." George later moved over to Columbia where he continued directing top musicals such as *Pal Joey* and *Bye Bye Birdie*.

Our condolences and best wishes go to Mrs. Corinne Sidney, her son, Ben, and their family.

## IN MEMORIAM: DAN CAVANAUGH

Dan Cavanaugh, one of Culver City's most prominent community leaders, has died at the age of 85. Born in Leetonia, OH in 1917, Dan eventually moved to California in 1946 and married his childhood friend, Vera Chamberlain, also of Leetonia. They were married almost 55 years until her death in June of 2001.

Dan loved the real estate business from the beginning, asking one of the earlier realty "statesman," William B. Zomar (who had opened his real estate office on Venice Blvd. at the corner of Cardiff Ave. in 1922), whether there was "enough business for other realtors in such close proximity." Mr. Zomar, taken by the enthusiasm and amiability of the young man, replied, "Sure! There's plenty of business for everyone!" Later, after having worked for Dick Miller, Joe Anthony and Dan Pataccchia, the Cavanaugh's started Cavanaugh Realtors in 1961, and Dan remained involved even after his retirement in 1994.

Actively participating in many community groups, Dan was a member of many organizations including the Culver City Rotary, the Knights of Columbus and the Elks.

The Society sends its best wishes to the Cavanaugh family.



## 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!

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P.O. Box 3428, Culver City, CA 90231-3428. For further information, call (310) 287-4558.

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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