Harry Culver Takes A ‘Seat’ Downtown

CITY PROCLAMATION GIVEN TO SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION MONTH

MAY PROCLAIMED “HISTORIC PRESERVATION MONTH”

CITY PRESENTS PROCLAMATION TO CC HISTORICAL SOCIETY

At the City Council meeting on May 8, 2006, the Culver City Historical Society was presented with a Proclamation proclaiming May as “Historic Preservation Month.”

On hand to receive this appropriate and well-earned honor was President Cathy Zermeno and CCHS Board members Lynn Baril, Susan Deen, and Robin Turner.

CULVER HOTEL SITE OF CULVER FAMILY SCULPTURE

by Julie Lugo Cerra

BRONZE SCULPTURE DEDICATED

On Sunday, March 26, 2006, the City of Culver City dedicated a bronze sculpture of city founder, Harry H. Culver. The commissioned artwork – “A Moment in Time” – is part of the city’s Art in Public Places program.

Artist De L’Esprie portrayed Harry Culver sitting on a bench, the day after the city was incorporated in 1917. He is reading a newspaper, fashioned in copper, dated September 21, 1917. The paper is filled with period ads and a reprint of Culver’s 1913 speech at the California Club in which he laid out his plans for our city. Standing behind Culver and looking over his shoulder is his wife, Lillian Roberts Culver, holding their new baby daughter, Patricia.

Dr. John Battle, Harry Culver’s grandson, and his family, came from their home in Seattle, WA, to take part in the ceremony. The Cultural Affairs Division involved the Culver City Historical Society in the program, which began, appropriately, inside the Culver Hotel.

After local officials were acknowledged, Mayor Albert Vera gave City Historian Julie Lugo Cerra the microphone to talk a bit about the Society and its activities, specifically the “Living History Project.” She had the privilege of introducing John Battle, who gave a wonderful recital of his grandfather’s 1913 speech!

The crowd adjourned outside for the unveiling. And what a photo op … then and now! The city had arranged for period-appropriate musical entertainment. The Society offered a walking tour, which the Culver family took along with others.

CCHS Annual “Picnic in the Park”
· JULY 19TH GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING ·

Summer Time! Picnic Time! It’s time for the annual Culver City Historical Society’s “Picnic in the Park” – so come join friends and neighbors to relax and enjoy delicious food and drink and a summer’s evening for a great community get-together.

This year’s picnic will be held at Carlson Park (corner of Braddock & Le Bourget) on Wednesday, July 19, 2006 from 5:30 pm to 8:00 pm with dinner served at 6:00 pm. Members of the “Screenland A’s” will be on hand to show off and discuss their wonderful vintage Model A cars. And there will be games!

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 Marty Nicholson at (310) 253-6662 or email at Martynic99@aol.com.
PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

by Cathy Zermeno

Summer is here and it is a beautiful time of the year. Daylight Saving Time increases our “evening hours” and enables us to enjoy the many old and new attractions of our City. And, there are so many great things happening in our City: lots of fine restaurants, first-class movie theaters, live theater and musical performances, parks to enjoy – Culver City has indeed developed into a really fun city!

The next CCHS General Meeting will be the Society’s annual “Picnic in the Park.” This year it is scheduled for Wednesday, July 19, and will be held at Carlson Park. Because our Picnic has more than a quarter of a century history, I think our readers will be interested in how we started our annual Picnics and so I have jotted down a brief overview (see “The First Picnic” story on Page 4).

Since that first picnic twenty-five years ago, the Society has continued the tradition, holding an annual picnic each summer at one of our beautiful City parks. It is my pleasure to invite you all to join us at this year’s annual “Picnic in the Park.” As always, it will be a potluck meal and you can bet there will be lots of delicious food for everyone!

Please call 1st VP Marty Nickolson at: (310) 253-6662, or me at: (310) 839-7688. Let us know that you will be joining us and what food items you will be bringing. The Society will supply soft drinks, plates & cups, and plastic utensils. Come and renew long-time friendships – and make new friends!

Looking forward to seeing you on the 19th…

Best,

Cathy Zermeno

Notes from Your City Historian

by Julie Lugo Cerra

“LIVING HISTORY” STILL A HIT!

Enjoy this photo of the last of the “Living History” performances for this school year.

We featured pictures of the “Machado Brothers” in the Spring newsletter. Since then, high school student volunteers went out to third grade classes at each elementary school with two presentations. The first was an adapted skit on the Tongva/ Gabrielino Indians, performed by Rezwan Kabir and Ashley Guerrero. The second, a “Pat Culver Battle” skit, had rotating stars and you can see their warm reception at Linwood E. Howe School, with 3rd grade teacher, Mrs. Kita (center).

Linwood E. Howe parent, Angela Dyborn, has been working with the students to produce a DVD on the history of our community. The school received an Education Foundation grant to do a mural, focusing on local history. It was dedicated June 21st.

DOWNTOWN STUDENT TOURS

We had the pleasure of taking six classes of El Marino students on an historic walk of downtown Culver City, on two Thursday mornings in May. They began by doing a marker rubbing of the plaque for Historic Site No. 1 – our 1928 City Hall. Splitting the groups, half of the students toured downtown, while the others visited the CC Police Department with Lt. Dean Williams. We then switched groups – and directions – at the site of the plaque on Culver and Duquesne. The students were amazingly aware of their community history!

HISTORY IS FUN!

Memories….. Much of the fun in preserving history lies in the collection of memories. If you or someone you know worked at The Culver Studios, (aka Desilu, RKO-Pathe, Laird Intl., Culver City Studios, De Mille Studios, Selznick Intl., but originally Thomas Ince Studios). Please contact me, via email or phone. (Julie@CerraEnterprises.com, or 310 558-3818).

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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Cathy Zermeno ……………… President
Steven J. Rose ……………… Past President
Marty Nicholson ……………… 1st VP, Program
Robin Turner ……………… 2nd VP, Museum
Susan Deen ……………… 3rd VP, Ways & Means
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Julie Lugo Cerra ……………… Governmental Liasion
Anita Shapiro ……………… Sunshine Director

Contributing Writers…………..…… Julie Lugo Cerra

Editor’s Column

“Culver City: A Wizard at ahhs”

So states the Los Angeles Times in a recent article by restaurant critic S. Irene Virbila. Further adding, “The food scene is burgeoning in the town where Dorothy followed the Yellow Brick Road on the old MGM lot.” Virbila calls the scene eclectic but down to earth: “An inviting collection of restaurants and cafes have cropped up in recent months, and more are on the way.” And we have a cooking school “turning out polished home cooks and aspiring professionals.” She ends by saying that “Culver City is closing in on being the most food friendly town on the Westside.”

Exciting news to hear that others outside our community are learning what we’ve been seeing developed over the past decade or so. Check out the many choices on the City’s website at: http://www.downtownculvercity.com/dining.php

Let us hear your stories of past eateries and dining experiences!

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

“LOOKING BACK…. !”

With all the interest in local history, I have again agreed to write a weekly column in the Culver City News. The first installment of Looking Back…..with Julie Lugo Cerra was published on June 22th. At the end of each article, there will be information on the CC Historical Society.
CULVER CITY’S “40-ACRES”
STUDIO BACKLOT RANCH

One of Culver City’s most famous studio backlots was a 40-acre location property on the north bank of La Ballona Creek.

INCE & DEMILLE

The story begins with the creation of the Thomas H. Ince Studio in 1918, the second of two studios in the new town of Culver City. At this time Thomas Ince Productions used La Ballona Creek and the surrounding hills as film locations.

When Ince died at the end of 1924, his friend Cecil B. DeMille purchased the studio in the following year with the help of Pathé America as his financial partner and film distributor. DeMille acquired acreage on La Ballona Creek at what is now Higuera Street and Ince Boulevard. One of the first films shot on this new backlot ranch was The Road To Yesterday (1925), and over the next three years, DeMille used the area for his epic film The King of Kings (1927), among others.

PATHÉ, RKO & SELZNICK

In 1926, the Radio Corporation of America merged with Pathé and by 1928, had changed its name to Pathé Studios Culver City. The backlot ranch at this time contained around 32 acres and another eight acres were added along the north bank of La Ballona Creek.

By 1930, the backlot was called the RKO-Pathé “40-Acres” (though, in fact, it was only 29 acres). Between 1930 and 1935, more sets were built in and around the previous settings of the DeMille days. In 1932, the large King Kong “jungle wall” sets were constructed, later to be burned down during the shooting of Gone With the Wind in 1938. When David O. Selznick leased the entire studio complex in 1935, the ranch name alternated between “30-Acres” and “40-Acres.”

In 1946, RKO-Pathé purchased the “40-Acres” ranch after a long lease arrangement. Throughout the 1940s, Selznick used the backlot for such films as Since You Went Away, Duel In the Sun and Portrait of Jennie.

HUGHES & DESILU TV

In 1950, Howard Hughes took over ownership of RKO and continued renting the RKO-Pathé studios to outside producers. In 1951, the early “Superman” TV series was shot on the 40-Acres – beginning the backlot’s television history. At this time such films as Jet Pilot, The Big Sky and Androcles and the Lion were also shot on the RKO 40-Acres.

Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz took over the old RKO-Pathé lot and renamed it “Desilu-Culver” in 1957. Over the next few years, Desilu TV shows such as “The Untouchables,” “The Texan,” “Whirlybirds” and “Sheriff of Cochise” used the backlot settings.

In 1965, for the epic film, The Greatest Story Ever Told, several more sets were built among the many already there. During the sixties, the most prominent show dominating the back lot was “Hogan’s Heroes.” When Desilu was sold to Paramount in 1967, the “Star Trek” television series was the most popular show using the studio and 40-Acre backlot.

THE END OF AN ERA

The studio was sold to a chemical company in the following year and renamed the “Culver Studios” where the television show “Lassie” continued to use the studio and the backlot settings.

When Laird International purchased the studio property at the end of 1977, they thought they were buying the studio lot and the 40-Acre backlot. To their surprise, the 40-Acre parcel had been pre-sold to a developer who demolished the entire lot and built an industrial park on the site – which has grown and developed into its current form. ###

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

JULY 19: CCHS ANNUAL PICNIC & GENERAL MEETING
AUG. 21-27: FIESTA LA BALLONA
AUG. 24: CCHS FIESTA DOWNTOWN WALKING TOURS
Oct. 18: CCHS General Meeting

CCHS AT FIESTA LA BALLONA

The Culver City Store at Fiesta will feature a range of merchandise, including the official Fiesta Pin (the Fiesta Lady with flashing blinking lights), and the “London-Paris-Culver City” T-shirts from the CC Homeowners Association.

The Historical Society will have its popular “Heart of Screenland” license plate frames, Culver City Historical Views note cards and Images of America: Culver City by Julie Lugo Cerra. Proceeds from the sale of license plate frames, note cards and books will benefit the CC Historical

COMING!

A “Culver City Historical Society” website – now under construction!
“The First Picnic”

by Cathy Zermeno, President

To review how the Culver City Historical Society started our annual Picnics, let’s begin by going back into history and taking a closer look at Harry Culver and his dream of a new city, halfway between downtown Los Angeles and the beach – which would be “served by Four Big Boulevards and Three Great Interurban Electric Lines – 159 cars a day, a Motor Bus every 15 minutes.”

**Harry Culver: The Master Salesman**

Harry was a crack real estate salesman and, in his famous speech at the California Club in 1913, sold his idea to the LA City Fathers of “the Home City” where “you should sit on the shady veranda of a Culver City home … and feel the comfortable, uncrowded homey atmosphere of the place.”

He thought it was the perfect place to start a community, and referred to Culver City as a “wondertown.”

The next step was to build up the community and economic base, so he started bringing people in to see the area and would serve them box lunches to make the visit a pleasure trip. He was hoping they would want to settle here and, of course, he would sell property. The rest, as they say, makes for a most interesting history.

**First CCHS Picnic Held in 1981**

After the Historical Society was founded in 1980, Julie Lugo Cerra and Marti Diviak co-chaired, “Our First Beautiful Picnic” in 1981, which was also one of Society’s first fundraisers. They arranged to have it set on the front lawn of the Laird International Studios in front of its “mansion” exterior (now The Culver Studios which continues to be community responsive and which will be holding the EXPO in Sept. – sponsored by the CCRA & the CC Chamber of Commerce, and is open to the public). It was a fabulous setting and a great success!

A tribute to the early days of Culver City, the picnic was a costume affair. Everyone came dressed in a variety of styles and designs from the ‘teens & ’20s and a few of the Society’s members modeled some of the wonderful MGM costumes given to the City.

Mayor Richard Alexander was the “auctioneer” for some great auction items, assisted by Councilman Richard Brundo. The rest of the City Council also attended: Paul Netzel, Ron Perkins and Paul Jacobs. A longtime coming, the Historical Society was welcomed with open arms in our city and this first picnic was a great display of that support.

The first CCHS picnic was a memorable day, filled with so many happy memories with so many long-time friends. With box lunches (à la Harry Culver’s style!) and antique cars, the mood of the day was indeed a hometown picnic – one Harry Culver and his family would have been proud of!
CULVER SCULPTURE DEDICATION: MARCH 26, 2006

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
1) Culver City Founder Harry H. Culver (c.1913).
2) Dr. John Battle, grandson of Harry Culver, delivers city founder’s speech from 1913 with CCHS members Judy Stangier & Sol Sigall in background (at left)
3) The Battle Family “seated” with Grandfather Harry.
4) CC Councilmembers: (L-R) Steve Rose, Alan Corlin, Carol Gross; seated is Mayor Albert Vera.
5) CC Cultural Affairs Commission: (Standing L-R) Dr. Luther Henderson III, Vice chair Susan Deen; (Seated L-R) Chair Ronnie Jayne and Gayle Smashey
6) Community turn-out for the happy celebration!
7) Mayor Vera introduces Artist De L’Esprie

(Photos courtesy of the Culver Family, Julie Lugo Cerra and the City of Culver City.)
The Society thanks KENNETH W. LOCK for becoming a Life Member!
A FAMILY OF MUSICIANS

Dan’s parents were musicians; his mom was a pianist and his dad was a professional organist and a master cabinet maker for the movie studios where he would be often asked to do side work at many movie stars’ homes.

In 1930, his parents purchased a new Model A Ford Coupe for $470 and drove it until 1934. When Dan was born at his grandmother’s house on Girard Ave. in Culver City, it was decided to replace the coupe for a larger family car. So the coupe was replaced with a 1929 Sedan and they also could use Dan’s uncle’s Ford Model T Roadster Pick-up for any family work-related duties.

DAN’S DAD & HOWARD HUGHES

In 1942, while Dan was attending La Ballona School (kindergarten thru 8th grade), his dad was being interviewed for a job with Howard Hughes. The job wasn’t for his custom cabinetry on movie sets or stars’ homes, but it was to help build a big wooden airplane.

To test his skills, he was asked to take a sheet of plywood and make it curve in two different directions. Previous applicants had asked for every tool in the carpenter shop and three or four days to complete the test. Dan’s dad said he would only need a few tools and he would be finished in three hours. Well, guess who built the horizontal tail section of the famous Spruce Goose? Dan’s dad and his crew of 40 workers! In 1947, Dan’s family were invited by Hughes to watch the test flight. They were taken by boat to a barge that Hughes had anchored in the bay for his guests – and saw “IT FLY!”

STUDIES & TEACHES MUSIC

Dan had taken music classes at La Ballona School and continued his interest in music at Hamilton High School where he graduated in 1953. He then attended L.A. State College where he met his future bride, Anita, who was learning to become a musician, so they had a lot in common.

After graduating in 1957 and continuing his music education at USC, Dan joined the Birmingham, Alabama Symphony and then the 7th U.S. Army Symphony in Stuttgart, Germany, followed by the Dallas Symphony, and currently still plays in the Glendale Symphony and the Rogue Valley Symphony in Ashland, OR.

In 1964, Dan began his teaching career as a music teacher in Manhattan Beach for two years, then transferring to Marina Del Rey Jr. High School where he taught until he retired in 1991.

BUYS FIRST MODEL A AT 15!

In 1949, at the age of 15, Dan purchased his first Model A for $30.00 – a two-door sedan which Dan converted into a truck. All during his teaching career, Dan was buying and building his Model A Fords. To this day, he’s still looking for those hard-to-find parts at swapmeets and fixing up those “A’s” while Anita gives music lessons to children and adults at the house. Both of his sons have the “artistic” gene as well: Matthew is a fine art printmaker, and Peter is a musician and piano tuner.

Dan in front of the center column with his Sedan below at the “Screenland A’s” first event, held at The Culver Studios in 2005.

In putting this story together, I already knew of Dan’s love for those old Fords, but what I discovered was a story of three generations of artists – with a love for music, art and craft. ###

[Ed. Note: The “Screenland A’s” will be displaying vintage cars at the July 19th Picnic.]

NATALIE MARBACK

Natalie Marback, widow of Dr. Norman Marback, passed away in June. Natalie was always at Norman’s side, active in the Opti-Mrs., Guidance Clinic Guild and other organizations.

Natalie leaves their two daughters, Irma (Joseph) Voorhees of the Bay Area and and Richelle (Vincent) Hoover of Thousand Oaks, who plan to continue the family membership in the Historical Society in order to keep up with news of their hometown.

The Marback name is a familiar one in Culver City. Dr. Marback’s mother owned “Nancy’s” near MGM, a deli that served many local and famous patrons.

The Historical Society sends its best wishes to the family and friends of David Henderson and Natalie Marback.
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!

**Name/Company:** ____________________________________________  **Telephone:** _______________________

**Contact Person:** ____________________________________________  **Fax:** ____________________________

**Mailing Address:** ____________________________________________  **Email:** ___________________________

Please make checks payable to The Culver City Historical Society and mail to P.O. Box 3428, Culver City, CA 90231-3428. For further information, call (310) 287-3850 or email: cchistorical@pacbell.com.

Contributions of both historic & social significance as well as monetary donations are encouraged, and the CCHS IRS tax exempt status may make such contributions tax deductible.

**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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