DEDICATION OF HELMS BUILDING AS CCHS SITE #9

On Saturday, September 20, 1997 - The 80th Anniversary of the incorporation of the City of Culver City -- the Culver City Historical Society marked the site, of the Helms Building as Historic Site #9. Owner of the historic site, Walter Marks III, assisted CCHS President Hal Horne, Madrina Clarita Young and CCHS Historical Sites Chair, Sam Cerra, in, unveiling the bronze plaque. A reception for the public followed in The Antique Guild, sponsored by Guild owners Lee Bixler at active Historical Society member.

With the marking of the Helms Building, the Historical Society has designated nine sites as official historical landmarks:

#1: CITY HALL: 9770 Culver Blvd. (1928/1995)
Dedicated as the first structure built specifically as a City Hall in 1928, the original building, now demolished, has been replaced by a new Civic Center. Prior to 1928, the City Hall was located in structures on Van Buren (still standing, just south of Washington Blvd.),

#2: THE HULL BUILDING: 9543 Culver Blvd. (1925)
The site of the first hospital in town, the Hull Building was built by Dr. Foster Hull who lost the property during the Depression to the Freeman family, who still own the property today. It has also been the site of Freeman Furniture, Sunset Drug, the Bank of Orange County, Riccardo's restaurant, Bella Pasta restaurant, and, currently, the San Gennaro restaurant.

#3: ST. AUGUSTINE'S CHURCH: NE corner Jasmine Ave. & Washington Blvd. (1887)
This was the first church in what became Culver City. The property was donated in 1883 to the Catholic Church by the Figueroa family, and the present structure is the third the house the Church.

"MUNCHKINS" RETURN TO CULVER CITY

by Julie Lugo Cerra

The "Munchkins" returned to Culver City for a reunion. In addition to the events scheduled at The Culver Hotel where Councilmember Richard Marcus presented them with keys to the City, it was my privilege to take them on a walk-through of Sony Pictures Studios (thanks, Sony!).

They were animated interviewees on the Thalberg steps - The Thalberg Building was dedicated in 1938, the year the "little people" came to Culver City to film the classic film, Wizard of Oz. We walked through the famous East Gate, across the lot to stages 15 and 27, where they remembered the "Yellow Brick Road" and "Munchkinland." Jerry Maren, who portrayed the Lollipop Kid, led the delegation with his wife, Liz.

November, 1998 will mark the 60th Anniversary of the "Munchkin" arrival in the city, and 1999 will mark the 60th Anniversary of the beloved film's release. Ross Hawkins and his camera crew documented the visit.

INSTALLATION OF NEW OFFICERS AT FEBRUARY 25TH GENERAL MEETING!

The Historical Society will install its new slate of officers at the quarterly General Meeting on February 25th, at 7:00 pm in the Lethbridge Garden Room at the Veterans Memorial Building, 4117 Overland Avenue.

The new Board will be led by President-elect Lu Herrera who will be aided by 1st VP-elect, Program, Ross Hawkins; 2nd VP-elect, Museum, Kirk MacArthur Judy; 3rd VP-elect, Ways & Means, Stu Freeman; Secretary-elect, Edith Prager; and Treasurer-elect, Virgie Eskridge. Acting as Installing Official will be Culver City Human Resources Director, Syd Kronenthal.

A reception will follow the installation.
It's difficult to write about all the things that have happened in the past four years since I first became President of your Historical Society. I spent the last column talking about the future, so now's the time to reflect on the past and to thank a lot of very special people.

Of the accomplishments I'm most proud of, two stand out. First, we've advanced our Reel Life in Culver City documentary project. The tremendous effort expended by Ross Hawkins and Julie Lugo Cerra has made our project known to producers, studio executives, film historians, film critics, actors, studio employees and distributors. We are optimistic that the first chapter, dealing with the period 1915-24, will be completed by mid-year. Reel Life will be an important contribution to our own archive of history and to media history.

Second, the Historical Society's standing as a tax-exempt organization has been finalized. This accomplishment will enable us to conduct more extensive fundraising and outreach in the years ahead to attain the one goal we've had above all others: our own museum.

Along the way, we also produced and have had very healthy sales of Historic Culver City, a 30-minute video; we continued our popular city bus tours during Fiesta La Ballona; we sold hundreds of "Culver City... Heart of Screenland" license plate frames (we're still getting orders, and every fire department vehicle in the city has one!); we continued to provide people locally and from around the country with information about our town; and we maintained excellent relationships with the City Council and staff in administration, planning and redevelopment.

I've already mentioned the work Julie and Ross have done on Reel Life. Their efforts also extended to other tasks, and their opinions and input were always appreciated.

I also want to thank for their counsel, work, discussions, disagreements and fun times: Connie Powell, Linda Edell, David Henderson, Bonnie Walsh, Lupe Smith, Cathy Zemeno, Judy Stangler, Jo Ellen Weaver, Esther Tarn, Joan Jakubowski, Same Cerra, Lee Bixler, Ken Ruben, Edith Prager, Virgie Eskridge, Stuart Freeman, Kirk MacArthur Judy, Syd Kronenthal, Marc Wanamaker, Bob Sirchia, Todd Tipton, Susan Berg, Jody Hal-Esser, Mark Winogron, Miriam Mack, Dora Gallo, Margaret Liu, Linda Shimada, and many, many others.

And, thank you to all the members of the Historical Society for your support. It was four years of great learning and accomplishment. I salute the incoming President and elected officers, and wish them the successes I've had.

Notes from Your City Historian
by Julie Lugo Cerra

A GOODBYE & A HELLO

- History repeats itself as Hal Horne becomes the second person to serve the Culver City Historical Society for two terms. Thanks, Hal, for your time and dedication! Four years is a real bite out of your volunteer life - hope we can still count on you to do the Fiesta La Ballona bus tours!!!
REEL LIFE IN CULVER CITY
by Ross Hawkins

MARION BELL REMEMBERED

Two years ago, I had the great opportunity to meet and interview singer/actress Marion Bell while she was working on the Culver City Civic Light Opera’s tribute to MGM musicals, and was treated to wonderful stories from a warm and friendly lady.

Born in St. Louis, MO, Marion moved to Los Angeles when she was only twelve years old. MGM film director Robert Z. Leonard heard her sing Noel Coward’s “I’ll Follow My Secret Heart” and got her a contract with the studio where he helped to guide her musical career.

While under contract at Metro, she toured the country with the Marx Brothers while they were rehearsing the classic A Night at the Opera. She told me that it was Irving Thalberg’s idea to have the film’s gags by taking the show on a vaudeville tour.

Marion appeared briefly in the film’s zany stateroom sequence as a spunky teenager who knocks at the door of the room which is already bulging at its seams, and dryly asks, “Is my Aunt Minnie in there?” Her favorite member of the Marx Brothers team? “Harpo,” she answered with a smile.

Although she was under contract to MGM for more than a decade, she would appear in only one other film for the studio, Zigfield Follies, released in 1946 in which she sang a duet from “La Traviata.” She was cast in the film, The Kissing Bandit, with Frank Sinatra, but chose instead to go to Broadway where she appeared in Alan Jay Lerner’s classic “Brigadoon” as Fiona. Her performance won her The New York Critics’ Circle Award for best leading lady in Musical Theatre. She was married briefly to Lerner.

Marion later confided to me that she felt that Ida Coverman, L.B. Mayer’s personal secretary, had a big hand in shaping the classic MGM musical style by quietly encouraging her boss to sponsor musical talent like herself.

She lived quietly in Culver City and devoted her time to teaching voice here. A half century after she created the role of Fiona in “Brigadoon,” Marion Bell passed away this past December, survived by a son and two sisters. I shall always remember her warm smile and gracious manner.

THANKS TO JUNE CALDWELL

Ms. June Caldwell of Turner Entertainment has donated a fabulous collection of celebrity photographs, many of which are personally autographed. These vintage 1930s photos include Jean Harlow, James Cagney, Jimmy Durante, Dick Powell, Ruby Keeler, Joel McCrea, Glenda Farrell and Myna Loy among others. The CCHS is extremely grateful for this generous gift and thanks June for her continued interest and support of our historical research and memorabilia collection.

(SITES cont’d.)

#4: THE CITIZEN BUILDING: 9355 Culver Blvd. (1929)

Built by Eugene Donovan to house his printing/publishing company, the printing presses at the back of the building were put to work for the studios as well as printing the award-winning Citizen newspaper.

#5: THE LEGION BUILDING: 3824 Hughes Ave. (1925)

This Spanish-style structure was built as a clubhouse for the American Legion, and was constructed over the first swimming pool in Culver City. Although it is now owned by the Brotman Medical Center, it is still a place for community and social gatherings.

#6: Main Street: 1913

After Culver City founder Harry Culver announced his plans for a new city at a meeting at the California Club in Los Angeles, he filed Main Street with the County of Los Angeles. His initial purchase of land extended north as far as Pico Blvd. Culver’s offices were located on this street, and it was the hub of activity. It was at the foot of this street that Culver built his “Hotel Hunt” in 1924. This six-story landmark, now the Culver Hotel, was renovated by Catlett Construction. The “little people” of the classic film, Wizard of Oz, were housed here during filmmaking in the late 1930s. This street is a major part of the downtown renovation plans that are near completion.


This studio was the second major studio built in Culver City, and both were constructed by film director/producer Thomas Ince, which explains the naming of the street, Ince Blvd., which runs along the east side of the studio. Ince died unexpectedly in 1924, and over the years, the studio has been known variously as De Mille Studios, RKO, RKO-Pathe, Selznick Studios, Desilu, Culver City Studios, Laird International, and presently, The Culver Studios. Its ownership has involved Howard Hughes, Joseph Kennedy and the Gannet Corp. (USA Today), and today, it is part of the Sony Picture Entertainment family.

At one time there was a back lot where the 1933 King Kong sets were set ablaze to simulate the “burning of Atlanta” for Gone With The Wind in 1939. It has been primarily a rental studio and was recently renovated to a state-of-the-art filming facility for TV and feature films. The block east of the studio is the Expansion site completed by Sony Pictures Entertainment in 1996, and is now the new home of Imageworks and TV offices.

#8: LUGO RANCH:
SE corner of Jefferson Blvd. & Cota St. (prior to turn of the century)

This was the last of the old ranches to be subdivided on property that was originally claimed as Rancho La Ballona by the Machados. Mercurial Lugo and his wife, Rita Reyes Lugo, raised their family of eight children there; the youngest of whom was the active community member and Police Capt., Charles Reyes Lugo. Mercurial Lugo was the Sanjero (water overseer) of the area who regulated the irrigation water for local farming, and the family had a corn stand and also grew beans, barley and a multitude of vegetables. The property was developed by R.J. Blanco in the mid-1950s.

#9: HELMS BUILDING:
3225 Helms Ave., between Venice & Washington Blvds. (1930)

Constructed in 1930 in Zig-Zag Moderne style, the Helms Building played an important part in the history of Culver City. It housed the Helms Bakery until 1969, a family-owned business founded by Paul Helms, and was known as “the home of Helms’ Olympic Bread” because it was a food supplier for the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles. Locals listened for the whistle of more than 1000 Helms coaches as the vehicles traversed Southern California, bringing their fresh baked goods directly to the consumers’ homes. The building is currently owned by the Marks family.

REMINDER:

Come visit the CCHS memorabilia display at The Antique Guild in the historic Helms Building at 3225 Helms Ave., between Venice & Washington Blvds.
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!

☐ I am a new member. ☐ I wish to renew my membership.

Name ___________________________________________ Phone ____________________________
Address ___________________________________________ Zip ____________________________

Type of membership, Check one:

☐ Patron Member $100.00 ☐ Business Member $50.00 ☐ Service Group $20.00
☐ Individual Member $15.00 ☐ Individual Lifetime Member $250.00 ☐ Please contact me to work on a committee.
☐ Lifetime Family Membership $500.00

Checks are payable to: The Culver City Historical Society P.O. Box 3428 Culver City, California 90231-3428

Your contribution may be tax deductible. Please check with your tax advisor

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.

Alliance Bank
Curtis S. Reis 410-9281
Ames Company
David Oliver 835-2637
Blechman-Milstein Medical Group
Robyn Coit 838-3834
Cavanaugh Realtors
Esther Tarn 837-7161
Culver Center Flowers
Earl Eskridge 839-2344
Culver City Import Group
Larry E. Miller 559-4200
Freeman Property Management
Stuart Freeman 839-7593
G & H Computers
Leonard McDonald 836-8698
JW Party Pictures/Photo Lab
Jeff Wilson 915-1640

John Riordan Plumbing
John Riordan 838-4656
Newton Plumbing
Jack Newton 839-1131
Oliver McMillan
Paul Buss 619-457-0911
Park Place Escrow
Patricia Parker 441-3755
Playa Vista
Sibyl Buchanan 822-0074
Robert E. Sapien & Associates
Robert Sapien 836-3901
Spartan Supply Company
Rick Betts 837-8351
Sony Pictures Entertainment
Lee Bixler 838-3131
The Antique Guild

Culver City Historical Society
Post office Box 3428 • Culver City, CA • 90231-3428