

Culver Historical Highlights

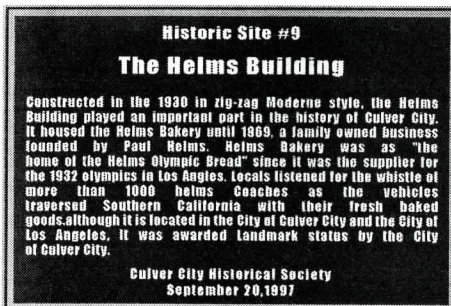
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WINTER 1998

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.

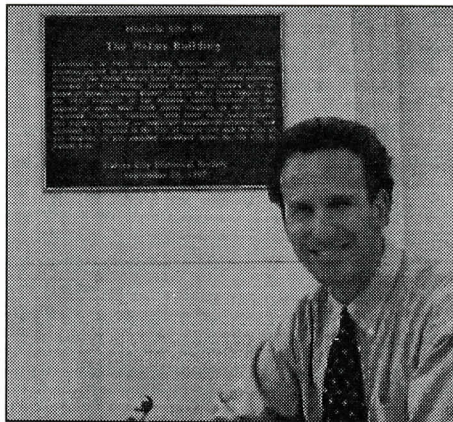


With the marking of the Helms Building, the Historical Society has designated nine sites as official historical landmarks:

#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Dedicated as the first structure built specifically as a City Hall in 1928, the original building, now demolished, has been replaced by a new Civic Center.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.),



WALTER MARKS IN FRONT OF PLAQUE

and on the second floor of the local theatre, which was located on the site of what is now the Culver Hotel. The present site was dedicated on June 17, 1995.

#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.

(Cont'd page 3)

"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.

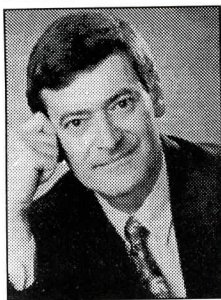
The new Board will be led by President-elect Lu Herrera who will be aided by 1st VP-elect, Program, Ross Hawkins; 2nd VP-elect, Museum, Kirk MacArthur Judy; 3rd VP-elect, Ways & Means, Stu Freeman; Secretary-elect, Edith Prager; and Treasurer-elect, Virgie Eskridge. Acting as Installing Official will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

A reception will follow the installation.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Hal Horne

Culver Historical Highlights

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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 Zermeno, 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 Hall-Esser, Mark Winogrand, 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

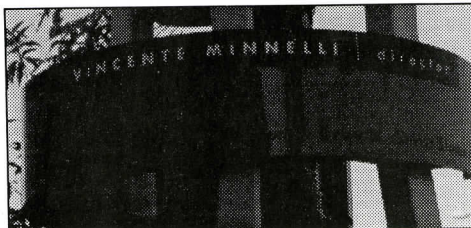
Culver City Historical Society for two terms. Thanks, Hal, for your time and dedication! Four years is a real bite out of your volunteer life - hope we can still count on you to do the Fiesta La Ballona bus tours!!!



• Look to the east in the Heart of Screenland and you will notice 62 colorful palm tree *surrounds* going up on East Washington Blvd. (National to La Cienega). A movie made by a Culver City studio is listed on each one, along with the date, director and major stars (see photos). This is a Culver City Redevelopment Agency Project.

• If you would like to tour the historic Sony Pictures Studio lot, the public walking tours are scheduled for three Saturdays, beginning March 21st. You must have a pass which is available at the Chamber of Commerce beginning March 9. The first tour of the day begins at 10:00 am and subsequent tours leave at 15-minute intervals. Get your passes early!

• And speaking of the Fiesta La Ballona "Historic Highlights Tour of Culver City," we are looking for docents for the tours. If you would like to volunteer, please call me at (310) 558-3818 for information. We train!



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.

Publisher.....Lee Bixler
Editor.....Judy Stangler
Contributing Editor.....Ross Hawkins
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OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Hal Horne..... President
Lupe Smith.....1st VP, Program
Cathy Zermeno.....2nd VP, Museum
Ross Hawkins.....3rd VP, Ways & Means
Esther Tarn.....Secretary pro tem
Joan Jakubowski..... Treasurer
Bonnie Walsh..... Parliamentarian
Linda Edell.....Membership
Judy Stangler.....Pub. Rels. /Newsletter
Sam Cerra.....Sites

EDITOR'S BOX

With the beginning of a new year, the Historical Society begins with a newly-elected slate of Officers. They come on board at an important time for us. With our tax-exempt status in place, a new locale for our memorabilia showcase at The Antique Guild and a well-received new format for our newsletter, we now are positioned to bring more attention and some publicity to the Society and its goals. Our retiring President, Hal Horne, has had much to do with these successes and we extend our deepest thanks to him for a job so very well-done!

We will be profiling our new Officers in the next issue of Culver Historical Highlights so that you will get to know more about these individuals who have taken it upon themselves to give of their time and energy to ensure the continued growth and success of the CCHS. And we encourage all of our readers to do the same and become actively involved in all of our readers to do the same and become actively involved in all of the Society's future projects and events. To a great '98!

CCHS Looking for Help

Do you have or know people who have film and memorabilia treasures which may be sitting in their garages or attics? The CCHS and "Reel Life in Culver City" are searching for film footage and background documents for this extraordinary film history. Please contact Ross Hawkins for more information or leads at (310) 839-5725.

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 refine 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.

#7: THE CULVER STUDIOS: 9336 W. Washington Blvd. (1919)

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-Pathé, Selznick Studios, Desilu, Culver City Studios, Laird International, and presently, The Culver Studios. Its ownership has involved Howard Hughes, Joseph Kennedy and the Gannett 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

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

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Culver City Historical Society

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