



Historical Highlights

Volume 35 No. 1 Published by the Culver City Historical Society Winter 2014

"HAPPY NEW YEAR ~ 2014!"

INSTALLATION OF NEW OFFICERS TO BE HELD AT
SONY PICTURES PLAZA

COLUMN ONE

FUNDRAISING IS WHAT SUSTAINS AN ORGANIZATION

Three great pieces of Culver City's "Heart of Screenland" motion picture history are going to be made available to Historical Society members and friends in the coming year.

The "Camera" Chair



They are wonderful old hardwood chairs with a period motion picture camera fitted into the chair back.

(cont'd pg 2)

MICHELLE BERNARDIN TO BECOME SOCIETY'S 13TH PRESIDENT

The Society's installation of officers will take place on Wednesday evening, January 15, 2014, at Sony Pictures Plaza from 6:30-8:30 pm. The 2014-2016 officers will be: Michelle Bernardin, president, Tami Eskridge, 1st VP, Development, Julie Lugo Cerra, 2nd VP, Museum, Hope Parrish and Dennis Parrish, 3rd VP Programs, Adrienne Bernardin, Secretary, and Linda Forman, Treasurer. Mayor Jeffrey Cooper will act as the installing officer. Reservations are a must, so please complete the enclosed form, and your tickets will be held at the door. Parking will be provided onsite at no charge.

FILMLAND - A PART OF CULVER CITY HISTORY

We are delighted to have the installation in a prominent local structure, where attendees will also have an opportunity enjoy the Sony Pictures Plaza Atrium Museum space.

The award-winning granite building, designed by architects Maxwell Starkman Associates to cater to movie industry needs, was completed in 1986 as the Filmland Corporate Center. That year, tours were given to locals who learned the granite came from Finland and Spain, then transported to Italy where it was laser-cut. It offered 308,000 square footage of rental space, and the 90 foot high atrium was topped by 10,000 square feet of glass. And yes, automated window-washing equipment was designed to clean that glass!

This prominent structure became the home to MGM-UA for a short time, until the studio moved out of Culver City in 1992. Since that time, it has been on a long-term lease to Sony Pictures Entertainment.

JANUARY 15, 2014: GENERAL MEMBERSHIP- RECEPTION MEETING ~ INSTALLATION of OFFICERS ~

The Culver City Historical Society's Winter General Membership Meeting will be an Installation Reception held on Wednesday, January 15, 2014, from 6:30 to 8:30 pm in the striking Sony Pictures Plaza (SPP) Atrium Museum area at 10000 W. Washington Boulevard, Culver City.

This will be the Installation of President-Elect Michelle Bernardin and her Board as well as a thank you to outgoing Board and Committee chairs. The Installing Officer will be Culver City Mayor Jeffrey Cooper.

Seating is limited and reservations are a must for the Hors d'oeuvres Reception (beer/wine/soft drinks included). Please join us by mailing in the reservation insert (enclosed) which must be received no later than Friday, January 10, 2014. You may also call the Society at (310) 253-6941 or email us at info@CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org. No tickets will be sold at the event. Also, please visit our website: www.CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org for updates.

See you there!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Michelle Bernardin



Dear Members,

I hope this note finds you and your family enjoying the wonderful delights and scents of the holidays.

Your Historical Society had a busy 2013, and we hope you will enjoy our "Year in Review" section. Our annual picnic, the 100th Anniversary of Harry Culver's speech at the California Club, marker cleanings, Fiesta fun, and more!

We started a little experiment in September, changing our public open hours in the hopes of accommodating more of our members and the public, and not competing with Saturday parking congestion at Veterans Memorial Building. The experiment succeeded on every point, and the Museum Committee enthusiastically voted to change our hours permanently. Come visit us on the first and third Sundays from 1:00-3:00pm!

I hope to see you at the installation of new officers on Wednesday evening, January 15. While I have learned a lot in this "dry run," being your president for the last six months to complete Louise Coffey-Webb's term, I am looking forward to the next two years. As you may know, my family has lived in Culver City for several years and quite a few generations, so to be a part of this organization and contribute to its growth in any small way, is a privilege because this is my home.

To close, there are no words to properly to thank the 2012-14 board. I have truly appreciated its support, encouraging smiles, and individual talents. We have some folks who are rotating off, and new ones joining us in the upcoming term. All of them making lasting footprints with their important contributions, integral to this group's growth, and I am very grateful.

Sending you my best for a happy New Year, and as always, thank you for supporting your Culver City Historical Society!

Have You Visited Our New Online Shop?

Consider giving the gift of history to your family and friends for any occasion!
Shop now! www.cchsstore.com

"Camera chairs" (cont'd.)

These chairs will be sold as is. We know, at one time, they were used at the Culver Hotel, but may possibly have come from one of the boardrooms of MGM or RKO?

Whatever the case may be, these "studio camera" chairs probably had an interesting past - what famous people may have sat in them?

In order to maximize the opportunity to our members and friends, we are thrilled to offer these chairs, purchased or won, three different ways:

1. In a live auction at the Installation dinner on January 15, 2014.
2. An "in-store" raffle starting in January through April 16, 2014. The winning number will be pulled at the general meeting on April 16, 2014. Raffle ticket prices will be 1 for \$10.00, 3 for \$20.00
3. Online at www.CCHSstore.com (availability date TBA).

Come see these unique pieces of "film" history!

Historical Highlights

Web: www.CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org
PO Box 3428 · Culver City, CA · 90231-3428
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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 Society Newsletter is published quarterly.
Editor & Publisher..... Judy Stangler
Contributing Writers..... Julie Lugo Cerra,
Marc Wanamaker, Sharon Shore

Officers and Committee Chairs

Michelle Bernardin	President
Stu Freeman	Immediate Past President
Stephen M. Fry.....	VP, Programs
Julie Lugo Cerra	VP, Museum/ARC
Tami Eskridge	VP, Development
Donie Nelson	Secretary
Linda K. Forman.....	Treasurer
Steven J. Rose	Parliamentarian
Tami Eskridge	Membership Chair
Joy Jacobs	Communications Chair
Judy Stangler	Newsletter
Jeanne Conklin	Historic Sites Chair
Gerry Sallus	Government Liaison
Sharon Shore	Costumes Chair
Winston Gieseke	Webmaster
Kevin Lachoff	Photographer

Editor's Column

A new year, a new Board and many new projects lie ahead for the Society in 2014.

There are many areas of historical research and program presentations that certainly would welcome the help and support of our members. Archiving, exploring and helping our many visitors find information not only about our special city, but also learning more about personal family history as well. We invite you to join one of our committees and learn how much fun history can be!

Also, please note that often more information on a particular subject or historical piece can be found on our website.

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

WANTED: iPad

Did Santa bring you a new iPad? If you have a used iPad that isn't loved anymore, please consider donating it to the Historical Society! We would like to have one to use for presentations and merchandise sales. Tax letter will be provided.

Please email Michelle at info@CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org with your device specs.

REEL



CULVER CITY

by Marc Wanamaker

*ESTHER WILLIAMS:
"HOLLYWOOD'S
MERMAID"*



A PERSONAL RECOLLECTION

I personally knew Esther Williams and her husband Ed Bell who were my neighbors for many years. When I visited her in her home she was always gracious and warm and answered my studio history questions with great interest.



Esther and Ed at home.

Esther passed away this past year and it's my pleasure to review her association with Culver City and the MGM studio which she called home for many years.

A CHAMPION SWIMMER WHO BECAME A "STARLET"

Esther was born in Los Angeles in 1921 and became a champion swimmer at the age of 15. Due to her great beauty, she became a part-time model at a department store. She also enrolled at LA City College, and while there, she was discovered by the famous producer, Billy Rose, who added her as a swimmer in his "Aquacade" program. It was there that an MGM scout saw her and signed her up as a specialty "Starlet"

due to her swimming skills.

It began for her with a small role in an *Andy Hardy* film in 1942, but it wasn't until 1944 that she starred in her own film, *Bathing Beauty*. This was the first of her 'aquatic' films that made her famous - films that were known for their beautiful color, song and dance musical comedies, highlighted with her spectacular swimming scenes on the water and below the surface.



NEW STYLES OF BATHING SUITS BECOME BIG BUSINESS

Esther became billed as "Hollywood's Mermaid" or "The Queen of the Surf." She wore new styles of bathing suits in her films and the female public went wild for these styles, resulting in bathing suit companies changing their old styles for the new "Esther Williams" style. Eventually deals were made with Esther to model some of the bathing suits for department stores and she became a partner in the bathing suit business.

By the 1950s, Esther continued her 'aquatic' styled films until she decided to act in more serious films, becoming a serious actress. Unfortunately, the public wanted to see her swim and wear bathing suits, and at that time she began to seriously go into the business of bathing suit manufacturing.

In 1959, Esther was involved with a new fashion line of dresses and other fashions including bathing suits

at Robinsons in Beverly Hills. She even modeled the fashions herself in the garden of the store. By the 1960s, she also invested in the swimming pool business, named *Esther Williams Swimming Pools*.

A "MILLION DOLLAR MERMAID"

Her connection to MGM lasted more than a decade with her practically living and working at the studio in Culver City. On Lot #2 (on the west side of Overland Avenue across from the main lot), among the many famous sets on that lot was the "Esther Williams Swimming Pool" where she did close-up work and other scenes. Several of the stages on the MGM lot were equipped with water tanks where Esther performed some of her most exacting swim numbers for her musical-aquatic films.

One of her most famous films was the biopic, *Million Dollar Mermaid*, based on the life of the great swimmer Annette Kellerman. This association was particularly important to Esther because she had someone to share her special talents with - that of a great world class swimmer and as an actress, as Annette had made similar films in the silent era!



Esther going over script with Annette Kellerman.

Esther will always be remembered as one of MGM's most popular stars. People to this day still remember her fondly as "Hollywood's Mermaid."

~ ~ ~

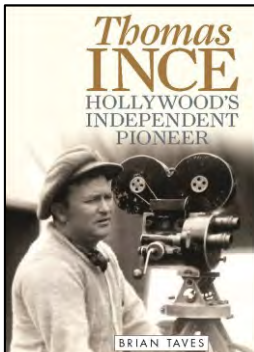
THE YEAR 2013 IN REVIEW

WINTER

2013 has been a very busy year and a very productive year for the Society.

A tribute to our film history was a book-signing at the ARC with author Brian Taves, whose book, *Thomas Ince – Hollywood's Independent Pioneer*, the first biography ever written about Ince's life – the man who built the first two studios in Culver City. It was Harry Culver who invited Ince to come to his "new" city.

The noted artist of mid-century design, Jerome "Jerry" Ackerman, was the guest speaker for our January General Membership Meeting. A longtime Culver City resident, Jerry discussed his life with his late wife and collaborator, Evelyn, in conversation with gallery director Gerard O'Brien of Reform Gallery.



Left: Brian Taves' new biography on film pioneer Thomas Ince.

Right: Jerry Ackerman (with microphone) talks with Gerard O'Brien.



The Society introduced the new online merchandise shop for easy purchasing of the many "gifts of history" the Society offers, including photos, books, blankets, umbrellas, notecards, and license plates.

SPRING

May is designated as National Historic Preservation Month, and has always been particularly important for the Society, which began preserving local history at our incorporation in 1980, and established our Historic Sites program within the next year. By 2011, we marked 13 Historic Sites with bronze plaques prominently placed at each historic venue. Historic Sites Chair Jeanne Conklin and her committee celebrated the year with a cleaning project to attend to each of the 13 plaques. We invite you to visit them all and share in the Society's pride in preserving our unique and special history!

The special guest at the April General Membership Meeting was John Jackson of the Culver City Ice Arena. He shared the arena's history including the many Olympians who trained there.

Below left: Cathy and Carlos Lugo and their daughters Monica and Rita Lugo at historic site #8, the Lugo Ranch.

Center: Pres. Michelle Bernardin and Chair Jeanne Conklin at St. Augustine's Church, historic site #3.



An early photo of the Culver Ice Arena.



~ ~ ~ PRESERVING HISTORY FOR OVER 30 YEARS !



Far left: Chuck Eskridge and Earl Eskridge at historic site #10, La Ballona School which was the first elementary school in what became Culver City.

Left (L-R): Jeanne Conklin, Fred Yglesias and Stu Freeman at historic site #13, the Veterans Memorial Building.

SUMMER

Once again, the July General Membership Meeting was combined with our Annual "Picnic in the Park" at Veterans Memorial Park. Jim Rodrigues, owner of the very tasty Santa Maria BBQ, did his magic at the barbeque grill, and guests were also treated to the Razzmatazz Dixieland jazz ensemble. It was great fun for all!



Picnickers enjoying great food!

At this year's Fiesta La Ballona, the Society was happy to host a book-signing with our own Julie Lugo Cerra. A great turnout came to enjoy her new book, *Culver City Chronicles*, another wonderful account of this special city. Julie, a Founding Member of the Society, has been the official City Historian since 1996.

On Saturday, July 20, over fifty Society members and friends along with CC Councilmembers gathered at the California Club in downtown Los Angeles to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the July 22, 1913 "Dream Speech" given by Harry Culver which outlined his vision for a new city. It was received with such enthusiasm that the enthralled group named it "Culver City" by acclamation. Councilmember Jim Clarke gave an enthusiastic reenactment of Harry Culver's famous speech, a seminal moment in our city's history.



Left: Jim Clarke giving Harry Culver's "Dream Speech."



Right: Eric Sims with Steve Fry, VP of Programs.

FALL

The special guest at the October General Membership Meeting was Eric Sims, Operation Manager, who presented "The Kirk Douglas Theatre and Its Metamorphosis," tracing its history from an early popular Culver City motion picture theater into today's beautiful and intimate Center Theatre Group venue for experimental theatrical productions. Memories filled the room!

The Society renovated our gift shop and added new items including a great new historic mug.



~ Photos by Lachoff, Cerra, and Eskridge

RENEW YOUR CCHS MEMBERSHIP!

Dear Members,

This is a friendly reminder that membership renewals for 2014 are due in January. We count on the support of our many members to be able to maintain the Archives and Museum, and to continue the promotion of Culver City's history.

There is a form at the back of this newsletter for your convenience, or a downloadable form that can be printed from our website: www.CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org

Your continued support is always greatly appreciated! Thank you!

NEWS FROM THE COSTUME CHAIR . . .

by Sharon Shore
Costumes Chair



A BEAUTIFUL SILK ORGANZA SKIRT WITH UNIQUE "PETALS"

Currently on display in the ARC for the first time, is a long, 1950s-style skirt made of billowing layers of cream colored silk organza.

Most unusual is the skirt embellishment – a scattered bouquet of three-dimensional flowers. They are made of organza petal layers attached at the center to a chainstitch embroidery and white beadwork base. Although the overall effect is lovely and "light" in feeling, the effort to create this one-of-a-kind fabric would have required many hours of considerable patience and skill.

The skirt is a part of the MGM costume collection and probably had a matching separate bodice. An inventory number is sewn to the inside of the waistband but other details of film history are yet to be discovered. The borrowed belt and beaded sweater complete the costume, thanks to generous Society members.

A VALLES-DESIGNED GENE KELLY BLAZER

Also on display is one of our few costumes for men. The cream and red striped wool blazer was worn by Gene Kelly as Eddie O'Brien in *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*, an MGM film made in 1949. The blazer jacket is part of an ensemble including two almost identical pairs of trousers in plain cream colored wool. One pair is made of flannel and the second pair, currently on display, is of gabardine. The weave structure of gabardine is somewhat "stretchy" and could therefore accommodate some of Gene Kelly's very athletic dance scenes in the film. All of the men's costumes in the film were designed by Valles.

[Note: Along with Frank Sinatra, the film also co-starred Esther Williams; see the *Reel Culver City* column on pg. 3.]



Above: The long organza skirt with "petals" and a detail of the embroidery and beadwork base.

Below: Gene Kelly's striped wool blazer from *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*.



MARK YOUR 2014 CALENDAR

**JAN. 15: CCHS INSTALLATION
AND GEN. MEETING**

APR. 16: CCHS GENERAL MEETING

JUL. 16: CCHS GENERAL MEETING

OCT. 15: CCHS GENERAL MEETING

The CC Cultural Affairs Commission meets on the 2nd Tuesday of the month in the Council Chambers, City Hall.

For more information on any of these events, please contact the Society:
info@CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org
or Tel: (310) 253-6941.
Or visit our web:
www.CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org

2014 ARC Open Dates

Call to confirm dates: (310) 253-6941

1st & 3rd Sundays, 1-3 pm

Jan. 5 Jan. 19

Feb. 2 Feb. 16

Mar. 2 Mar. 16

(Also by appointment)

Thank You New Society Members

Jerry Dealey
Dave Tavres

IN MEMORIAM

The Society sends its warmest condolences and gratitude to the families and friends of our members who have passed this year.

Stan Abrams
Mary Gibson
William Burges

A SPECIAL THANK YOU

It has been my pleasure to serve as Costume Chair for the last two years and to be a part of the museum committee. Due to professional and business commitments, I must pass the position of chairperson to someone else. I want to thank each and every society member who offered support and encouragement of the costume displays. All the comments, questions and information offered about the collection have been truly appreciated and helpful – to be built upon for future studies.

An ARC Update

by Julie Lugo Cerra
Vice President,
Museum/ARC and
City Historian



THE ARC TO FOCUS ON CITY FOUNDER IN JANUARY

Starting in January, the month of Harry Culver's birth, visit your Archives to enjoy the special focus on our city founder, who "just knew what people wanted," according to his daughter, Patricia. You will see original documentation of "our formative years," before incorporation (1917).

A book of original Culver advertisements yields insight into Culver's thinking for this city. Harry Culver carefully chose this point between Los Angeles and "Venice of America," with a prediction of development toward us, and our city's growth toward those established communities. Clearly, he had vision!

CULVER FAMILY'S 1929 TRIP MEMORIALIZED IN BOOK

Another section of the display includes pages of clippings from Culver's trip across the country as president of the National Real Estate Association (1929-30). Stolen from the Culvers' Wallace Neff-designed home, the book memorializing the year-long trip was recovered years ago by our Society. The Culvers, including a young Patricia, began the journey by flying out of the Culver City Airport in our founder's Stinson-Detroiter. The book, a gift from the association, memorialized their trip in detail.

Patricia Culver Battle told us about

the book, with its oversize pages. It sat on a table made specifically to showcase it. As always, we are grateful to the Culver family, whose descendants continue to help us by enriching our archival repository.

ARC'S "OPEN HOURS" CHANGED TO SUNDAYS

Our change to "Open hours" on Sunday afternoons seems better for everyone, so the Museum Committee decided to continue our Open Sundays indefinitely.

We are enjoying a broadening scope of guests and researchers. We make special appointments often, to accommodate many people who are diligently working on the history of local families, the ranchos, and the history of the area. In addition to adding to our collection, we are actively taking advantage of other resources, like the Huntington Library, UCLA etc. to broaden our base of information.

Our participation in events like the "LA as Subject" Archives Fair adds to our resources, as well.



We have hosted several tours at the Archives, often combined with Walking Tours of Downtown Culver City. By spring, we will be ready for Culver City students with a special exhibit for their visits, and we already have a bus tour from Orange County

booked for August, 2014 (along with their visit to Sony Pictures).

THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS FOR A GREAT 2013!

This past year has been a very productive one, thanks to many! We have more volunteers cataloging, better places to store historic items, which are often irregular sizes, and not always easy to store!

Chair Jeanne Conklin and her Historic Sites Committee have cleaned all 13 Historic Sites markers placed by the Society. Special thanks to "cuz" Fred Machado who has donated four amazing panoramic photos that you should see! Check out Sharon's Costume Column and of course, "Happy New Year" - and come visit!



Above: The Culver City Municipal Plunge has a display in its lobby and one of its artifacts is a fabulous photo of "Hollywood's Mermaid," Esther Williams, on permanent loan from the Society.

Left: The Society's table at the annual "LA as Subject's Archives Bazaar" with Pres. Michelle Bernardin, Alex King and Stu Freeman, with member Marc Wanamaker at adjacent table to the right.

Below: CCHS Past President Stu Freeman presented the ARC with a free-standing "speaker holder" which shows off two of the vintage speakers from the beloved Studio Drive-In.



CCHS ARCHIVES & RESOURCE CENTER (ARC)

Veterans Memorial Building 4117 Overland Ave., Culver City, CA

NOTE: New days for visiting the ARC:

The 1st and 3rd Sundays, 1-3 pm, and by appointment.

Free admission. (Enter from parking lot behind the VMB.)

Mail: PO Box 3428, Culver City, CA 90231-3428

Tel: (310) 253-6941 **Email:** info@CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org

Web: www.CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org



Time to Renew or Become a Member of the Culver City Historical Society Today!

Join others in preserving the history of the "Heart of Screenland" and supporting the Culver City Historical Society Archives & Resource Center (ARC).

We can't do it without YOU!

TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Member (\$20) | <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Lifetime Member (\$300) | <input type="checkbox"/> Organization (\$15) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Member (\$30) | <input type="checkbox"/> Family Lifetime Member (\$500) | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Member (\$50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Youth Member (\$10) | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron Member (\$100) | <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate Sponsor (\$500) |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor (\$1000) | |

Name/Company: _____ **Contact Person:** _____

Mailing Address: (Street) _____ **(City)** _____ **(State/Zip)** _____

Telephone: _____ **Fax:** _____ **Email:** _____

Please make checks payable to **Culver City Historical Society** and mail to

P.O. Box 3428, Culver City, CA 90231-3428. For further information, call (310) 253-6941 or email: info@CulverCityHistoricalSociety.org.

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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| Culver Hotel, The Douglas Newton (310) 558-9500 | SendOutCardsRichard A. Marcus (310) 397-4696 |
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Culver City Historical Society

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