

# Culver Historical Highlights

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Spring 2004

## MAY USHERS IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARENESS CCHS MEMBER MARTHA SIGALL HONORED BY ANIMATORS

### CCHS MEMBER MARTHA SIGALL HONORED BY ANIMATION SOCIETY AND WITH CITY COMMENDATION

Longtime CCHS member Martha Sigall has been awarded the prestigious "June Foray Award" for "significant and benevolent or charitable impact on the art and industry of animation."

The award was given out by The International Animated Film Society at the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Annie Awards during a ceremony held at the historic Alex Theatre in Glendale, CA.



L-R: Steven Rose, Martha & Sol Sigall

In addition, the City Council of the City of Culver City bestowed its Commendation for "her selection as the recipient of the June Foray Award and (cont'd on pg. 3)

### NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION OBSERVANCES

Since 1971, preservationists around the country have joined forces to celebrate National Preservation Week during the second week of May, with some communities designating the entire month of May as Preservation Month. It is a visible way to showcase grassroots preservation activities in communities nationwide.

Each year, the National Trust selects a theme which for 2004 is *New Frontiers in Preservation*. This, the National Trust states, "underscores how the national preservation ethic is growing, broadening appreciation for modern architecture, safeguarding Native American sacred sites, recognizing the role preservation plays in downtown revitalization in the age of sprawl, heritage tourism, smart growth, and providing affordable housing. The theme also emphasizes emerging issues and challenges in the field of preservation."

The National Trust maintains that this is arguably the most important time in recent history when so many diverse elements affect the importance of preserving our history: culture, society, economics, politics, geographical and the future. The Cultural Affairs Commission has recommended to the City Council that May be declared "Historic Preservation Month" in Culver City, and it will be on the agenda at the May 10<sup>th</sup> meeting. Please try to be there in support!

### CULVER CITY PARKS ARE COMMUNITY TREASURES

PART TWO OF TWO

by Julie Lugo Cerra

We conclude our look at the history and background of the City's many parks with the following:

**BILL BOTTS FIELD in CULVER CITY PARK** is the site of our little league/soccer fields. It was named for a 1960s Councilmember Bill Botts, who fought for the space for the Little League Fields. Botts and his wife,

Anne, had a standing breakfast on Sunday at their home where the Councilman (cont'd on pg. 3)



Syd Kronenthal Park

## APRIL 21ST GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

### Special Guest Speakers

### HUGH NEELY and JOHN FLYNN of the MARY PICKFORD INSTITUTE

The Historical Society's Spring General Membership Meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 21st in the Lethbridge Garden Room at the Veterans Memorial Building, 4117 Overland Ave. at 7:00 pm.

Hugh Munro Neely, Film Curator of the Mary Pickford Institute, and Dr. John Flynn, Library Manager for the Institute, will introduce many of us to this valuable resource center located in the historic Washington Building in downtown Culver City. Its motto is "Legacy, Creativity and Education Through Film"

Mr. Neely, a Los Angeles native, is a veteran documentary filmmaker who has produced award-winning films for Cinemax, Bravo, the Arts & Entertainment Networks, and Turner Classic Movies. Dr. Flynn has served as a writer and/or producer on such projects as *Mary Pickford: A Life on Film*, *The DeMille Dynasty*, and bios on Clara Bow and Marion Davies – and he is a Culver City resident!

The public is invited to enjoy the free program and students are encouraged to attend. This will be a potluck "Bring a Dessert" to serve 6-8 people with the Society providing coffee and tea, plates and utensils.

For more information, please call (310) 287-3850.

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Steven J. Rose



April is here and with it comes Spring bringing a renewal of its beauty. Winter has ended and we will feel the sun's warmth brightening our lives in the coming months!

The Culver City Historical Society is embracing Spring with a new site for our archives and memorabilia in downtown Culver City, above the Bank of the West. With much hard work, we will be opening our doors to the public in the near future with what we

hope will be a precursor to our longed-for dream of a museum. It is my hope that when we do, both the public and the government will look upon it as a safe and secure site to place our history on display.

Our new facility will offer exhibits and research opportunities on the history of Culver City and the whole of La Ballona Valley. In the coming months, Robin Turner, our new Museum VP, will be scheduling work parties to bring our hopes and wishes into reality. I might add that Robin has some pretty impressive credentials: She is an archaeologist and paleontologist who has worked in Southern California for the past 15 years, notably consulting and volunteering with the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, as well as owning her own archaeo/paleo business. I encourage you to join her.

Please remember to attend our April 21<sup>st</sup> General Meeting to learn more about a new treasure in Culver City – the Mary Pickford Institute. We're delighted to have them tell us more about their work and to join us here, in "The Heart of Screenland."

Keeping history alive for the future.....

Best regards,



## Notes from Your City Historian

by Julie Lugo Cerra



How about that "Square Meal on a Round Bun" and "Two good places to eat ..... here and home!"



### COMMUNITY CULTURAL PLAN NOW IN PLACE

Our Community Cultural Plan is in place and we are now in a position to get some real work done. The Cultural Affairs Commission is trying very hard to get the plaques on those properties designated Landmark right away.

These include buildings like The Culver Theatre, which is now devoid of its "Culver" script, the very thing that inspired the new city logo. The theatre which will be known as the Kirk Douglas Theatre, is due to open by Fall. As your City Historian, I hope the Center Theatre Group will be responsible and use colors within the palette of colors that were appropriate at its opening in 1947 as precedent dictates.

### PICCADILLY'S DRIVE-IN

Special thanks to cuz, Fred Machado. The Downtown Business Association and the Exchange Club wanted a picture of the Piccadilly's Drive-In for an event they are sponsoring in May. Well, of course, Fred just "happened" to have a letter written by his brother Tom on a copy of the front of the menu!

As I am trying to tie up all the loose ends for the Images of America book on Culver City, I want to thank all the folks who have helped with photos, and photo identification. The pictorial will be so much richer because of you all. Although you know who you are, I mean the Society, Robert Battle, Steve Newton, Jozelle Smith, June Caldwell, Jean Barker, Paul Pitti, Roger Mayer, the city staff, and anyone I have forgotten.....

You may want to watch for items on the Council/CCRA or Planning Commission agendas that pertain to historic preservation. Check the city website at [www.culvercity.org](http://www.culvercity.org) at the end of each week. The Cultural Affairs Commission has asked that the City declare May as Historic Preservation month in Culver City. You can show your support on May 10. Mike Balkman Council Chambers at 7pm.

Our condolences to John Felix on the passing of our dear Pearla Staples. She was quite a lady!



## Culver Historical Highlights

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 CCHS Newsletter is published quarterly.

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### Editor's Column

Those of us who had the great advantage of going to school in Culver City from kindergarten through high school know we had the best education ever! And most of the residents in the Lindberg Park area crossed a footbridge to attend Farragut Grammar School, Culver City Jr. High (it was "Jr." then!), and Culver High School.

Well, that footbridge, which was originally built in 1951, has been replaced with a new steel bridge (a Bow Truss design and strong enough to support a light-weight truck!). The February 4th Opening Ceremony celebrated the new, improved pedestrian bridge – which also functions as a connection to the bike path and trail adjacent to the creek – and although it was definitely needed, some of us will miss the simple wooden bridge we walked across throughout our childhood.

Future newsletter issues will feature a fuller history of the bridge and the La Ballona Creek as well as a travel report on the Nethercutt Museum by our own Sandy Burton, among a variety of topics.

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

### MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Remember, all memberships were due for renewal in January, 2004. Please send your renewal as soon as the possible.

Support your Historical Society – We can't do it without you!

# REEL LIFE

## IN CULVER CITY

by Ross Hawkins

### MARY PICKFORD – THE FIRST “SUPERSTAR”



The global popularity of film star Mary Pickford can never be underestimated, even by today's standards. Famed



Mary Pickford

journalist Adela Rogers St. John, a contemporary of Pickford's, went so far as to claim that Mary Pickford was "the best known woman who has ever lived, the woman who was known to by more people

than any other woman that has been in all history."

It may sound like hyperbole, but before they became art, when films were considered nothing more than a gimmick, Mary Pickford was, quite literally, the "Queen" of films. When she and co-superstar, Douglas Fairbanks, married, they were hailed as Hollywood's "royalty," and they toured the world, meeting their "equals" -- European kings and queens and other heads of state from around the globe.

When Pickford and Fairbanks joined with comedic idol Charlie Chaplin and director D.W. Griffith in 1919 to form United Artists, it was an immediate joke that "the inmates were running the asylum!" The foursome, however, proved their critics wrong.



L-R: Fairbanks, Chaplin, Pickford & Griffith

Known as "the company built by the stars," United Artists was never intended to be a regular Hollywood "studio" as we know it. It started solely as a distribution company with its mission to release films made by independent producers, and to "further the artistic welfare of the motion

picture industry" by promising creative freedom to actors and filmmakers alike.

Led by Hollywood mogul Joseph Schenck during its formative years from 1925 to 1935, United Artists attracted such top talent as Gloria Swanson, Samuel Goldwyn, Howard Hughes, Walt Disney and Darryl Zanuck. The remaining founders, Pickford and Chaplin, sold their shares in UA in 1951 to Arthur B. Krimm and Robert S. Benjamin, thus ending the "inmates" management.

Learn more about Mary Pickford at the General Meeting on April 21<sup>st</sup>. I will have the great opportunity of interviewing our guests in greater detail and my next column will dig deeper into the extraordinary life and accomplishments of "America's Sweetheart" -- Mary Pickford.

### "Sigall" (cont'd.)

thanks for her continuing to share her experiences with the students of Culver City."

Martha's career in animation began in 1936 at the Leon Schlesinger Studio and, through the years until her "official" retirement in 1989, she has worked with such legends as Tex Avery, Bob Clampett and Chuck Jones.

After "holding down the fort" during World War II, Martha worked for a who's who of animation studios including UPA, MGM, Hanna-Barbera, DePatie-Freleng and Bill Melendez.

In 1996, Martha became a volunteer docent for the Warner Bros. Museum educating visitors from around the world, along with her husband Sol -- her partner of over 52 years.

Martha Sigall is truly "a part of Culver City's history as the *Heart of Screenland!*"

### "Parks" (cont'd.)

enjoyed input from the locals on city issues. The park, annexed from the county in 1982, is 40 acres, our largest park to date.

**BLAIR HILLS PARK** is a two-plus acre site in the Blair Hills neighborhood. It was partially dedicated (the sump? area) to the city by developer Edward Stone and the city subsequently purchased six lots, increasing its size.

**BLANCO PARK** was named for Ray J. Blanco, the developer of the lower hill area. He donated the land in 1951 for the use of a park in perpetuity. The property was part of the original Rancho La Ballona, which was later sub-divided. Vicenta Machado, daughter of rancho founder Agustin Machado, gave this parcel to her son, Mercurial Lugo and his wife Rita Reyes, probably as a wedding gift in the 1880s. It was known as the

Lugo Ranch until the mid-1950s when the property was sold by Vicenta Lugo (Lugo's daughter) to R.J. Blanco for development into a small shopping center.



L-R: Culver West Park & Tellefson Park

**CULVER WEST PARK**, formerly **WEST END PARK**, is named for the area of the city in which it is located. This area was an early annexation to the city in the mid-1920s, although it still carries a different zip code. Wade Street, which leads into the park from Washington Blvd., is the location of a home which once belonged to jazz great Louis Armstrong. The park contains 2.51 acres, acquired over a 5-year period, starting in 1948. It was one of the most expensive acquisitions due to cost of the property.

**EL MARINO PARK**, originally called **CULVER PARK**, was established on land purchased in 1954 by the city from Washington Improvement Co. developer, Camillo Cereghino, and his wife Marie. Cereghino, with Harry Culver, developed early Culver City, and named the streets in the tract where he lived (on Madison & Farragut), for famous dignitaries and political figures.

More information on these "community treasures" can be found at:

<http://www.culvercity.org/citygov/human-services/parks/parks.html>

**SYD KRONENTHAL PARK** was renamed for former Director of Human Services, Sydney Kronenthal. Syd came to work for the city in 1945 and served for more than 50 years before he retired. The park's prior name was **McMANUS PARK**. It lies at the foot of McManus Street, which was named by Los Angeles, prior to its annexation to Culver City. Syd and Mike Tellefson worked together proactively promoting park space in Culver City.

**TELLEFSON PARK** was a 1976 Bi-Centennial dedication of park space, formerly a skating rink, the *Rollerdrome*. It was named for Mike Tellefson, who served the city in a variety of capacities, including Councilmember, Mayor and City Attorney, for 31 years.

### IN MEMORIAM

The Society sends warmest regards to the family of **Dorothy Gibson** who passed away on February 29<sup>th</sup>. As a longtime member of the community, she will be missed.

## 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!

### TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP

- |                                      |  |
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*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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