



LOS ANGELES

CONSERVANCY

news

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One of two murals commissioned for the 1949 home office of the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company. This panel by Hale Woodruff depicts the African American experience in California from 1850 to 1949. On the other side of the lobby is a companion piece by Charles Alston depicting the period from 1527 to 1850. Both murals are proposed for removal. Photo by Mike Mullen, Herald-Examiner Collection/Los Angeles Public Library.

Golden State Mutual: Protecting Los Angeles' African American Heritage

by Adrian Scott Fine

Rarely does a single place have so many associations with African American heritage and layers of significance as does the former home office of the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company. From the architect, to the business, to the artists and their site-specific murals, the building tells a fascinating story of African Americans in Los Angeles, throughout California, and nationally. With the recent closure of the company, the Conservancy and others are working to save the building and keep its many significant elements intact.

What became the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company was founded in 1925 by William Nickerson, Jr.; Norman Oliver Houston; and George Allen Beavers, Jr. It was one of the first companies to offer life insurance to African Americans in Los Angeles, who were routinely denied coverage. The company filled a huge void, grew very quickly, and by 1945 was the largest black-owned business west of the Mississippi River.

In 1949, Golden State Mutual moved into a new, custom-built home office at 1999 West Adams Boulevard. The building was designed in the Late Moderne style by renowned architect Paul Revere Williams. A native Angeleno, Williams was the first African American architect admitted to the American Institute of Architects, in 1923. He rose to national acclaim and enjoyed a prolific career spanning five decades. A 1978 company history described the home

Please see *GOLDEN STATE* on page 6

Self Help Graphics Moves

by Karina Muñiz

In late March, Self Help Graphics & Art (SHG&A) left its longtime home at 3802 E. Cesar Chavez Avenue in unincorporated East Los Angeles. Citing various factors in its decision, the renowned Chicana/o arts organization moved to E. First Street in Boyle Heights.

The Conservancy continues to work with SHG&A and other stakeholders to protect the organization's former home, a 1927 building that has played a strong role in Chicana/o art, cultural identity, and political activism.

SHG&A had occupied the building since 1978. The late artist Eduardo Oropeza created the exterior mosaics that transformed the structure into a community icon.

The building's significance dates back to the mid-twentieth century, when it housed the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO). The community center nurtured bands that created the famous East L.A. sound, including Thee Midnites and the Salas Brothers. In the 1980s, the building housed The Vex, a music club that fueled the East L.A. punk scene.

The building's longtime owner, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles, sold the structure in 2008. The Conservancy worked with SHG&A and community members to document the building's significance, nominating it for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources. The State Historical Resources Commission will vote on the nomination at its May 19 meeting in Santa Monica.

For details, please visit the Issues section of our website at laconservancy.org.

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Los Angeles Conservancy

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The Los Angeles Conservancy is a nonprofit membership organization that works through education and advocacy to recognize, preserve, and revitalize the historic architectural and cultural resources of Los Angeles County.

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Thanks to the Getty Research Institute for access to the Julius Shulman photography archive.

Annual Meeting June 12 at the Natural History Museum's 1913 Building

Please join Conservancy board, staff, and fellow members for our annual meeting on **Sunday, June 12**, from 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County's 1913 Building. We will review the past year in preservation, present our Volunteer Recognition Awards, and introduce the newly elected members of the Board of Directors. We will also have a special program by Karie Bible, Marc Wanamaker, and Harry Medved, co-authors of the book *Location Filming in Los Angeles* (Arcadia Publishing, 2010).

Packed with historic photos, *Location Filming in Los Angeles* offers a historic view of diverse locations that served as the backdrop to Hollywood's greatest films, from the silent era to the modern age. The authors will sign copies of the book after the meeting.

Karie is the official tour guide for Hollywood Forever Cemetery and creator of *FilmRadar.com*, dedicated to Los Angeles repertory and revival films. Marc is a noted author and historian, and a founding member of the Hollywood Heritage Museum. Harry has co-authored books including *Hollywood Escapes* and served as public relations director of the Screen Actors Guild, Warner Bros. Online, and Fandango.

The Original (1913) Building of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County was designed by the noted firm of Hudson and Munsell in an eclectic blend of Spanish and Romanesque revival styles. The building has remained largely intact for nearly a century. Its innovative seismic upgrade, and the restoration of its spectacular historic features, earned a 2011 Conservancy Preservation Award (see page 5).

The annual meeting is free (except for parking, \$8) and open to the public, and it includes admission to the museum. Reservations are recommended; you can mark the enclosed ballot or contact the Conservancy at (213) 623-2489 or info@laconservancy.org.

For details, directions, and parking information, visit nhm.org ("Plan Your Visit") or laconservancy.org, or contact the Conservancy. We hope to see you there!



The 1913 Building of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Photo by Tom Bonner.

Help Spot the Hidden Gems in Your Area!

Do you know of any significant historic resources in your community that deserve attention? The City of Los Angeles' Office of Historic Resources (OHR) invites you to join **SurveyLA**, the city's first-ever comprehensive historic resources survey. You can play a direct role in recognizing the historic places that make your community special.

You can participate as little or as much as you'd like, from completing a simple form to working with other community members to gather information. OHR has an award-winning guide to participating, **MYhistoricLA**, and staff members stand ready to help.

While you're welcome to contribute regardless of where you live in L.A., the City would particularly like to hear from you if you live in any of these current areas of focus: Arleta, Bel Air, Beverly Crest, Brentwood, Cahuenga Pass, Canoga Park, Echo Park, Elysian Valley, Encino, Mission Hills, North Hills, North Hollywood, Pacific Palisades, Pacoima, Panorama City, Playa del Rey, Sherman Oaks, Silver Lake, Studio City, Tarzana, Toluca Lake, Valley Village, Westchester, West Hills, Westlake, Winnetka, or Woodland Hills.

For details, please visit the MYhistoricLA section of surveyla.org or contact Robby Aranguren, Public Participation Coordinator for SurveyLA, at myhistoricala@gmail.com or (626) 793-2400 x101.

Preservation Issues in the News

by Flora Chou, Adrian Scott Fine, Karina Muñiz, and Marcello Vavala

Barry Building

In April, the Conservancy commented on the draft environmental impact report (EIR) for the Green Hollow Square project (formerly called Brentwood Town Green), for which the Barry Building remains targeted for demolition. Many thanks to the more than fifty people who also submitted comments.

Located at 11973 San Vicente Boulevard in Brentwood, this distinctive building arranged around a central courtyard was designed by Los Angeles-based architect Milton Caughey (1911-1958) and completed in 1951.

Despite the Barry Building's status as Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #887, the property's owner, Charles T. Munger, seeks to raze this highly intact example of International Style architecture to make way for a new retail development project. The proposed project would contain over 73,000 square feet of retail, restaurant, and office space in three new, two-story buildings on San Vicente Boulevard. As proposed, the historic building would be demolished to make way for one of the new structures—even though the Barry Building's scale, massing, and arrangement of retail spaces is remarkably similar to what would replace it.

The draft EIR includes a preservation alternative that would reuse the Barry Building for retail space while retaining its landmark designation. Although the draft EIR declares this preservation-friendly choice as the environmentally superior alternative, it also makes unsupported claims that this seemingly preferable option would not meet a number of the project objectives. In our response, the Conservancy advocated for improvements to the preservation alternative while asserting that many of the project objectives can indeed be met by reusing the Barry Building.

Although Los Angeles' current Cultural Heritage Ordinance can't prevent the demolition of a Historic-Cultural Monument, it does allow the City to delay demolition. This delay period allows for further consideration of preservation alternatives, which has been successful in the past. As a result, there have been very few instances when a Historic-



La Villa Basque coffee shop in 2010, in pristine Googie condition. Photo by Ellen Bloom.

Cultural Monument has been demolished to make way for new development (except in cases of irreparable fire, earthquake, or other damage). If the Barry Building were demolished, its loss would call into question the City's ability to protect our cultural heritage when clear adaptive reuse options exist.

La Villa Basque

Despite our best efforts, significant change is under way at La Villa Basque, a French/Basque restaurant in Vernon. The 1960 eatery was long recognized for its remarkably intact Googie architecture and authentic sixties design, and it hosted the Conservancy's 2010 volunteer party.

In early 2011, we learned that the business had changed ownership. We went to the site to find the banquet rooms being gutted and combined into one event space. Custom wooden screens and other original features were subsequently removed from the main dining area and entry, along with some built-in furnishings.

Conservancy staff reached out repeatedly to the new management. They met with us briefly, assuring us that they were not making significant changes. We offered to advise on sensitive upgrades and to help promote the site as a truly special, highly intact historic destination. We encouraged them to use its authentic character as a distinct asset, from marketing to filming.

Matthew Weiner, creator and executive producer of the hit drama *Mad Men* (a 2011 Preservation Award recipient), has spoken out

in support of our efforts to preserve La Villa Basque. *Mad Men* had filmed at the restaurant because of its pristine condition. When management began removing original elements to "make it more *Mad Men*," Mr. Weiner urged them to keep La Villa Basque intact.

Yet management has continued its work unabated, including replacing the original coffee shop countertop with marble. They are apparently changing the name of the restaurant, and we anticipate the removal of the distinctive exterior signage.

The City of Vernon has no protections for its historic resources. There is no legal mechanism to prevent the continued loss of La Villa Basque's historic character.

Public pressure is our only tool to save what remains of La Villa Basque. We greatly appreciate the efforts of everyone who has visited or contacted the restaurant, urging management to keep it intact. Please continue to voice your concerns.

HPOZ Conference

On **Saturday, May 7**, the Conservancy will join the Los Angeles Department of City Planning and Office of Historic Resources to present the 9th Annual HPOZ Conference.

The day-long conference is a valuable opportunity for residents, board members, and anyone interested in the City's Historic Preservation Overlay Zones to gather for a day of educational workshops and networking. Session topics this year will include drought-tolerant landscaping, HPOZ surveys, historic property research, and practical application of restoration principles.

The conference will take place at McCarty Memorial Church in West Adams Terrace. Guests can take a walking tour of the West Adams Terrace HPOZ, the pending Jefferson Park HPOZ, or the Joseph L. Starr Farmhouse (HCM #865). The conference will also include the City's second HPOZ Awards luncheon honoring outstanding projects within L.A.'s twenty-seven HPOZs.

Conference registration is \$20 and includes breakfast and lunch. To register, visit laconservancy.org/neighborhoods.

2011 Preservation Awards

For detailed project descriptions, visit laconservancy.org/awards

Congratulations to the recipients of the Conservancy's 30th Annual Preservation Awards, honoring outstanding achievement in the field of historic preservation. As always, we had a very competitive group of applicants. The nine recipients reflect the vast range of efforts throughout Los Angeles County to recognize, celebrate, and protect our cultural heritage.

We will present the awards at a luncheon on **Thursday, May 12**, at the Millennium Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. We are very grateful to City National Bank, the luncheon's presenting sponsor for the eleventh consecutive year.

The luncheon is a great opportunity to network with hundreds of business and community leaders while supporting the work of the Conservancy. Tickets are \$125; table sponsorships are also available. For details, please visit laconservancy.org/awards.

President's Award

Community Redevelopment Agency, City of Los Angeles

As California's redevelopment agencies face an uncertain future, it's important to recognize the crucial link between community development and preservation. Historic preservation is a powerful tool for fueling economic development and revitalizing neighborhoods. In terms of sheer magnitude, few entities have done more in this respect than the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles (CRA/LA). In more than fifty projects, CRA/LA has reused historic structures or conducted surveys identifying historic sites. Past projects include fellow Preservation Award winners; pending projects include the rehabilitation of the 1926 Westlake Theatre (pictured). We thank CRA/LA for enriching the lives of Angelenos while honoring our cultural heritage.



Adrian Scott Fine

Antelope Valley Indian Museum State Historic Park

15701 East Avenue M, Lancaster, 93535

This truly unique building near Lancaster was created over a number of years starting in 1928. Self-taught artist and set designer Howard



Stephen Schafer

Arden Edwards built the house in the high desert in the Swiss Chalet style, covering it with intricate artwork and filling it with his collection of Native American artifacts. Now part of a state historic park, the building has been stabilized using ingenious techniques to create a museum-quality environment while preserving its historic features.

Media Award

Mad Men

Winner of three Golden Globes and three Emmys for Outstanding Drama Series, AMC's *Mad Men* is far more than a TV show. The chronicle of the men and women of Madison Avenue advertising is a pop culture phenomenon that reignited interest in all things 1960s, including architecture. The sixties craze came in quite handy during the Conservancy's recent educational program, The Sixties Turn 50, showcasing Greater L.A.'s rich yet fragile legacy of 1960s resources. Beyond making the sixties cooler than ever, the show has featured local midcentury landmarks and woven preservation into one of its storylines. Series creator and executive producer Matthew Weiner has gone even further, speaking out publicly against the removal of historic elements from the 1960 La Villa Basque restaurant in Vernon (see page 3), one of the show's past filming locations.



Courtesy AMC

Murray Burns / The Preservation of Angelino Heights

We applaud everyone who labors to preserve historic homes. Yet Murray Burns stands apart. Since 1975, Murray has saved nearly thirty homes in the neighborhood of Angelino Heights. He has meticulously restored more than twenty. He safeguards them through landmark designation, Mills Act property tax relief contracts, and conservation easements. Murray has also worked to enhance the effectiveness of historic districts throughout the city. He has devoted much of his life to following his passion and sharing it with others, building a rare legacy of preservation and public service.



Planaria Price

City of Los Angeles 2010 HPOZ Preservation Plan Program

Amid a budget crisis and a forty-percent cut in staffing, the City of L.A.'s Planning Department took proactive steps to protect its program of historic districts (Historic Preservation Overlay Zones, or HPOZs). They worked with HPOZ boards to craft sixteen Preservation Plans at once, clarifying and streamlining the process for evaluating changes to properties within the districts. This one project gave property owners, HPOZ boards, and City staff tools to make sound decisions, while making the program more sustainable.



Conservancy archives

Security First National Bank of Los Angeles/Comerica Bank

824 Fair Oaks Avenue, South Pasadena, 91030

Thanks to a strong survey and preservation ordinance, the City of South Pasadena had the chance to review plans to further obscure a historic bank building whose facade had been covered over for decades. Instead, the original facade was uncovered and rehabilitated. Collaboration between the City, owner, tenant, and community revealed and reactivated a historic treasure at the city's most prominent intersection.



Hank Friezer, courtesy South Pasadena Preservation Fdn.

Downtown Women's Center

442 South San Pedro Street, Los Angeles, 90013

In 2005, the Downtown Women's Center's Los Angeles Street facility was bursting at the seams and slated for development. The City paved the way for the Center to take over a nearby industrial building, originally developed by a woman in the 1920s as a shoe factory. The building was transformed into an elegant, LEED-certified haven for women in need. The Center contains seventy-one units of permanent housing, as well as a host of supportive services and even a retail storefront. This inspiring blend of old and new provides clients with a nurturing environment of dignity and respect.



Randal Michelson, courtesy Pica+Sullivan Architects

Villa Riviera

800 East Ocean Boulevard, Long Beach, 90802

An icon of the Long Beach coastline, Villa Riviera received its first major restoration since opening in 1929. A dedicated group of homeowners made possible the top-to-bottom project that included extensive lead-paint removal, plaster repair, window treatment, and waterproofing. Painstaking research identified the original color scheme. The project also reconstructed missing original features, including six life-sized grotesque statues on the roof and the original bronze doors at the main entrance.



Courtesy Spectra Company

Natural History Museum of L.A. County, 1913 Building Seismic Rehabilitation

900 Exposition Boulevard, Los Angeles, 90007

Sometimes, the best preservation work is what you don't see. An innovative technique called "center coring" reinforced the building's ninety-eight-year-old walls from the inside, with extraordinary precision. The project also restored the stunning stained-glass skylight in the rotunda, revealing a brilliance that had been hidden for many years. These and other improvements have poised this major cultural center for another century of use by the public.



Tom Bonner

2011 Jury

Many thanks to the members of our independent jury, who had the difficult task of selecting this year's recipients from a strong pool of applicants.

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Architectural Historian, Architectural Resources Group

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Entrepreneur & Proprietor, The Edison and Clifton's

GOLDEN STATE continued from page 1

office as “a symbol of black enterprise and of loyal service to many thousands.”

Conceived by Williams as part of the building’s design are two murals that flank the upper portion of the double-height lobby. The oil-on-canvas works were painted by noted African American artists Charles Alston and Hale Woodruff. Each mural measures more than sixteen feet long and nine feet tall.

Titled *The Negro in California History*, the murals depict the experience of African Americans in California from 1527 to 1949. The works are highly significant examples of integrated art in Los Angeles celebrating black history.

Golden State Mutual operated from its West Adams location for sixty years, until closing in 2009. The building’s fate came into question when the State’s Conservancy and Liquidation Office prepared to sell the company’s remaining assets. The Conservancy’s Modern Committee submitted a Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM) nomination for the building in January 2011. The City’s Cultural Heritage Commission approved the nomination in April; the City Council will make the final decision in May or June.

The building has been purchased by Community Impact Development, a nonprofit social services group from South Los Angeles that supports the HCM nomination. Yet the interior murals have become the subject of a highly publicized legal dispute. The murals are proposed to be sold and removed from the building. The Smithsonian Institution considered purchasing the artwork but withdrew its bid in March, citing community opposition over the murals’ removal from the building and Los Angeles.

Community Impact Development contends that the artwork is integral to the building it purchased. The Conservancy agrees, and we support the company’s legal efforts to prevent the sale of the murals. For updates on this issue, please visit the Issues section of our website at laconservancy.org.

Last Remaining Seats Starts May 25

Last Remaining Seats (LRS), the Conservancy’s most popular program, returns in May for its twenty-fifth year. This season features the historic theatres of Broadway, with screenings at the Orpheum Theatre (1926), the Million Dollar Theatre (1918), the Los Angeles Theatre (1931), and the Palace Theatre (1911). We’re excited to help celebrate the 100th birthday of the Palace, in partnership with Bringing Back Broadway.

For details and tickets, please visit laconservancy.org or see the color postcard mailed to all members.

We offer special thanks to our 2011 Last Remaining Seats sponsors. Series Star Sponsor: Hollywood Foreign Press Association. Series Supporting Sponsor: Steve Bing. Series Sponsors: NBC Universal; Trina Turk; Valley Economic Development Center. Evening Sponsors: Cathy and Steve Needleman; Linda and Jerry Bruckheimer; Warner Bros.; Clifton’s and The Edison; Paramount Pictures and 213 Downtown LA Nightlife; Hugh Hefner. Media Sponsor: Los Angeles Downtown News. VIP Reception Sponsor: Bank of America/Merrill Lynch. Funded in part by: The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Arts Commission; Los Angeles City Department of Cultural Affairs; The Walt Disney Company.

Membership Benefits

All Conservancy members can enjoy reduced LRS ticket prices of \$16 in advance, compared to \$20 for the general public! All Benefactor (\$500) and Cornerstone (\$1,000+) members are invited to the VIP opening night reception for Last Remaining Seats at Clifton’s Cafeteria on **Wednesday, May 25**. Reception guests will enjoy pre-

show cocktails and hors d’oeuvres, as well as reserved seats at the Orpheum Theatre for the sold-out screening of *Rear Window*, starring James Stewart and Grace Kelly.

As a special benefit for Granite, Marble, and Travertine Cornerstone members (\$2,500 - \$10,000+), we offer a limited number of reserved seats for the other screenings. If you have questions or would like to upgrade your membership to receive these benefits, please contact Adrienne Kisson at (213) 430-4204 or akisson@laconservancy.org.

The 2011 LRS Lineup

Wednesday, May 25

Orpheum Theatre

Rear Window (1954)

Wednesday, June 1

Los Angeles Theatre

The Music Man (1962)

Wednesday, June 8

Million Dollar Theatre

Captain Blood (1935)

Wednesday, June 15

Los Angeles Theatre

King Kong (1933)

Wednesday, June 22

Million Dollar Theatre

Zoot Suit (1981)

co-presented with the Latin American Cinemateca of Los Angeles

Sunday, June 26

Palace Theatre

Sunset Boulevard (1950)

Wednesday, June 29

Orpheum Theatre

Safety Last! (1923)

In Memoriam: Judith Yoakum

The Conservancy notes the passing of Judith Yoakum, a longtime volunteer and supporter. A former walking tour docent, Judith led many tours for local students before the Conservancy created our youth outreach program. She went far and above the call of duty, working with each classroom teacher in advance to make sure the students were prepared for the best possible experience. We will miss Judith and will always appreciate her contributions.

JANUARY 29 / MARCH 29 MEMBERSHIP REPORT

The Los Angeles Conservancy would like to acknowledge the generous contributions of our new Supporting members, and the new and renewing members of our Sustaining, Benefactor, and Cornerstone groups.

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Thanks to Hughes Tour Sponsors

In addition to the generous support of our members, the Conservancy relies on assistance throughout the year for specific projects, as well as for general operations related to education and advocacy. We wish to express heartfelt thanks to the sponsors of our March 20 tour of the



Guests visit Building 15, one of the largest wooden structures in the world. Photo by Greg Szimonisz.

former Hughes Aircraft Company's Culver City Campus, now being transformed by The Ratkovich Company for use as a creative media campus.



ARUP

Additional tour support provided
by **Gensler**.



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Los Angeles Conservancy
Attn: Membership
523 West Sixth Street, Suite 826
Los Angeles, CA 90014
(213) 623-2489 ■ fax: (213) 623-3909

CONSERVANCY WALKING TOURS

Walking tours begin at 10 a.m. except where noted. Tours are \$5 for Conservancy members and children twelve and under; \$10 for the general public. Walk-ins are accepted on most tours. Pre-payment is required on Angelino Heights, Biltmore Hotel, and Broadway. For details and reservations, visit laconservancy.org or call (213) 623-2489.

WEEKLY TOURS

Art Deco

Every Saturday

Biltmore Hotel

Every Sunday, 2 p.m.

Broadway: Historic Theatre & Commercial District

Every Saturday

Historic Downtown

Every Saturday

BI-WEEKLY AND MONTHLY TOURS

Angelino Heights

First Saturday

Downtown Renaissance: Spring & Main

Second and Fourth Saturdays

Downtown's Modern Skyline

First and Third Saturdays

Union Station

Third Saturday

Youth, family, and group tours by arrangement; call the number above for information.



Los Angeles Conservancy

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Los Angeles, California 90014

laconservancy.org

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UPCOMING EVENTS



Downtown Women's Center (a 2011 recipient).
Photo by Randall Michelson/Pica+Sullivan.



RKO Radio Pictures



Tom Bonner

30TH ANNUAL PRESERVATION AWARDS LUNCHEON

Thursday, May 12

Millennium Biltmore Hotel

Join us as we honor outstanding achievement in the field of historic preservation across Los Angeles County. See page 4 for details.

LAST REMAINING SEATS

May 25 - June 29

Broadway's Historic Theatres

Celebrate a quarter century of classic films in historic theatres! This year's films include *The Music Man*, *King Kong* (pictured), and *Safety Last!* Visit laconservancy.org for details.

ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, June 12

10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Natural History Museum

Meet with Conservancy board, staff, and fellow members at the original 1913 building of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. See page 2 or insert for details.