



LOS ANGELES

CONSERVANCY

news

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The 1939 Venice Post Office closed in July and was recently sold to preservation-minded buyer Joel Silver. The building exemplifies a trend affecting thousands of post offices nationwide, many of them historic. Photo by Adrian Scott Fine / L.A. Conservancy.

Saving the Historic Post Office

by Adrian Scott Fine

The historic Venice Post Office at 1601 Main Street has become a poster child for the current national plight of the United States Postal Service (USPS). As a result of unprecedented financial challenges at the USPS, an entire class of buildings—the post office—faces increasing threats from closure and sale. While the Venice Post Office fortunately has a preservation-minded buyer, film producer Joel Silver, it exemplifies the complexities involved in preserving one of America’s great building types.

The Venice Post Office was built in 1939 as part of the Federal Works Progress Administration. Its design is attributed to Louis A. Simon, the Supervising Architect in the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Department of the Treasury. He repeated the basic building form and interior arrangement throughout the country, though each post office had its own design and architectural treatment—such as the Spanish Colonial Revival style of the Venice branch.

This location is one of approximately eight hundred post offices nationwide that feature a custom interior mural designed to reflect the surrounding community. The murals were funded through a federal arts initiative to create jobs and boost morale during the Great Depression. The striking mural in the Venice Post Office lobby, by Edward Biberman, depicts the early history of Venice. Over time, this post office and countless others have become far more than just architectural landmarks—they act as community anchors, placed in prominent locations to serve the public.

Since last year, the Conservancy has worked with residents, numerous community groups, Councilman Bill Rosendahl, and Congresswoman Janice Hahn to advocate for the Venice

Please see POST OFFICE on page 6

Linda Dishman Celebrates 20 Years as Conservancy’s Executive Director

by Cindy Olnick

Happy anniversary to Linda Dishman, who became the Conservancy’s executive director in March 1992. The organization has since doubled our membership, tripled our staff, and increased our budget fourfold, all in service of our mission. We on the staff are incredibly grateful for her longstanding leadership. We took this occasion to ask Linda to reflect briefly on her two decades at the helm.

What was your first big challenge at the Conservancy?

Several advocacy issues were under way when I started, like finding a new use for the Wilshire May Company building [now LACMA West] and preventing demolition of the Herald Examiner building. The 1992 civil unrest [following the acquittal of police officers accused of beating Rodney King] happened a couple of months after I started. We didn’t have laptops or cell phones, so each staff member watched a different TV channel to try and find out which historic buildings were threatened!

Any major milestones over the past two decades?

The fight to preserve [the former Cathedral of] St. Vibiana in the mid-1990s was a defining moment for the Conservancy. Not that it was more important than previous issues like the Central Library or the Wilmetts Theatre, but it was more of a public vilification. We were accused of single-handedly

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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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Support the Conservancy by Buying Groceries!

Thank you to all our members who have participated in the **Ralphs/Food 4 Less Community Contribution Program**. Each time you use your Ralphs or Food 4 Less rewards card, a portion of your total purchase is donated to the Conservancy. Since the Conservancy began our partnership with Ralphs/Food 4 Less five years ago, members have contributed thousands of dollars simply by buying groceries!



An early Ralphs Market in Long Beach, ca. 1931. Photo from Conservancy archives.

Each year at this time, participants must renew their registration for the current term (September 1, 2012 – August 31, 2013). This also makes it the best time for new participants to sign up.

Simply visit Ralphs.com, sign in or create an account, click on “Community Rewards” under “My Account,” and select “Edit Community Contribution Program Information.” On the next screen, you can find the Los Angeles Conservancy by name or NPO number (80379).

If you don’t have a Ralphs rewards card, you can get one at the customer service desk of any Ralphs.

If you participate through Food 4 Less, you don’t need to re-register your rewards card. If you have a Food 4 Less rewards card and have not registered it, you can register online at Food4Less.com and click on “My Food 4 Less.” Thank you!

Mickie Torres-Gil Joins Conservancy Staff as Membership Assistant

We are thrilled to welcome former intern **Mickie Torres-Gil** as the Conservancy’s new membership assistant. In the summer of 2011, Mickie participated in the Getty Foundation’s Multicultural Undergraduate Internship Program and worked on several of the Conservancy’s educational programs, including our walking tours, the fall 2011 At Home With History tour, and our summer Adventures in Architecture program with the Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA).



In May, Mickie graduated from the University of Southern California with a bachelor’s degree in architecture. She completed a capstone seminar investigating the role of education in historic preservation. Her membership in the American Association of Museums (AAM) has helped her learn about nonprofit development. With great knowledge of the Conservancy and preservation, Mickie looks forward to strengthening our member base and working on fundraising events. Please join us in welcoming Mickie to the Conservancy staff.

Preservation Issues in the News

by Flora Chou, Adrian Scott Fine, and Marcello Vavala

Barlow Respiratory Hospital

The Conservancy submitted comments in June on the draft environmental impact report (EIR) for the Barlow Respiratory Hospital Replacement and Master Plan project. Despite its designation as a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM #504) and being identified as a National Register-eligible historic district, the century-old former tuberculosis sanatorium has been at risk for years.

Spurred by state requirements following the 1994 Northridge earthquake that acute care hospital facilities meet stringent seismic safety standards by 2013, Barlow Hospital proposed a project in 2008 to rezone its hillside campus for primarily residential use. Anticipating that the sale of the proposed 888 new residential units would help fund the construction of a new three-story hospital, the proposed project aims to demolish twenty-one of the thirty-two contributing historic structures located throughout the twenty-five acre site.

The Conservancy has met with Barlow Hospital's development team to seek options that save a greater number of historic buildings to protect the site's landmark status. While the draft EIR evaluated several alternatives that would retain more contributing structures, they either fail to meet project objectives aimed at keeping the hospital operational or they propose an overwhelming amount of new construction that would radically alter the village-like setting and jeopardize the site's status as an HCM.

The Conservancy urges refinements or the development of new alternatives within



One of the buildings on the Barlow Respiratory Hospital campus. Photo by Adrian Scott Fine / L.A. Conservancy.

the final EIR. New alternatives could reduce the number of proposed residential units and locate them in a manner more compatible with the massing, scale, and setting of the existing buildings and cultural landscape.

Maravilla Handball Court/ El Centro Grocery

Great news! At its August 3 meeting in Beverly Hills, the State Historical Resources Commission voted unanimously to designate the Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources. Submitted jointly by the Conservancy and the Maravilla Historical Society, the nomination had the formal support of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. Conservancy staff, representatives from the Maravilla Historical Society, and local residents spoke in favor of landmarking this culturally significant resource.

Located in the Maravilla neighborhood of unincorporated East Los Angeles, the handball court was built brick-by-brick by East L.A. residents and completed in 1928. The El Centro Grocery and attached residence were added in 1946. The site has been a beloved community resource ever since, and it remains an important social center for the Maravilla community. It strongly reflects the cultural layers important to the history of East Los Angeles, including its association with the Japanese-American Nishiyama family.

The Maravilla Historical Society spearheaded efforts in 2008 to restore the court and store for community residents to appreciate, use, and learn about an important part of their neighborhood's history. The site received national attention as part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's This Place Matters campaign. Congratulations to community members on all their hard work!

Do You Heart Garden Apartments?

Thanks to funding from the Clarence Stein Institute and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Conservancy is moving



The Nishiyama family in front of their store, 1960s. Photo courtesy Tommy Nishiyama.

forward with the launch of the L.A. Garden Apartment Network. The network seeks to foster greater awareness and understanding of the historic garden apartment communities that helped define Greater Los Angeles.

Although garden apartments were built throughout the United States in the mid-twentieth century, the concept was especially popular in Los Angeles. With more than thirty such developments in existence, L.A. County's collection is second in number only to the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

In recent years, the Conservancy has played a lead role in helping to save once-threatened garden apartments, including Lincoln Place in Venice (completed in 1951) and Chase Knolls in Sherman Oaks (completed in 1949). Currently the Conservancy is working with local residents and community groups to advocate for the preservation of Wyvernwood in Boyle Heights, opened in 1939 as the first large-scale garden apartment complex in Los Angeles. In all of these examples, demolition was proposed, followed by lengthy, multi-year advocacy efforts.

The L.A. Garden Apartment Network will kick off with a day-long conference in October, featuring presentations on the development and growth of Los Angeles' garden apartments, an oral history clinic, and a tour.

To join the network and receive an invitation to the conference, take the I Heart Garden Apartments pledge on our website! To learn more, visit lac.laconservancy.org/garden_apartments.

THANK YOU TO THE 2012 LAST REMAINING SEATS VOLUNTEERS!

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26th Last Remaining Seats a Season of Firsts

We hope you were one of the 11,000 people who attended another memorable year of Last Remaining Seats, our annual series of classic films in historic theatres. This year was notable in several ways, including our taking the series to Beverly Hills for the first time for two screenings of *The Wizard of Oz* at the historic Saban Theatre (originally Fox Wilshire).

We offer our deepest thanks to the many volunteers (listed at left) who helped plan and run the series, as well as our 2012 sponsors: Series Star Sponsor, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association; Series Supporting Sponsor, Steve Bing; Series Sponsors, Cole's with 213 Ventures, Gensler, NBC Universal, Octavio Carlin, and Trina Turk; Evening Sponsors, Paramount Pictures, Linda and Jerry Bruckheimer, Cathy and Steve Needleman, Warner Bros., and Clifton's and The Edison; Media Sponsors, Los Angeles Downtown News and I.a. centric magazine; and VIP Reception Sponsor, Bank of America/Merrill Lunch; with partial funding from the Los Angeles County Arts Commission, Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, and The Walt Disney Company. Major funding for the Conservancy's educational programs is provided by the Kenneth T. and Eileen L. Norris Foundation.



ABOVE: Film critic Kevin Thomas (right) interviews the stars of *Tootsie*, Geena Davis and Dabney Coleman, who brought the house down at the Orpheum. Photo by Stephen Russo.



ABOVE: Executive Director Linda Dishman introduces members of the Last Remaining Seats volunteer sub-committee. Photo by Barry Schwartz.

RIGHT: A vintage car outside the beautifully restored Saban Theatre in Beverly Hills before the closing night of Last Remaining Seats. Photo by Gary Leonard.



To see more photos from the 2012 series, visit laconservancy.org/remaining.

Mark Your Calendar! Julia Morgan and the YWCA: Panel Discussion and Tour

On **Sunday, November 11**, join the Conservancy and the YWCA of the Harbor Area and South Bay for a special program celebrating the remarkable architect Julia Morgan. Learn about the unique relationship between Morgan and the YWCA, for whom she designed buildings in four different states. Get to know the home-like Harbor Area YWCA, a 1918 Craftsman building (HCM #186), and learn about its impact in the community over the years. The program

will include a panel presentation, a tour of the facility, and a reception with light refreshments.

This event is part of the Julia Morgan 2012 Festival organized by the California Cultural and Historical Endowment with the help of the Landmarks California Committee. Details and registration will be available soon at laconservancy.org. Questions? Call the Conservancy office at (213) 623-2489. For more information about Julia Morgan 2012, visit juliamorgan2012.org.



San Pedro YWCA, circa 1918. Photo courtesy YWCA Harbor Area and South Bay.

LINDA DISHMAN continued from page 1

impeding the revitalization of downtown through this one project. The level of animosity and hyperbole during that fight is something I haven't seen in other issues. The fight for St. Vib's was a turning point in people's perception of how tough the Conservancy could be, and it further solidified our reputation.

What do you think has changed in local preservation?

I think Los Angeles has more of a preservation ethic, which has been growing for decades. All of our success is built on the strong foundation laid by the Conservancy's founders. They set our dual purpose of advocacy and education and had a clear vision of finding win-win solutions.

I also think preservation is taken more seriously in the environmental review process for development projects. But we still have far to go to truly integrate it into urban planning and development.

What are you most proud of?

Membership—we grow our base member by member. I'm always happy to meet a Conservancy member. Ninety-eight percent of our members live in Southern California. Having the largest local membership base in the country makes us unique, and it's the most powerful way to dispel the notion that people in Los Angeles don't care about our history.

Have you learned anything surprising (that you can share)?

One of the things many people don't know about Los Angeles—and what I didn't know when I started this job—is how deeply people identify with their neighborhoods. Like politics, it seems that all preservation is local. That's why we're so fortunate to have so many citywide and neighborhood groups as partners. They make all the difference.

What's your vision for the next twenty years?

The Conservancy is here to stay, so we'll continue to strengthen the organization. I'd like to see an endowment to help ensure a strong future for the Conservancy, just like we work to ensure a strong future for Los Angeles.



Linda Dishman, celebrating her twentieth year as head of the Conservancy. Photo by Robert Pacheco.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Docomomo US Tour Day

The Conservancy is proud to participate in the sixth annual Docomomo US Tour Day on **Saturday, October 6**. Docomomo promotes the international study, interpretation, and protection of the architecture, landscape, and urban design of the Modern Movement. Their annual Tour Day brings together local chapters, partner organizations, students, architects, historians, and the general public nationwide.

Join the celebration by taking the Conservancy's Modern Skyline walking tour at **2 p.m. on October 6**. For details and reservations, visit laconservancy.org/tours.

Haunted Scavenger Hunts

Join the Conservancy and Out of the Box Events as we explore the spirits, secrets, and legends of one of the oldest neighborhoods in L.A. on the fourth annual Haunted Scavenger Hunt of Angelino Heights. Bring a camera for this hunt; you never know what you'll capture!

Choose **Saturday or Sunday, October 20 or 21**. Hunts begin at 4 p.m. and end around 6:30 p.m. Tickets are \$25 for Conservancy members and \$30 for the general public. Reservations are required, and this popular event often sells out! For details and reservations, visit outoftheboxevents.com.



A home on Carroll Avenue in Angelino Heights. Photo by Anne Laskey / L.A. Conservancy.

POST OFFICE continued from page 1

Post Office. Despite numerous legal appeals, community rallies and protests, and a vocal public outcry, the historic post office closed in July 2012 with services relocated to a nearby facility. Mr. Silver purchased the property in early August and plans to adapt the building for use as his production office while retaining many character-defining features.

Although the historic post office building will not retain its original use, the Conservancy believes that adaptive reuse is often the best way (in this case, the only way) to preserve historic resources as cities evolve over time. Mr. Silver plans a sensitive rehabilitation project that will restore the exterior and lobby space, including the mural, while allowing limited public access to view the mural once construction is complete.

The Venice Post Office is one of more than four thousand post offices nationwide (both historic and non-historic) that have been slated for closure to address the USPS' mounting financial deficit. This translates to well over one hundred sites in California and nearly thirty in Los Angeles County alone (we are not certain how many of these are historic). California appears to be at the epicenter of this issue, reportedly with the most post offices currently on the market or planned for sale. Speculation on why the USPS is selling so aggressively in California includes the valuable real estate involved; the Venice Post Office was listed at \$7.5 million.

While not every post office building is historic, for those that are—in Venice, Culver City, and Santa Monica, for instance—federal law requires the USPS to abide by national preservation laws and ensure their long-term preservation through some form of enforceable restriction or condition put in place before the disposal and sale of the building. This has been the primary challenge in Venice and elsewhere, as the USPS has been unwilling to entertain alternative approaches to ensure meaningful protection for these historic buildings. The Conservancy believes that the USPS' process for disposing of historic properties is inherently flawed. The National Trust for Historic Preservation agrees, naming “Historic Post Office Buildings” to its 2012 list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places.



The mural at the Venice Post Office by artist Edward Biberman depicts the early history of Venice, including founder Abbot Kinney (center). Photo by Jim Smith.

The National Trust, the Conservancy, the California Preservation Foundation, and community groups all over the country are facing more post office closures and an often confusing and inconsistent process with the USPS. Advocates are pressing for a more transparent and sensitive process that follows federal preservation law.

Through much work and negotiations with the USPS, the Venice Post Office was sold with a covenant, held by the City of Los Angeles. Similar to a conservation easement, the covenant will ensure a process for reviewing proposed changes to the historic building in the future. The Conservancy commends the City and its Office of Historic Resources for working hard to develop this innovative solution. Otherwise, the USPS may have transferred the building out of federal ownership without any meaningful enforcement provision.

The next wave of post office closures has already begun. At press time, the USPS had

just approved the closure of the 1938 Santa Monica Post Office at 1248 Fifth Street. The City of Santa Monica is filing an appeal, and the Santa Monica Conservancy and other local advocates are pressing the USPS to reconsider this plan. At the same time, advocates are pursuing proactive measures including a possible local landmark nomination once the building is transferred into private ownership.

The Conservancy has learned a lot about this issue from working on the Venice Post Office and speaking with other groups nationwide. Grassroots community action is critical in advocating for the preservation of historic post office buildings, and we stand ready to help community members navigate the process.

To find out more, please visit the Advocacy Issues section of our website at laconservancy.org/issues. If you have a historic post office in your neighborhood that faces closure, please notify us at info@laconservancy.org.



Signs from the Venice Post Office protest last November. Photo by Adrian Scott Fine / L.A. Conservancy.

JUNE 5 / JULY 31 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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Your membership provides the Conservancy with crucial operating funds, as well as strength in numbers to maintain a powerful voice for preservation.

Join or renew at laconservancy.org.

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that the Conservancy is the largest local member-based historic preservation organization in the country?

We have over 6,500 dedicated members who understand and embrace the importance of preserving historic resources throughout Los Angeles County.

Thank you so much for your vital support!

Fall Benefit: An Evening at the Buster Keaton Estate

We are thrilled to announce **An Evening at the Buster Keaton Estate**—the Conservancy's 2012 benefit—on **Saturday, October 6**. The event will take place at the 1926 Keaton Estate in Beverly Hills, a stunning Mediterranean Revival palazzo that is one of the last remaining mansions built for a silent movie star.

The legendary comedian Buster Keaton built the 10,000 square-foot home shortly after completing his masterpiece, *The General*. Yet the estate's Hollywood pedigree doesn't stop there: it was later owned by a number of other stars, including Marlene Dietrich, Cary Grant, and James Mason. By the mid-1990s, the estate had fallen into disrepair. It is especially fitting that this year's benefit is in Beverly Hills, which has made great strides in historic preservation over the past year.

Cocktail party tickets are \$300 per person, with dinner sponsorship packages starting at \$2,500. All proceeds benefit the Conservancy's advocacy and education programs.

We are pleased to offer this rare opportunity to spend an evening in one of Beverly Hills' most remarkable private residences. For more information, please call Adrienne Kisson at (213) 430-4204. You can also reserve online at lac.laconservancy.org/benefit.



The Buster Keaton Estate (1926), the site of this year's benefit. Photo by Richard Langendorf.

**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. Questions? Call the Conservancy office at (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

Modern Skyline

First and Third Saturdays, 2 p.m.

Union Station

Third Saturday

Youth, family, and group tours by arrangement; call (213) 623-2489 for information.



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UPCOMING EVENTS



Conservancy Archives

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Register or renew after
September 1

Each time you use your Ralphs or Food 4 Less rewards card, a portion of your total purchase is donated to the Conservancy. Sign up or renew today! See page 2 for details.



Richard Langendorf

**AN EVENING AT THE
BUSTER KEATON ESTATE**

Saturday, October 6
Beverly Hills

This year's fundraising benefit will take place at a stunning 1926 Mediterranean Revival palazzo built for silent film legend Buster Keaton. See page 7 for details.



Courtesy YWCA Harbor Area and South Bay

**JULIA MORGAN AND
THE YWCA**

Sunday, November 11
San Pedro

Save the date for a special panel discussion and tour focusing on the work of architect Julia Morgan, part of the 2012 Julia Morgan Festival. See page 5 for details.