

# All About Oakridge



A Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument  
Former Residence of Barbara Stanwyck and  
Jack Oakie and Victoria Horne Oakie

## Current Projects at the Residence

### Mural Stabilization and Roof Replacement

The roof replacement at Oakridge is underway! Exterior repairs to the residence will also be made as the decayed and hazardous cedar shake is replaced by a realistic synthetic product that is both sustainable and fire-retardant. The project is a multi-faceted one since the historic living room mural is also involved. The mural is adhered to the plaster walls with starch paste which has weakened over time. It was necessary to stabilize all four walls of the room prior to construction to protect the delicate surface from the



damaging vibrations caused by both demolition and repair. Northridge-based Sterling Construction was selected for this task and performed the work according to the guidelines recommended by Fine Art Conservation Laboratories of Santa Barbara. The procedure involved padding the mural walls with layers of thick plastic sheeting and soft foam which were then held in place by plywood panels. Bracing the walls in this fashion will hopefully minimize any further damage to the fragile artwork. Preserving our treasured mural is one of Friends' many priorities at Oakridge and we look forward to beginning conservation efforts soon.



George Alvarado, supervising roofer for the City of Los Angeles' Department of Recreation and Parks (left in photo), and Anthony Riccio of Total Roofing, Inc. (right in photo), surprised Friends docents with the news that none of the existing roof at Oakridge is original to the home. The clue lies in the spaced sheathing, the 1" by 4" boards nailed to the rafters that support the shake. When Oakridge was built in 1937, the length of cedar shake was quite long. In later years, the length of the shake decreased, requiring the addition of more horizontal boards to reduce gap size during installation.

The lighter color strips in the photographs of the open roof illustrate this discovery. Additional evidence that the roof is not original was found during the removal of the old shake itself. It was attached with staples whereas the original shake would have been nailed down.



An added bonus of the roof replacement will be the installation of all new wood siding on the exterior of the residence. The original siding is noteworthy for its hand-beveled edges and Friends is grateful to the City of Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources for insuring that the new boards replicate the original. Paint colors have also been matched to exacting standards to maintain authenticity. We hope you will join Friends for a tour or an event once these improvements are completed to see for yourself.

## Barbara Stanwyck and Edith Head: A Costume Connection

"Who would dream that a couple of broken-down suits which I was to wear in my role as a poor girl in *Internes Can't Take Money* (1937) would change my viewpoint?," Barbara Stanwyck wrote in *Movieland* magazine of her first encounter with then costume assistant Edith Head. Head added a touch of femininity to Barbara's wardrobe for that film and the star, unaccustomed to such treatment, found the results pleasing. When a police officer mistook Barbara for a fan at the premiere of *Stella Dallas* (1937) and restrained her from accompanying Robert Taylor because "she didn't look like a movie

star”, Stanwyck “made up my mind to let Edith design my wardrobe from that day forward.” Thus developed a life-long collaboration of actress and designer on and off the studio lot. Edith Head would continue as Barbara’s designated costume designer on a total of 20 films, concluding with 1964’s *Roustabout* in which Stanwyck starred with Elvis Presley.



Edith Head said, “The Lady Eve (1941) changed both our lives. It was Barbara’s first high fashion picture and her biggest transition in costuming. She was already a top star and had an image long before I got to her. She was always playing plain Janes, women to whom clothes meant nothing. Yet Barbara was quite trim and had a better shape than most of the other actresses around. She possessed what some designers considered to be a figure “problem” – a long waist and a comparatively low

rear end. By widening the waistbands on the front in her gowns and narrowing them slightly in the back, I could still put her in straight skirts, something other designers were afraid to do, because they thought she might look too heavy in the seat. Since she wasn’t the least bit heavy, I just took advantage of her long waist to create an optical illusion.” Edith Head further describes her design concept for Lady Eve, “For her gambler character I had used sharp contrasts – black on white, all black, all white, to make her appear a tad coarse. Naturally I chose much richer, more luxurious fabrics (later in the film). I left the sequins and the glitter to the lady gambler in the beginning.”

Once the movie Lady Eve was finished filming, Stanwyck took Edith Head to the dentist to replace her missing front teeth. Stanwyck recounted the story, “Edith always covered her mouth when she laughed and I didn’t understand why. Finally, she showed me her teeth and I understood. They were awful – not diseased, but some were missing and she felt self-conscious.” Within a few days after visiting Stanwyck’s dentist, Head’s teeth were improved, although she still had difficulty smiling in pictures.

Edith took care of Barbara as well. In the film, *Sorry Wrong Number* (1948), Stanwyck portrayed a bedridden heiress whose lavish silver brocade bridal gown was at risk of being obscured by competing bed linens. Barbara felt that, as an heiress, she should be covered in diamonds. Edith complied by accessorizing the ensemble with a diamond necklace and earrings that Robert Taylor had given to Stanwyck for Christmas.

Edith Head’s career spanned over fifty years, from the mid-1920s to the late 1970s. As Head of Design at Paramount during the Golden Age of Hollywood, Edith supervised an amazing 47 films in 1940 alone. She is credited with 400 films and supervised the costuming for over 1,000 motion pictures. Head is also credited for lobbying for the Costume Design category for the Oscars, eventually being nominated for 35 Academy Awards and receiving 8.



Despite her many accomplishments, Edith said the project she was most proud of was her 1970s commission to design United States Coast Guard uniforms in response to women joining the military. She received the Meritorious Public Service Award for her efforts. In the 1960s, Head chose to expand her costume designing career to include a radio program, *Edith Head's Fashion Notes*, and frequent guest appearances on television talk shows. By the 1970s, Head's film career was on the wane, so she began a relationship with Vogue Patterns to license her designs. Head's Vogue Patterns are still in demand today, with fans scouring estate and garage sales for the paper treasures.

## [Coming Attractions!](#)

Friends of Oakridge is pleased to announce that we have received an Emerging Organizations Grant Award from the **City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA)**. The DCA grant funds will be used to present a community Film Festival showcasing the history and individuals associated with the historic Oakridge Estate. Friends has lined-up some classic films, documentaries, and special guest speakers that will be both informative and entertaining. Friends' email subscribers will receive advanced notification of program dates and when tickets are available for purchase.

### [December 2019: \*Christmas in Connecticut\*, \(1945\)](#)

The film is set in a Connecticut farmhouse where a magazine food writer who has lied about being the perfect housewife attempts to cover her deception when her boss and a returning war hero invite themselves to her home for a traditional family Christmas.

**Starring: Barbara Stanwyck**, Dennis Morgan, and Sydney Greenstreet

### [January 2020: \*Closed Captioned Jack Oakie Film\*](#)

#### **Special Sign Language Interpreted House Tour Led by Joyce Linden**

Jack Oakie was one of the funniest comedians of stage, radio and especially film's "Golden Age." He accomplished so much despite the fact that he was hard of hearing throughout his career and performed primarily with the aid of lip reading or vibrations. Friends is offering a specialized house tour led by our experienced docent, Joyce Linden, a Certified Sign Language Interpreter.

**Film: TBD**

### [February 2020: \*Paul Revere Williams: a Legend in Architecture\* \(2005\)](#)



#### **Special Guest Speaker, CSULB Advanced Media Administrator, Dave Kelly, Producer/Director**

Friends is celebrating Black History Month and Paul Revere Williams' 126<sup>th</sup> birthday with the screening of the documentary, *Paul Revere Williams: a Legend in Architecture*. The documentary explores, through interviews and archival images, the life and work of the noted architect Paul Revere Williams, designer of many

of Southern California's public buildings, celebrity homes, and public housing projects.

### March 2020: *Harvey*, (1950)

**Special Guest Speaker Bob Koster, son of Harvey Director, Henry Koster** Friends is screening *Harvey* to feature Oakridge's benefactress **Victoria Horne Oakie** in one of her funniest screen appearances.

**Harvey:** Due to his insistence that he has an invisible six foot-tall rabbit for a best friend, a whimsical middle-aged man, (Jimmy Stewart), is thought by his family to be insane - but he may be wiser than anyone knows.

**Starring:** James Stewart, Wallace Ford, William H. Lynn, and **Victoria Horne**.



### April 2020: *Sweet Adversity – Marsha Hunt Story*(2015)

**Special Guest Speaker Roger C. Memos, Documentary Film Producer**

In 1935, 17 year-old aspiring actress Marsha Hunt was discovered in Hollywood and represented by agent **Zeppo Marx**. She signed with Paramount Pictures and went on to a flourishing career at MGM. Marsha made 54 films in 17 years before a series of unfortunate events led to her being unfairly blacklisted. After the blacklist, she championed humanitarian causes, forging a career as one of Hollywood's first celebrity activists. As far back as 1955, Eleanor Roosevelt was a mentor of hers as they both worked tirelessly to support the work the United Nations was accomplishing in this country.

### May 2020: *The Story of Marwyck Ranch - Thoroughbred Breeding and Training*

**Presented by Patricia LoPresti**

Please join Friends of Oakridge to learn about Northridge's remarkable, premier Thoroughbred breeding operation, **Marwyck Ranch**, later renamed Northridge Farms. The 130 acre Marwyck Ranch, a combination of the owners' names (Barbara Stanwyck, Marion and Zeppo Marx), opened for business in August of 1937. Northridge Farms (1943-1961) was considered the West Coast home of Thoroughbred Champions. Patricia LoPresti will "tell the story" of the Thoroughbred breeding and training operation that existed at 10127 Reseda Boulevard from 1937 to 1961. The presentation will focus on the equine aspects of what is now known as The Oakridge Estate. The principal players include: Barbara Stanwyck, Marion Marx, Zeppo Marx, Harry S. Hart, Mary Strnad, J. H. and Annette Ryan, Rosemary Ryan and Flavio Lomax.



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***Note: Coming Attractions is a tentative schedule that may be modified due to construction at the residence or speakers' availability.***

## John Lee, CD 12 Inaugural at Oakridge Estate Park

Friends of Oakridge was

honored to host an Open House at the residence on Saturday, September 7<sup>th</sup> in celebration of the Oakridge Estate Park community inauguration of newly-elected CD 12 Councilmember John Lee. Tours focused on the urgent need to conserve the historic living room mural which has become brittle and degraded with age. The day also saw the first use of Oakridge's newly completed asphalt driveway and overflow parking area. The gravel lot will provide parking for over 30 cars on the north side of the driveway roundabout. Friends welcomes Councilmember Lee and is looking forward to partnering with him in our ongoing mission to rehabilitate this cultural-historic landmark.



## Volunteer Opportunities

Friends offers several ways for you to share your talents. We are seeking people with skills in any of the following categories: public speaking, photography, social media, videotaping, public relations, historic research, and event volunteering. The Friends of Oakridge is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization and we are always looking for enthusiastic people to join our team. Visit our website to sign-up.



Visit our  
website

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