

All About Oakridge



The Oakridge Estate is a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument
Former Residence of Barbara Stanwyck and
Jack Oakie and Victoria Horne Oakie



A Surprise Gift

Participants attending January's *A Virtual Afternoon at Oakridge* were pleasantly surprised when guest speaker David Sonne, Trustee of the Jack Oakie and Victoria Horne Oakie Charitable Foundation, concluded his program remarks by announcing a \$1,000 donation from the Foundation to Friends. The funds will be earmarked for future film education events at Oakridge in support of the mission of Friends. In addition to expressing our gratitude to the Trustees of the Foundation for such a generous gift, we also wish to thank them for granting us the various copyright permissions that made it possible to share this historic slice of Oakie life with you, our supporters.

Through the magic of Zoom, nearly 100 guests turned back the clock to 1953 to watch home movies featuring Jack and Victoria enjoying life at Oakridge as David shared personal stories and anecdotes about the couple. Of special interest was the rare footage of the expansive lawns, manicured shrubbery, majestic oak trees, and magnificent unobstructed views that once surrounded the Estate. Prior to the film, a narrated presentation comprised of vintage photographs of the residence's interior gave viewers a peek at the furnishings that once filled its rooms. It was a real treat seeing Jack and Victoria in the home they loved so well. An entertaining and informative afternoon was enjoyed by all.



Do You Have a Story About the Oakridge Estate?

In our next Newsletter, Friends of Oakridge is marking the 80th Anniversary of Jack Oakie's purchase of the Oakridge Estate. Often after an event or tour, we have guests tell us stories about themselves or a family member who visited when Jack and Victoria lived at the residence. Along with our planned feature articles, we would like to include some of the public's memories and stories of visiting the property while the Oakies lived there. Please submit your families' personal memories with the Oakies and any photos to us at: Newsletter@theoakridgeestate.org with the subject line: Oakridge Stories. We look forward to reading your submissions.

The Yuma "Union"

What did Hollywood celebrities Jack Oakie and Venita Vardon and Janet Gaynor and Adrian have in common besides home addresses on Devonshire Street in Northridge? One answer is that both couples were married in Yuma, Arizona. If you're curious why they chose Yuma, please read on.



From 1927 to 1943, the state of California had what was known as the "gin marriage" law. Enacted to discourage hasty decisions made while "under the influence", the legislation stipulated a three-day waiting period between receiving a marriage license and tying the knot. However, this well-intentioned statute had unintended consequences. It merely encouraged impassioned couples to flee to Nevada and Arizona where more permissive marriage laws reigned. Because of its proximity to Southern California, Yuma soon became an attractive destination for weddings, and the industry flourished with no fewer than a dozen around-the-clock chapels. Eager couples arrived by automobile, bus and train or boarded dedicated aircraft operating as "Cupid's Special" or the "Honeymoon Flyer". According to *Phoenix Magazine*, in 1942, the town of 9,000 hosted a staggering 22,486

weddings with 97% of the couples hailing from out of state. It has been estimated that more than 300,000 couples tied the knot in Yuma between 1928 and 1956, when voters overwhelmingly passed a proposition mandating a 48-hour waiting period and a blood test.

Hollywood stars often married in Yuma to escape publicity since the *Yuma Sun* newspaper only published the names of local newlyweds. Celebrity brides and grooms included Bette Davis, Charlie Chaplin, Claudette Colbert, Tom Mix, Jean Harlow, Buster Crabbe and Stan Laurel.



What were the Oakie/Vardon and Adrian/Gaynor Yuma nuptials like? Newspaper accounts from the day reveal two very different types of affairs. Jack and Venita were married Sunday evening, March 22, 1936 during a 15-minute stopover in Yuma aboard the Southern Pacific Apache train enroute to New York City. Word of the wedding was intentionally leaked, and hundreds of fans gathered on the platform where Yuma's well-known "marrying judge", Justice of the Peace E.A. Freeman, awaited the couple's arrival. The ceremony was witnessed by the Apache's conductor and engineer, who

signed the marriage certificate. The bride's mother, Eva Kemper, and the groom's mother, Evelyn Offield, were among guests sipping champagne in the private, air-conditioned, decorated coach as orchestra leader George Stoll performed the Wedding March on his violin. Accounts of the event state that Jack gave Venita a wedding ring engraved, "To Veepers from Jake" and that he was so nervous he forgot to kiss his bride. Venita is quoted as reminding him with the quip, "Kiss me you chump!"

By comparison, Adrian and Janet Gaynor's marriage in the late afternoon on Monday, August 14, 1939 was a more sedate affair. The two had met at a Hollywood party and for more than a year, MGM's most prized costumer had courted the actress with his sketch pad by designing much of her personal wardrobe. Although the couple had been formally engaged for over a year, they chose to embark on their 290-mile road trip from Hollywood to Yuma without saying a word to friends. Their intimate wedding ceremony, performed by Justice of the Peace Ed M. Winn at the San Carlos Hotel, was witnessed by Gaynor's chauffeur and an assistant publicity director for MGM Studios. Within an hour, the newlyweds were on a train bound for El Paso and their month-long honeymoon in Mexico City.

As would be expected for any event involving Adrian, newspaper accounts were dominated by details of the bride and groom's attire. Miss Gaynor's ensemble, which he designed, consisted of a blue and white polka dot skirt, red silk sash, white silk blouse, blue polka dot collar and red tie accessorized with three bracelets and a gold signet on which was engraved, "Janet I love you". Adrian wore a gray gabardine suit, blue and white striped shirt, blue and white checked tie, and black and white sport shoes.



Both unions enjoyed varying degrees of longevity as well. After several tumultuous years, the Oakies officially divorced in 1945, whereas Gaynor's twenty-year marriage ended with Adrian's death in 1959.



Friends Hosted Virtual Film and Lecture

On Saturday, December 12, 2020, Friends of Oakridge started the holiday season with a virtual event highlighting the film *Remember the Night* (1940), starring Barbara Stanwyck and Fred MacMurray.

Friends offered event participants the ability to stream the film virtually from the comfort of their home. The next day guests tuned in for an informative conversation about the film with Victoria Wilson, author of *A Life of Barbara Stanwyck: Steel-True 1907-1940* and Foster Hirsch, author of *Otto Preminger* and *The Dark Side of the Screen*. The discussion provided some insight into the characters' nuances and the underlying themes throughout the movie.



Volunteer Spotlight

Friends of Oakridge is fortunate to have a group of dedicated volunteers who make our tours and events possible. This Newsletter, we are pleased to introduce Joyce Linden, a longtime docent.

How did you first learn about the Oakridge Estate?

I first learned about Oakridge before it was even called Oakridge – when I was 6 years old. That's a strange way to begin this, so I guess

I need to give away my age by disclosing that I was born the year the Oakridge house was built. That still does not explain why I was 6 years old. My parents had an orange and walnut grove on Balboa Boulevard at the edge of the Van Nuys Airport. In 1942, the government wanted to expand the airport and bought our property. My father bought 15 acres of oranges on the northwest corner of Wilbur and Devonshire. We lived elsewhere while he commuted until the house next to that orange grove was for sale. In 1945, the realtor who had a small office near the intersection of Winnetka and Devonshire, gave us a tour of the area pointing out all the movie stars' properties in the vicinity. Yes, I was 6 years old then, but I was interpreting everything the realtor told us to my parents who were both born deaf. So, I learned at an early age which celebrities lived where.

Years later, teaching at CSUN, Mrs. Oakie signed up for a one-week Workshop. She was interested in learning sign language because she wanted to write a play based on Jack's life story. So, I had plenty of motivation to become involved with the Oakridge Estate.

What made you interested in volunteering at Oakridge?

I have been volunteering from the very beginning when we started doing tours by bus from the park. I enjoy sharing a bit of history of the Valley because I consider myself an original "Valley Girl", or to use the title of one of the Valley Museums, I'm a "Valley Relic". I enjoy meeting people and as a retired college professor, I miss teaching and lecturing in front of a group of students.

What thing or information were you most surprised to learn about the Oakridge Estate?

I didn't know anything about the architects involved in the Estate, nor how much land had been involved. I learned a lot about Barbara Stanwyck and was very surprised to learn that Zeppo Marx was her business partner.

What is your favorite room or place in the house?

The Oakie room is my favorite because I remember the stories my parents told of seeing Jack at the mailbox down by the gate without a shirt on waving at all the cars going by. My parents got to meet Mrs. Oakie and told me they saw Jack's room with all his trophies and photos on the wall, so I imagine that room the way it was during his time. I also love the décor in the bathroom by Jack's Trophy Room and the names on the restroom doors outside. I love the humor of it.

Do you have a favorite event at the house and why?

I love movies, so I guess my favorite events include times that we've scheduled film showings and speakers. I also loved sharing the Estate with the Deaf community when we offered a special tour for them.

What other activities are you interested in outside of Oakridge?

I believe in "Lifelong Learning", so I take classes at SAGE-Learning in Retirement, I belong to two movie discussion groups, and attend

events of the Association of Retired Faculty from CSUN. I also enjoy participating in activities in the Deaf Community.



The Friends of Oakridge is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization and we are always looking for enthusiastic people to join us. We offer our volunteers a unique opportunity to

showcase their talents, utilize their skills, and express their interests. Our volunteer team is comprised of individuals from a variety of professions, all sharing the common goal of preserving the Oakridge Estate. During the current closure of the property, volunteer opportunities include assisting with virtual events, social media, community outreach, and research. Volunteers are provided with training and are matched with assignments based on their interests and availability. Please visit our website www.theoakridgeestate.org to complete a Volunteer Application. An organization member will contact you soon and we look forward to speaking with you.

A Special Message to Our Subscribers

Friends of Oakridge appreciates your continuing interest and support for the historic Oakridge Estate. To ensure the health and safety of our visitors and volunteers during the current public health concerns related to the transmission of COVID-19 (Coronavirus), Friends has suspended all tours and programs at the Estate in alignment with the City of Los Angeles' guidelines. In an effort to keep the community involved, we will continue to offer virtual events focusing on the cast of characters associated with this historical property. Everyone at Friends of Oakridge looks forward to resuming our tour and event schedule in the future. Please check for updates at our website:

www.theoakridgeestate.org.



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website

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