

All About Oakridge



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

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 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. Everyone at Friends of Oakridge looks forward to resuming our event schedule in the future. Please check for updates at our website: www.theoakridgeestate.org.

What is a Capehart?

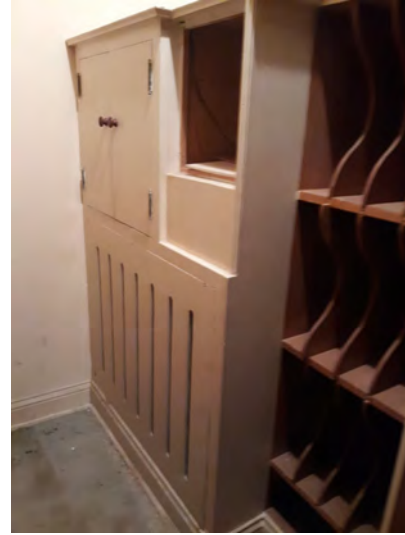
Over the past decade, Friends of Oakridge volunteers have spent hundreds of hours researching the history of the Estate and its residents. So it came as quite the surprise when we recently stumbled upon an internet post from a gentleman who visited the residence back in 2015. Robert W. Baumbach, author of *The Victor Data Book* (2003) provided an interesting fact about the mural room closet that only an expert could know: "Incorporated into the design of the home, next to the bar, was a Capehart. The Capehart was a popular choice in home entertainment within the film industry. The Capehart was most commonly offered in elaborate cabinets made with exotic woods and fine finishes. In custom installations, such as this one, the equipment was incorporated into a concealed location without benefit of a fine cabinet. In the Stanwyck home, the record changer, radio and amplifiers were placed into simple plywood enclosures inside a closet. Remote speakers and amplifiers allowed the system to play throughout the home."

Further research revealed that the cable remotes for the system were the size of a

shoebox and could be used to operate the Capehart from any room in the house.

What is fascinating about the Capehart Deluxe home radio-phonographs of the 1930s and 1940s is that they utilized an innovative record changer designed by Ralph Erbe which not only played 10" and 12" records intermixed, but could also turn each record over. They could play the B side following the A side, or they could turn the record over as it returned to the stack, allowing the B side to play the next time it cycled through. At the time the Stanwyck residence was built, large Capehart systems with extensive home installations could cost as much as \$5,000. In 1937, the average cost of a new house was \$4,100! We can only wonder when the Capehart phonograph at Oakridge disappeared but you can watch the amazing Capehart record changer in action at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elsaUPb5ZV4>



Entertainment closet in the Mural Room where the Capehart was located. Record storage in foreground.



The space where the Capehart phonograph would be housed.

Afghan Hounds Once Wandered the Oakridge Estate

Afghans are ancient and were once referred to as "The Dog of Kings". The breed dates back thousands of years and was documented in Egyptian papyrus scrolls. They are considered genetically closer to the first domesticated dogs than the vast majority of most modern breeds. It is thought that the modern Afghan hound originated in Afghanistan. The breed made its way to Britain in the 1800s and was recognized by major kennel clubs by the early-to-mid 20th century.

Afghans were a product of their environment and were originally bred as sight hounds to hunt the large prey that inhabited the harsh regions of Central and South Asia. Their long silky coats were designed to protect them during cold nights in the Afghani Mountains. Underneath that coat is a tall, sleek body.

Males stand about 27 inches at the shoulder and weigh about 60 pounds.

So how did this glamorous breed make it to the grounds of Oakridge? Enter 26 year-old Ziegfeld Follies actress, Venita Vardon, who met and married Jack Oakie in 1936. Besides Jack, Venita's great love was breeding Afghan hounds, and the couple started the Oakvardon Kennels in the mid-1930s at their home on Haskell Avenue in Van Nuys. In fact, by 1938, Mrs. Oakie had become so knowledgeable about pets in general, that she founded a weekly magazine, *The Illustrated Animal News*, which she launched with the financial backing of her husband and the contributions of different celebrity guest editors each week. The journal was distributed free of charge among dog lovers in the film colony and, after three months, enjoyed a circulation of several thousand subscribers.



AFGHAN CHAMPION AND HER NEW FAMILY
Barberryhill Dolly, champion Afghan hound, and seven-pup litter are looked over by their owners, Jack Oakie, actor, and Mrs. Oakie, the former Venita Vardon.

Venita's most treasured Afghan was Barberry Hill Dolly, a champion female she acquired from actor Charlie Ruggles in 1935. She was very successful at Oakvardon Kennels and won a Best in Show in California in 1940. At that time, the prize money for Best in Show was \$25. Venita's reputation for raising prize-winning Afghan hounds at her kennels made her a sought-after judge at dog shows. One of Dolly's famous puppies was Adera and other champion dogs bred at Oakvardon included Charon, Sita, Banneju and Dera. Until Venita's untimely death in 1948 in a plane crash, Dolly was her constant companion. Dolly then went to Sunny Shays Grandeur Kennels where she remained for the rest of her days. Venita's fame as a breeder continues and many of the top champions today have lineage leading from her prize-winning Afghan hounds at Oakvardon.

14 Mar 1941
**Mrs. Jack Oakie's Afghan Tops Show
Film Star's Wife Wins In First Handling**

CHAMPION Barberry Hill Dolly, seven-year-old Afghan hound belonging to Mrs. Jack Oakie, wife of the famous motion picture star of Van Nuys, Calif., swept the field in the Saburo State Kennel Club show at the state fairgrounds last night to take best in show from some of the best dogs of the Southwest.

Reputed to be the "finest Afghan bitch of all time," the magnificent animal was as nonchalant about her win as her mistress was excited.

The win was an outstanding triumph for Mrs. Oakie who handled the hound in the ring herself for the first time in her show career. She brought "Dolly" to Phoenix and handled her in the ring against the advice of her kennel manager who had said she "didn't know how."

"I'm so happy," she said, "and won't I gain new respect at home; I can hardly wait to call Mr. Oakie to tell him about it."

The hound won her right to compete for best in show by winning her group. She also won best American bred in the show.



Aristocrat Of Southwest Dogdom--

CAPTAIN SHOW HONORS: Mrs. Jack Oakie of Van Nuys, Calif., is shown admiring the trophy awarded her seven-year-old Afghan hound, Champion Barberry Hill Dolly, after it was judged best in show at the Saburo State Kennel Club show at the state fairgrounds last night. It was the first time the wife of the motion picture star handled the hound in the ring herself.—Republic Staff Photo.

In 1941, the Oakies purchased Barbara Stanwyck's Marwyck home and quickly renamed it Oakridge. On the ten acres surrounding the residence, the Oakies built extensive kennels that at one time housed around 150 dogs.

Venita was one of the breeders who imported Afghan hounds from England to bring in new bloodlines. It is still debated whether Venita introduced her neighbors, the Marxes, to the Afghan breed or the other way around. Herbert "Zeppo" Marx, the youngest of the four Marx Brothers, was one of the Afghan hound's earliest fans, and he was one of the first to bring the breed to the United States in 1931. The Marxes traveled to England to purchase their first Afghans for showing and eventually breeding. The two dogs that Zeppo imported from the U.K. were "Asra of Ghazni" and "Westmill Omar". Immediately, ownership by the Marxes increased the breed's profile in England as the London papers carried pictures of Mr. and Mrs. Marx walking in Hyde Park with their Afghans. Even today, top Afghan breeding lines can be traced back to both Venita's treasured Dolly and the Marxes' prize winners, Asra and Omar.

One other notable owner of the breed was Pablo Picasso, whose Afghan named Kabul is featured in his painting *Woman with Dog*.

Friends of Oakridge Hosted Several Accomplished Guest Speakers



On January 11, 2020, Rancho Cordillera del Norte hosted Friends of Oakridge as we presented **William Wellman, Jr.** and **Wyatt McCrea** along with the screening of the film *Great Man's Lady*. William Wellman, Jr. is the son of the film's director William Wellman and Wyatt McCrea is the grandson of the film's star, Joel McCrea. These dynamic speakers kept the audience captivated as they shared stories of their family members' experience working on the film and with the film's leading lady, Barbara Stanwyck.

William Wellman, Jr. is credited with over 180 movies and television shows, 17 stage productions and some 200 commercial and industrial films. In 1981, he was awarded the Best Actor of The Year by the Christian Film Distributors for Heartland's *Brother Enemy* and was nominated again in 1982 for Mark IV Pictures' *The Prodigal Planet*. He is the author of *Wild Bill Wellman: Hollywood Rebel* and *The Man and His Wings*.

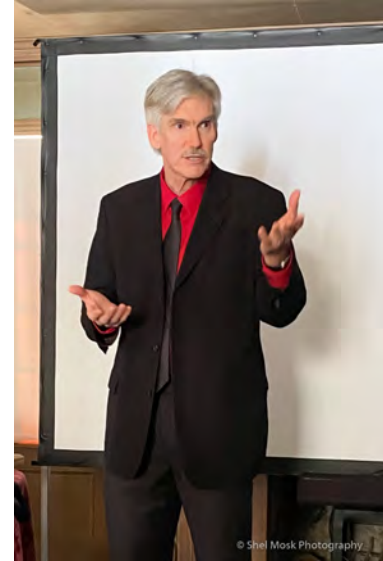
Wyatt McCrea is a producer and actor, known for *Floating Horses: The Life of Casey Tibbs* (2017), *Gen's Guiltless Gourmet* (2009) and *Call 911* (2008). He is actively involved

with The Joel and Frances McCrea Ranch Foundation and is the author of the book, *Joel McCrea A Film History*.

(Photo above left to right William Wellman Jr. and Wyatt McCrea)

On February 22, 2020, a sold-out crowd gathered in the Oakridge Mural Room to listen to **Dave Kelly** speak about his documentary film: *Paul Revere Williams: a Legend in Architecture*. Mr. Kelly is an award winning Director of Advanced Media Production at California State University, Long Beach.

Mr. Kelly has written and produced several documentaries that have aired on PBS stations nationwide. A noteworthy documentary titled *Sky Blue Sea* was completed in 2015 and was nominated for a Los Angeles Area Emmy Award in 2016. *Sky Blue Sea* aired on PBS affiliates from 2016-2018. Among other honors, Mr. Kelly has won two national Hometown Media Awards and a National Finalist nomination in the Local Cable ACE Awards.



Guest Speaker photographs courtesy of Shel Mosk www.shelmosk.com

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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