

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

Summer Special Edition

On the 80th Anniversary of
Jack Oakie's Purchase of the Oakridge Estate

Family Stories of Jack Oakie and Victoria Horne Oakie

The volunteers at Friends of Oakridge have spent many hours researching past Oakridge residents from available media. However, there still remain many questions that can only be answered by relatives, friends, and past visitors to the Estate. In this issue you will be treated to memories from Jack Oakie's niece Jinny Miller and Victoria Horne Oakie's two nephews, Howard Oransky and Steve Riskin.

Memories of Uncle Jack

Jack Oakie's niece, Jinny Miller, is a spry 96 years young. We were captivated by her energy and spirit when she visited Oakridge a few years ago and Friends is extremely grateful for her family's support and generous donation of Oakie memorabilia. Here, in her own words, as told to daughter Lynn Delaine Miller, Jinny reminisces about her beloved Uncle Jack.



Jinny with Uncle Jack



Jinny Miller today

My Uncle Jack used to sleep until 11 am and then get up and have a big breakfast when he was a single man. If he wasn't married, he usually lived with his mother (my Grandmother), Evelyn Offield ("Ev", 1868-1939). My mother, Alice Offield Lindberg (1899-1948), was his only sibling and was 4 years younger than him. Uncle Jack generously paid for my mom Alice, my older sister Evie, and me to come out to California every summer from 1929 onward. What fun we all had visiting for the entire summer with Uncle Jack and Grandma Ev. We travelled either by airplane (which had to stop to refuel from New York to California), cross-country train, or the cruise ship through the Panama Canal. This travel started when I was 5 years old. My mom, sister, and I were living in Brooklyn, New York. Uncle Jack nicknamed me "Lumpy" and my sister "Slats".



Once we arrived in California, we stayed at my Grandmother's house that Uncle Jack provided for her. He also lavished luxury cars, a chauffeur, and household staff on her. My Grandma had a Packard, driven by Grant Wadsworth (pictured to the left with Uncle Jack and Grandma Ev in the backseat). We would all get into the car and go to the Santa Monica Swimming Club, shopping downtown Los Angeles, or out to dinner where we would meet up with Mr. Walt Disney or other celebrities. Uncle Jack took us horseback riding (located next door to one of his homes) and to the beach. He and I would play tennis all the time at his home, followed by a daily swim.



Uncle Jack with Evie on the left and Jinny on the right

We would go over to Bing Crosby's house, where his four kids would be running around. Lucille Ball, who was once engaged to Uncle Jack, continued to come to the house often, even though no longer engaged, because she loved my Grandma. Lots of movie stars and their children would come to my Grandmother's house as she was funny and told wild stories. She had been a University professor of psychology in New York, but when her husband died in 1917, she later moved to California to be with Uncle Jack. Some of the more frequent guests on any given day were Mary Brian, ZaSu Pitts, Shirley Temple, John Decker, Clark Gable, Groucho Marx, Charlie Chaplin, Oona O'Neill, Paulette Goddard, Albert Einstein, and Desi Arnaz. Uncle Jack bought Oakridge when I was an older teen. It seemed that the home was so far out in the country and the driveway up to it went on forever! One thing that really impressed me was to see custom made toilet seats – they were made to conform to Barbara Stanwyck's bottom! It is funny to think about, but at home Uncle Jack was usually very serious despite being a comedian.



Huntington Library Digital Photograph Collection

In 1929, my Grandmother had a very strong feeling that something was going to go haywire in the world. She withdrew all of Uncle Jack's money out of the bank a few days before the Stock Market crashed. What a lucky intuition she had!

Uncle Jack's first wife, Venita Vardon, was a fashion model and had a lovely figure. Venita had show dogs, and even went to Madison Square Garden for an exhibit. Venita died in an airplane crash on the way to my sister's wedding (1948). Uncle Jack was too drunk to board the airplane, so he escaped that tragedy. He did like his booze! Even though I was a young teenager, I remember him being inebriated on several occasions. Then Uncle Jack married Victoria Horne, who was very nice and madly in love with my uncle. She waited on him hand and foot!



Jimmy, Eve and their Mom vacationed in California at Uncle Jack's for two weeks in September, 1946. One evening we had dinner at the Mocambo with Vickie Horne and artist John Becker.

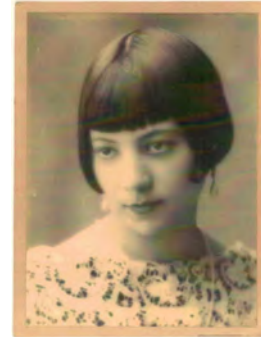
Uncle Jack paid for all of my sister's and my education from 8th Grade (Brooklyn Friends) onward and all of our University expenses. He paid for our dance lessons (I had a short-lived stint as a Rockette) and piano lessons. Uncle Jack was a dancer on Broadway when he was a very young guy, around 19 years old. He did not have formal dance training but was backstage all the time and picked up the dance moves, despite being significantly hearing impaired.

When Uncle Jack's movies were released, we went to the premieres, including the World Premiere in New York City at the Astor to see *The Great Dictator*. Oh boy, that was something. They had a red carpet that you walked on, just like they do today at the Oscar ceremonies. We were all dressed up but I wore bobby socks, as was the fashion for young ladies at that time.

Uncle Jack was much loved by my family and was very generous to all of us. After my grandmother passed away, we no longer went out to California. I last flew to California from Colorado to show Uncle Jack my newborn baby girl in 1948. He was enamored of his great niece. He used to send my family a fruitcake every Christmas, which made for a lot of fun stories over the years.

Memories of Aunt Victoria

Victoria Horne (Hornstein) Oakie was one of four siblings; Bertie (Bertha), Louise, Victoria, and Henry. Howard Oransky, son of Henry Hornstein and Steve Riskin, son of Louise Hornstein, have graciously agreed to share some personal memories, family history, and family photographs of their Aunt Victoria. The following article contains Howard's and Steve's stories as told in their own words.



Howard talking about his family history:

"Horne Children" Mary Hornstein, grandmother, surrounded by her 4 children: Bertie and Louise on the left, Vickie on the far right, and son Henry center, estimated date 1923.



My paternal grandparents were Ignatz and Mary Hornstein. They both died before I was born.

Ignatz was apparently a very successful clothing designer who worked for the Saks Company in New York. They had a summer home at Saranac Lake in upstate New York, which my father remembered. All the children were talented. Bertie lived in New York and designed her own clothes, although I never met her. Louise lived in San Francisco. I remember her. She studied art at the Graphic Artists' Workshop in Mexico City, with quite famous artists teaching, such as Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Leopoldo Mendez, and Pablo O'Higgins. My parents visited her there. I still have one of the prints they acquired there by the Mexican artist Leopoldo Mendez. It is hanging in my office. Vickie was, of course an actor.

My father, Henry Norman Horne, restored antique watches and clocks. He was self-taught and quite brilliant mechanically. I remember as a child visiting his shop in Beverly Hills. He did work for the Getty. Later, he had a shop on Ventura Boulevard called Old Timer. He was the youngest and died in 1995, before Vickie died.



Howard on visiting his Aunt Victoria:

My first memory of meeting Aunt Vickie was from about the age of 7, in 1962. I remember visiting Vickie and Jack with my father and my sister, Mary. The house seemed incredibly fancy to me. I remember there were murals painted on some of the walls. I remember there was a dumbwaiter in the kitchen that went upstairs. They had a dog. My sister and I thought she was Lassie, the dog on television, or at least she looked like Lassie. My sister and I got in the golf cart with Jack, and he drove us around the property, to the tennis court, the swimming pool and so on. I remember his hair was thick and white. He was wearing a bathrobe and I thought to myself, that's how it is when you are a famous actor, you can wear your bathrobe in the afternoon. When I was a student at CSUN in the 1970s I ran into Aunt Vickie quite by accident in a photo shop in Northridge and we stayed in touch. She sent me some books about Jack. Ironically, I was living right near her then. I did my MFA at CalArts 1982-84.

I remember my Aunt Vickie brought me into a room in the house and it was full of toys. It was like a toy store. She told me I could have any toy I wanted, but that I had to decide – I could have only one. I don't remember which one I chose. It was kind of overwhelming. Once, when I was a child in Los Angeles, we were watching television and there was a movie on, and in the movie Jack was playing an upright bass and kind of slowly singing, kind of drunk, maybe at a New Year's party. And we said, yes, that is our Aunt Vickie's husband, Jack.



"Wedding" was taken around 1965 after my parents had divorced. Left-to-right: Vickie, my father Henry, his new wife Joan, my aunt Louise.

Steve Riskin's memories of Aunt Victoria:

My mother Louise is one of the four Hornstein children, making Vickie my aunt. Vickie was there from my birth; in fact, she 'shot-gunned' the wedding of Louise and my biological dad, Stephen, in June of 1934. My Grandmother Mary died on April 1, 1934 and I was born mid-December that same year. Louise and Stephen separated when I was 4. So in those 4 years I lived with Vickie – both Louise and Vickie were 'besties' during the hard years of the Depression in the big city, New York City. Vickie had a



Scottie dog, black, named High-Ball. I stayed with her in her below ground apartment from time to time, but lived with Louise on W. 124th Street, in a 5 story walk-up. Both women were active in labor organizing and the arts, Vickie in stage plays for the Hattie Flanagan Federal Theater, in *Life with Father* (Vickie offered to get me on stage in the Hartford production of the play) and I remember seeing her when she ran a booth at the New York World's Fair.

I lived at the Oakridge Estate for 5 or 6 weeks in 1951 when I was waiting to go on to Berkeley. I was 16, my parents had gone to New York a year earlier (Henry and Hannah moved into my parents' house during that year and to kind of look after me. I lived in a one room apartment in the basement of that house), so my father could do a residency in Anesthesia at Harvard. But before I went north to the University I stayed with Vickie and Jack. Jack took me to see the MGM lion over at the animal training facility in Van Nuys; Jack used to be good friends with those who trained 'moving animals' – the chimpanzees that played in Tarzan movies, the 5th or 6th generation of the MGM lion, and others he was fond of. There were some bridge games in the evening; I was dragooned into playing bridge with various Hollywood celebrities (though I only knew how to play hearts). We visited various celebrities, musicians, and half and half persons – ranch owners who also acted or performed or wrote. I had the bedroom/bath in the suite at the north east corner of the first floor. I was never upstairs; that was forbidden, though I was shown the circus suite from the top of the stairs. I'm pretty sure Vickie was proud of the fact that Jack himself designed it and was very proud that it was executed exactly as he wanted. But that's a tenuous recollection from the one time she took me upstairs, at the doorway to the room, to show it without allowing me in. She pointed out how the curtains matched exactly and how it reproduced the feeling of the circus, something Jack was nostalgic about. I was not allowed in because it was, how shall I say, a working bedroom.



Above: Portrait of Victoria Horne Oakie and Jack Oakie Memorabilia.

Right: The Jack Oakie Room originally located at the University of Wyoming

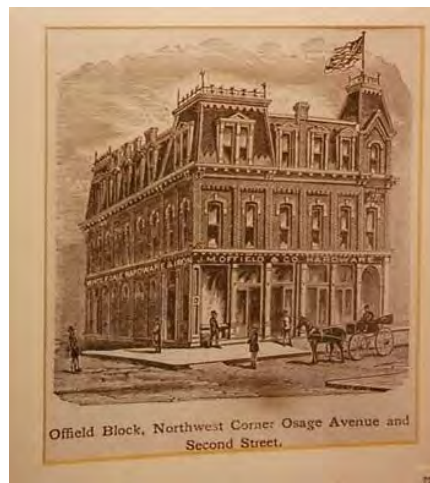


That whole central area of the house collapsed in the '71 Sylmar quake; Vickie was proud of her reconstruction of the house. I walked the house with Vickie after the earthquake. I went into the basement to test for gas leaks and set up a fan that would move that air until the gas company inspectors could get out there to inspect it. I don't know who did the repairs but Vickie oversaw them meticulously to make sure they were done to her specifications. Again, in one of her books she writes of how she was never cowed by 'technicalities' or people who talked down to her about how complex the problem or the expertise needed so that she would back out of her detailed concerns. She was spunky and took no guff and was proud of her victories in a variety of such encounters.

I was never 'out of contact' with Vickie; we often went to lunch in Hollywood - the Pig 'n Whistle was a favorite of hers; but she did like to breakfast at the dining room in the Roosevelt Hotel. I edited the play she wrote in the '90s (since I was a computer geek - and she never could get beyond the typewriter, but did use those that allowed you to view and edit an entire line one at a time). The collie, in '52 photos, is named "Christmas"; the breakfast nook was named by Jack "Albuquerque" since it reminded Jack of the cramped sleeping quarters of a train trip on which he once woke as the train pulled into that city in the dawn. There was a photo of Jack and Vickie in the his Trophy Room Jack was in a tuxedo, Vickie in white furs, with Vladimir Horowitz bowing to Vickie and kissing her hand. Once, when I was looking at that photo, Vickie came up beside me. We stood there silently a few moments and then I remarked "Vickie, you should be kissing HIS hand." She turned on her heel and walked away angrily.



Birth place of Jack Oakie



Building that housed the Maple Leaf Club

In the University of Wyoming Oakie Collection, there was a picture of the

corner building in Sedalia, Missouri, owned by Jack, that housed the Maple Leaf Club, a "Negro Social Club", (in the terms of the time), on a section of the ground floor. If you are a Ragtime enthusiast, you will recognize that as the place where Scott Joplin was the occasional pianist and where the most famous of his compositions was composed and first played, *The Maple Leaf Rag*. You can YouTube one of two player pianos still in existence with Joplin playing that piece. Or, you can choose any of a thousand pianists playing it. It was the first of the so-called "killer piano pieces" - a pianist used to show off his/her skills, a job application, as it were, by playing that piece back when piano was the universal form of amusement, in that time sans teeth, sans eyes, sans radio, sans everything. Now, to quote from a pamphlet in the Library of Congress...

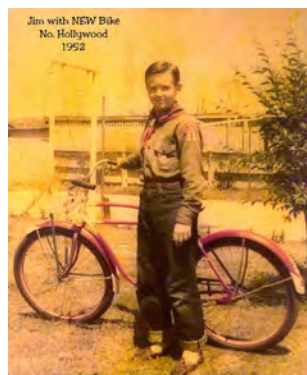
"Today, many of the historic landmarks are gone. The George R. Smith College was destroyed by lightning in 1925. The Maple Leaf building was demolished in the late 1950s, after suffering damage from several fires and a tornado. Actor Jack Oakie, a former Sedalia native and owner of the Maple Leaf, later declared that had he known the historical value of the structure, he would never have allowed it to be torn down. Nowadays, thanks to an active Scott Joplin Foundation, surviving landmarks are being located, identified, and preserved." Originally published in The World and I, vol. 8, no. 9 (July 1993), pp. 182-189

The siblings were very close, Louise, Henry, Vickie (with periods of 'not talking') and so there are memories from 1936 onward to Vickie's death in the Beverly Hills Home (over on Clark Drive). Odd thing is, when I married in 1957, Marilyn and I lived – our first apartment – at 238 N. Clark Drive. 45 years later, Vickie died in a care home at 234 (?); exactly next door, but for one eight-complex apartment building.

Special Note: All of the information and photographs in this article were provided specifically for use in this Friends' Newsletter and should not be duplicated without written permission.

Community Story - Memories with the Oakies

Friends received the following story from Bobbi Mason, a loyal supporter, about her family member working for Jack Oakie.



Bobbi wrote; "My cousin, Jim Rowe, and I were among the very first visitors to Oakridge Estates when it opened up to visitors, many years back. We were shuttled from a parking lot in Northridge as I recall. He was most anxious to visit because back in the 1950's, one of his first jobs as a young boy was at Oakridge Estates. His mom would drive him there after school or on a week-end. There was a "poop wagon", pulled by "Oakie", a retired horse of Jack's. Jim's job was to

scoop the poop into the wagon on the very southern slope of the estate, now no longer there. He got 50 cents an hour. He told me he thought it was sad that Jack's horse was relegated to a menial job in his later years. There was an estate photo of that wagon somewhere, but I cannot locate it. Jim has since passed away, but my husband & I have since taken the tour and enjoyed it very much."

We thank Bobbi for sharing her family story and the photo of Jim at 12 years old, the age he was when he worked at Oakridge.

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 Art Jacobs, a longtime docent.



How long have you been volunteering, what made you interested in volunteering and what do you enjoy most about volunteering at Oakridge?

I have been volunteering for the past eleven years at Oakridge. I became interested in the property back in 2010 during the bus tour celebrating the 100th Anniversary of Northridge. At that time, they dropped us off at the property, opened the front door and only allowed us to peek in from the front porch. It was just enough to get me interested in knowing more about this historical property. The thing I enjoy most about volunteering is meeting the wonderful people who visit the home. I also enjoy unearthing historical data about the property and the cast of characters that called Marwyck/Oakridge home.

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

There are two. How much they invested in having a state-of-the-art Thoroughbred ranch. Barbara Stanwyck and Marion Marx made sure those horses had the best of everything. Secondly, I was amazed to see no major renovations over the years. The home is almost the same as when Barbara had it built in 1936.

Please tell us about your favorite room or place in the house and why?

I would say the master suite. Not so much the room itself, it is the view from the suite. It allows the visitor to look out over the property and envision what it was like 80 years ago. Marx and Stanwyck purchased 130 acres. Their homes could have been placed anywhere on the property, but they both selected the spots on the hill that allowed the architect to incorporate the view of the San Fernando Valley. The Marx house and ten acres were later purchased by Janet Gaynor and Gilbert Adrian. I interviewed Janet Gaynor and Adrian's son Robin Adrian a few years back and he said the Marx home was his mother's favorite home and the view was spectacular. On a good day you could see all the way to City Hall in Van Nuys.

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

All the events at Oakridge are special. The volunteers really try their best to come up with events that are educational and entertaining. We cannot thank our supporters enough.

What other activities are you interested in outside of Oakridge?

Oakridge and its current cast of characters keep me busy enough. When I am not volunteering or researching for the property, I enjoy going to estate sales

and flea markets looking for anything related to this magnificent jewel located in the heart of Northridge.



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 Department of Recreation and Parks guidelines. 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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