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BHS President welcomes the Spring.

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Warner or Columbia, or both?

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Burbank's own Freddy Cannon.

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# ABOUTTIMES

*the newsletter of the Burbank Historical Society*



2019Q2002 / SPRING EDITION

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## THE COLUMBIA RANCH by Susan Hodgson

“Greetings and welcome Springtime!”

It's hard to believe that we are already moving into the second quarter of 2019!

Looking back at history, a momentous springtime event was held on May 4, 1923, when Earl L. White kicked off the sales of 199 lots in the Magnolia Park area with a barbecue. Another would be on May 6, 1967, at 7:00 pm, a groundbreaking ceremony for the “Golden Mall,” in “Beautiful Downtown Burbank.” The name coined by NBC's hit show *Laugh In*, and carried on for several years by the *Tonight Show* starring Johnny Carson.

There are so many events that have taken place throughout the history of our great city, so please, come by the museum and immerse yourself in our history.

We are always looking for lovers of the city, lovers of history and those who enjoy sharing with others. Think about joining our tremendous Docent Team. Become involved. We help passions grow.

History paves the way to the future, please remember to preserve your family's history by naming and dating your photos.



Sincerely,  
Dianna Briggs  
President

Have you ever heard of Columbia Ranch? Did you know it was in Burbank? But isn't Columbia part of Sony down in Culver City? And – wait – isn't that Burbank ranch now part of Warner's?

The answers are yes, yes, yes and yes.

### *Here's the history:*

Columbia Pictures started out in 1918 as a movie-making company called CBC in New York. The acronym stood for Cohn-Brandt-Cohn. One Cohn was Harry Cohn; the second was his brother Jack, and the B stood for Brandt, as in Sam Brandt. Although it started out in New York City, like most studios, CBC soon made the move out west, specifically to Hollywood – in this case, Sunset and Gower. Why did all those studios move to Southern California? For the same reason most of us do – for the weather.



Columbia Pictures lot, Sunset and Gower. Source: Burbank Historical Society

It didn't take long for the two Cohn brothers to start (or continue) bickering, which finally got Brandt to the point where he couldn't take the tension anymore and he sold out his interest in the studio. Harry then became President of the studios that they re-named Columbia. Rumor has it, the Mob lent Harry the cash to buy Joe out. Mafia connection stories followed Harry Cohn his entire life. And Harry didn't seem to mind. CONT'D - PG 2



The company had a reputation as a tacky studio. It made low-budget, low-quality films. CBC was often referred to as “Corned Beef & Cabbage.” But another “C” delivered fame and fortune to the studios. That “C” was a director by the name of Capra. In 1934, Frank Capra – and Columbia Pictures – brought the movie “It Happened One Night” to the world.

It swept the Oscars and is, to this day, considered one of the greatest films ever made. Capra went on to make film after film for Columbia and under Harry Cohn’s rule, Columbia never failed again to make a profit.

But what is this “ranch,” Columbia Ranch? In 1934, Columbia had just plain run out of room for filming. They needed open space for a back lot – streets to “act” as busy cities, or to act as old western towns, as family neighborhoods. That’s when Harry Cohn came across 40 acres for sale in Burbank, a spacious, rural town just over the hill from Hollywood. Right near Hollywood Way and Oak, there was an area perfect for filming, so Harry bought it. And that was Columbia Ranch – the new back lot for Columbia Pictures.



Back lot of Columbia Ranch - Burbank

One of the first blockbusters Columbia filmed at the new Burbank ranch at Hollywood Way and Verdugo was “Lost Horizon.” Based on James Hilton’s 1933 bestselling novel, the film version came out in 1937. (Note: Author James Hilton was already famous for his prior bestseller “Good-bye Mr. Chips,” which was also made into an Oscar-winning movie.) The “star” of “Lost Horizon” was the mythical city Shangri La – a term still used for idyllic locales. In fact, it was the original name of the Presidential retreat in Maryland in FDR days. Today we call it Camp David. Columbia spent all kinds of money on “Lost Horizon,” going nearly \$800,000 over budget. Harry Cohn and Frank Capra were never on good terms after that.

Meanwhile, Columbia Ranch was used as a backdrop for nearly all Columbia movies – especially its popular movie serials, including the original *Batman*, *Superman*, *Captain Midnight*, *Blondie* and *The Three Stooges* series. Other big movies filmed there include *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *High Noon*, *You Were Never Lovelier* and *The Wild Ones*.

Formed in the late 1940s, the Columbia TV division, Screen Gems, also used the area to film dozens of famous television shows, such as *Father Knows Best*, *The Donna Reed Show*, *Dennis the Menace*, *Hazel*, *Bewitched*, *Gidget*, *I Dream of Jeannie*, *The Monkees*, *The Flying Nun*, *The Partridge Family*, and *Fantasy Island*. Do you remember the opening theme of the classic TV show “Friends”? If you do, then you probably remember a certain fountain (built in 1935) that they all danced around. That fountain is located at the ranch.

But times changed. In 1958, Cohn died suddenly. In 1970, the ranch was devastated by three separate catastrophic fires. In the early 70s, Columbia and Warner Brothers joined forces to combat each of their respective failing finances. They called their new venture “The Burbank Studios.” (The Burbank Studios would later become engulfed in scandal, due to executive David Begelman’s sordid case of embezzlement.)



Fire Destruction



In the mid-70s, eight acres located near Hollywood Way and Verdugo were sold off and a shopping center moved in. In 1974, during a community fair held at the ranch, yet another fire broke out, destroying even more of the ranch. Eventually, Columbia moved to the MGM lot (later Sony) in Culver City and Warner Brothers completely took over the Burbank property, re-naming the ranch "Warner Ranch."

But some things never change – like human nature. Harry Cohn – much like Harvey Weinstein, allegedly! – was considered a micro-managing, screaming tyrant and non-stop womanizer. He was well known for his casting couch proclivities and his nasty temper. The characters portrayed by Broderick Crawford in the renowned movies "All the King's Men" and "Born Yesterday" were based on Harry Cohn – as was the movie mogul Jack Woltz from "The Godfather."

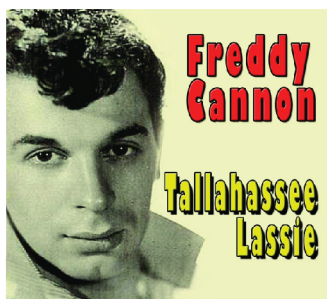
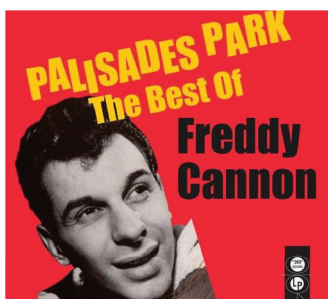
But when he died, Harry Cohn's funeral was very well attended. People showed up by the proverbial busload. Viewing that, comedian Red Skelton famously quipped, "It proves what Harry always said: Give the people what they want and they'll come out for it!"

Pretty funny, huh? Yes, yes, yes and yes!!!

 **WHERE EVEN SQUARES ARE HIP!** by Susan Hodgson

Who remembers Freddy "Boom Boom" Cannon? I do!

My favorite of his songs was "Palisades Park." You can hear the carnival noises in the background as the star singer – and I! -- belt out, "You never know how great a kiss can feel/ When you stop at the top of a Ferris wheel/ When I fell in love/ Down at Palisades Park!"



It was 1962. That singer was Freddy "Boom Boom" Cannon, born Frederick Anthony Picariello, Jr. in 1936. A music (especially R&B) lover since childhood, he had his first big hit in 1959 with a ditty called "Tallahassee Lassie," a tune he actually co-wrote with his mother!

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A local TV guy you might have heard of named, oh, I dunno -- Dick Clark (!) happened to hear "Tallahassee Lassie," tweaked it a bit, and next thing you know, Freddy had a hit. The song peaked at #6 on Billboard's Top 100 – the first of 22 such hits – and Freddy "Boom Boom" Cannon was a star, going on to appear on American Bandstand 110 times! (Yes, 110!)

Other Cannon hits included 1959's "Way Down Yonder in New Orleans," and 1965's theme song to Dick Clark's TV show "Where the Action Is," entitled "Action." You know it: "Oh baby, c'mon/ Let me take you where the action is/Oh baby, c'mon!"

CONT'D – PG 4

 **PURCHASE A SPECIAL LEAF! Price: \$250**

See the tree leaves on the beautifully painted wall mural found in the Sence Room. The leaves are in remembrance of a loved one or to recognize a family member.

To purchase a leaf for the tree please ask one of our board members or docents for the Tree of Life form to fill out.



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Open Saturdays & Sundays 1:00pm to 4:00pm

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**Burbank Historical Society** presents  
**ARE YOU A DISNEYLAND FAN?**



Chris Nichols is a widely-respected writer and historian specializing in Southern Californian architecture and culture. His work has been featured in the Smithsonian magazine, NY Times, LA Times and LA Weekly. He currently writes the popular "Ask Chris" column in Los Angeles magazine every month.

**Saturday, April 20, 2019**

2:00 – 3:00 p.m.

The Cunningham Room  
GORDON R. HOWARD MUSEUM  
115 N Lomita St., Burbank  
818.841.6333

The program and parking are free. Parking is available in the lot off Clark Street. For more information please visit:

[www.burbankhistoricalsoc.org](http://www.burbankhistoricalsoc.org) or call us at 818-841-6333

WHERE EVEN SQUARES ARE HIP! (CONT'D)

But my favorite song, "Palisades Park," has a fun history to it. It was written by none other than Chuck Barris famous (or infamous?) for being the future host of "The Gong Show." According to Barris, it was the only song he ever wrote and he actually wanted to get Dion to record it. Of course, Barris also claims he was once a CIA agent, so who knows!

What does all this have to do with Burbank? Well, in 1969, Freddy "Boom Boom" Cannon recorded yet another song. It's called "Beautiful Downtown Burbank"!! We can't say it was a hit, but what other song do you know that proclaims, "Everybody's gonna take a trip/ To Beautiful Downtown Burbank!/ Where even squares are hip/ Beautiful Downtown Burbank!"

They just don't write 'em like that anymore!

*With thanks to Wes Clark and Mike McDaniel for the tip about the Burbank song!*