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#19 - MARCH, 1999

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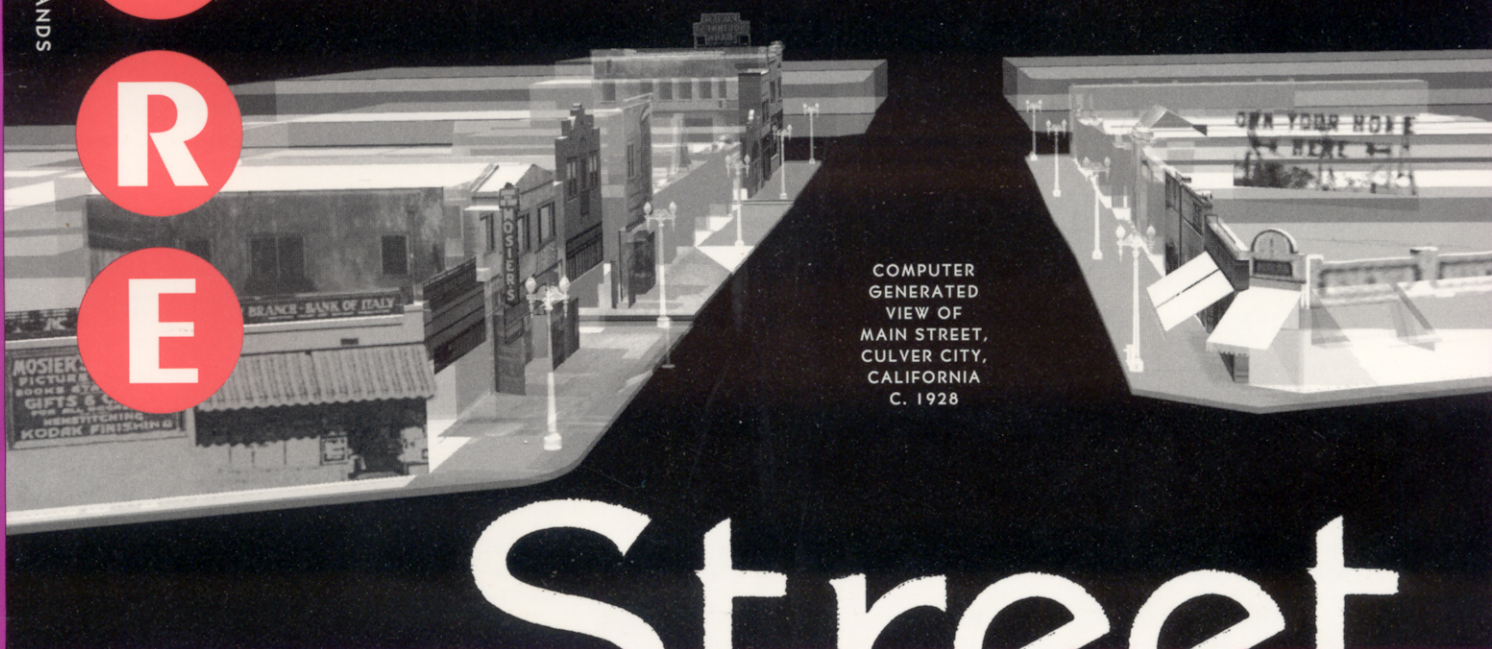
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PUBLISHED IN A CURIOUS MIX OF ENGLISH AND NEDERLANDS
LOSSE NUMMERS NLG 19,99 BF 250 \$9.99

The shortest Main



COMPUTER
GENERATED
VIEW OF
MAIN STREET,
CULVER CITY,
CALIFORNIA
C. 1928

Street

in the world



AART CLERKX—Page 7

And also: Leroy Shield • Empty streets • Richard Edes Harrison • Black Coffee
Hubbard & Foothill • Russell Square • New Discoveries • the "Mapback" artist

"A fast-growing City between Los Angeles and the Sea. Produces more motion pictures than any city in the world. . . . Three electric lines and 15 major traffic arteries provide transportations facilities in ALL directons."

A developer's dream town, Culver City was nothing but an intersection of roads amidst some barley fields in 1913. Just a decade later, it was a bustling city, with a real downtown area, hotels, hardware and grocery stores—and a generous supply of film studios. This is where Hal Roach Studios established itself; this is where countless exterior film scenes were shot. Main Street, Culver City became familiar to millions of movie fans and early morning TV viewers. What do we see in these black-and-white images? Are those shops, those lamp-posts and those traffic signs still there today? Where *exactly* are those cracks in the pavement?

FUORE investigates a tiny aspect of Culver City: the area known as "downtown Culver City," the shortest Main Street in the world, between Culver and Venice boulevards.

November, 1927:
Oliver N. Hardy notices
that his Scottish relative
has gone "downtown"



Main Street seen from the Culver Hotel, c. 1928

The short

Main Street seen from the Culver Hotel, 1930





Main Street

est

in the world



CULVER CITY was a developer's dream town, and the developer's name was Harry H. Culver. He first visited the area in the summer of 1913, when Culver City was just a triangular crossing formed by Washington Boulevard and some inter-urban tracks. This is where Culver envisioned a community of residential, commercial, and industrial properties which could rival nearby Los Angeles real estate prices. On July 25, 1913, he announced his plans to potential stockholders at a banquet held at the California Club of Los Angeles. He made such an enthusiastic presentation that his captivated audience christened it "Culver City" by acclamation. For the next 17 years, with incredible drive and optimism, he worked at transforming the barley fields into the city of his dreams.

Every block of the new town site was detailed on blueprints drawn by Engineer P.H. Albright. Maximum utilization was made of the location's assets—the meeting point of three railroad lines, plus three main boulevards leading from Los Angeles to the sea: Washington, Venice, and National.

Working at top speed, twelve contractors had already installed several miles of streets, curbs, and sidewalks by the end of 1913. The first commercial structure was the real estate office of The Harry H. Culver Company, a two-story building which still stands on the southwest corner of Venice Boulevard and Main Street. [It later became the Pacific Southwest Bank and is now a furnace store.] It featured a 800,000 Watt swinging searchlight on its roof, attracting buyers like moths to a flame.

Harry Culver himself was responsible for the organization of the Culver City Commercial & Savings Bank and the Pacific Building and Loan Association. In 1924 he built the six-story Hunt Hotel, later renamed Hotel Culver City and now a landmark building called Culver Hotel, at the intersection of Washington and Culver boulevards. It was called a "skyscraper"

in newspaper reports—it was the tallest building between downtown Los Angeles and Venice—and advertised in 1928 as having "150 Modern Rooms and Apartments, Built for You to Enjoy." Numerous movie stars, including Clark Gable, Joan Crawford, and Greta Garbo maintained residences within. In 1939, during the filming of *The Wizard of Oz*, 120 "little people" stayed here.

The '20s brought a building boom to Culver City. For a start, Washington Boulevard was paved. During Prohibition the boulevard mushroomed into a long "strip" of nightclubs attracting gamblers, prostitutes, bookmakers, bootleggers, and gangsters. The nightclubs also provided employ for dance orchestras such as George Olsen and his Music [who opened their own night club/café on Washington Boulevard in April, 1930]. Other establishments along the Boulevard—truly the equivalent of the Las Vegas strip today—included the Cotton Club, the Plantation, King's Tropical Inn, London Club, Ford's Castle, Happy Bungalow, Pitts Castle Inn, Kit Kat Club, Old South Inn, Doo Doo Inn, Nightingale Cafe, and Lyon's Den.

Culver City not only was a center of nightlife; it also quickly became known as "the Heart of Screenland." In 1915 Kalem Motion Picture Company, later known as Essanay, had been the first movie company to arrive in town. That same year, Harry Culver convinced filmmaker Thomas H. Ince to move his studio to Culver City. In September, 1915, construction was begun for a studio complex. [Ince later joined Sennet and Griffith to form Triangle Studios. This studio was bought by Goldwyn in 1918. Ince built a second studio on Washington Boulevard which later became known as Selznick, RKO, and Desilu, and is now The Culver Studios, part of SONY.] For the next three decades, movie studios were the most important taxpayers and employers of the city; a large percentage of the population either worked directly for a film studio as cameraman, technician, carpenter, wardrobe seamstress or bit

player, or indirectly depended on its patronage. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, a conglomerate formed in 1924, opened a vast studio complex between Culver, Overland, Washington, and Madison.

By mid-1925 the Hal Roach Studios, established in 1919 at Washington near National, were "the largest comedy-making studio in the business." Most of the exterior shots of the Charley Chase, Laurel & Hardy, and Our Gang comedies were made on Culver City streets. These locations are recognizable even today. [The Roach Studios themselves, however, are no longer standing; the buildings were destroyed in 1963.]

How did filmmakers of the 1920s use Main Street as a film set? We originally assumed that they used the location only out of convenience—the "downtown" street was, after all, just a stone's throw from the film studios. But a study of the available source material reveals that the cameramen calculated their effects quite carefully. By framing their shots just so, they could create the optical illusion of a busy city street, while in fact they were filming in the world's shortest Main Street. This effect was created as follows:

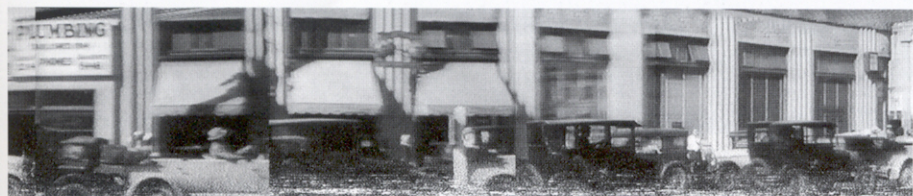
1. Never show the street corner, because a corner defines the length of a street. None of the available film images show the building of the Bank of Italy in its entirety. Even the action in *Leave 'Em Laughing*, which supposedly took place on the crossing with Culver Boulevard, was filmed in front of the first three shops of Main Street.
2. Use a closely cropped image. Showing only the ground level of a row of shops creates the illusion that the buildings are higher than the one-story structures they actually are.
3. Keep the end of the street out of focus. Main Street changes into Bagley Avenue at Venice Boulevard and continues from there as a tree-lined residential street. These trees are always visible, but they seem very far away, again creating the illusion of a very long street.



Main Street's changing face: the block opposite the Culver Hotel was modernized during the '60s, but changed back to its '30s state in 1997.



Hal Roach Production #S-4:
"Putting Pants on Philip" (1927)
This offers some interesting shots of Main Street looking towards the hotel (2nd and 3rd from top).



Hal Roach Production #S-37:
"High Gear" (1931)
This film from the "Boy Friends" series offers a reprise of much of the action from "Leave 'Em Laughing," including a traffic cop who sits down in the middle of the Culver/ Main intersection. The "modern" art-deco front of the Bank of America can be seen here, as well as in "Something Simple" (at right).



Hal Roach Production #S-6:
"Leave 'Em Laughing" (1927)
Having managed to overdose on laughing gas at the dentist's, Stan and Ollie attempt to drive while overcome by giggles. They cause a serious traffic jam on the intersection of Culver Boulevard and Main Street, utterly frustrating the traffic cop, Edgar Kennedy. These scenes were filmed opposite the Culver City Department Store at nr. 3845.



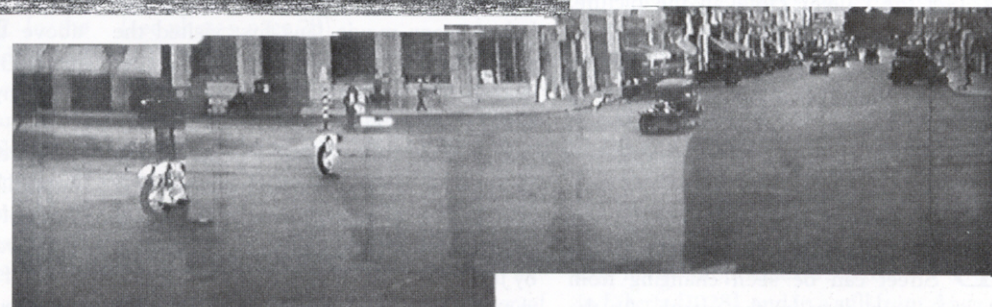
Hal Roach Production #L-13:
"Two Tars" (1928)
Stan and Ollie are sailors on shore leave who meet two girls on Main Street. The scenes with the candy vending machine were filmed on the Roach back lot and intercut with Main Street footage.



Hal Roach Production #T-8:
"Taxi Barons" (1932)
This shot from the eighth episode in the "Taxi Boys" series is a late example of Main Street usage.



Hal Roach Production #L-22:
"Angora Love" (1929)
This was the last Laurel & Hardy film to be made in Main Street. The action starts in front of the tailor shop at number 3840, then is picked up a bit further down at number 3818. Filmed from behind, the boys are then seen passing the same shop where they started walking (top and bottom shots).



Hal Roach Production #C-25: "Something Simple" (1934) places Charley Chase in a taxi in Main Street.



MAIN STREET (SOUTH SIDE), 1924

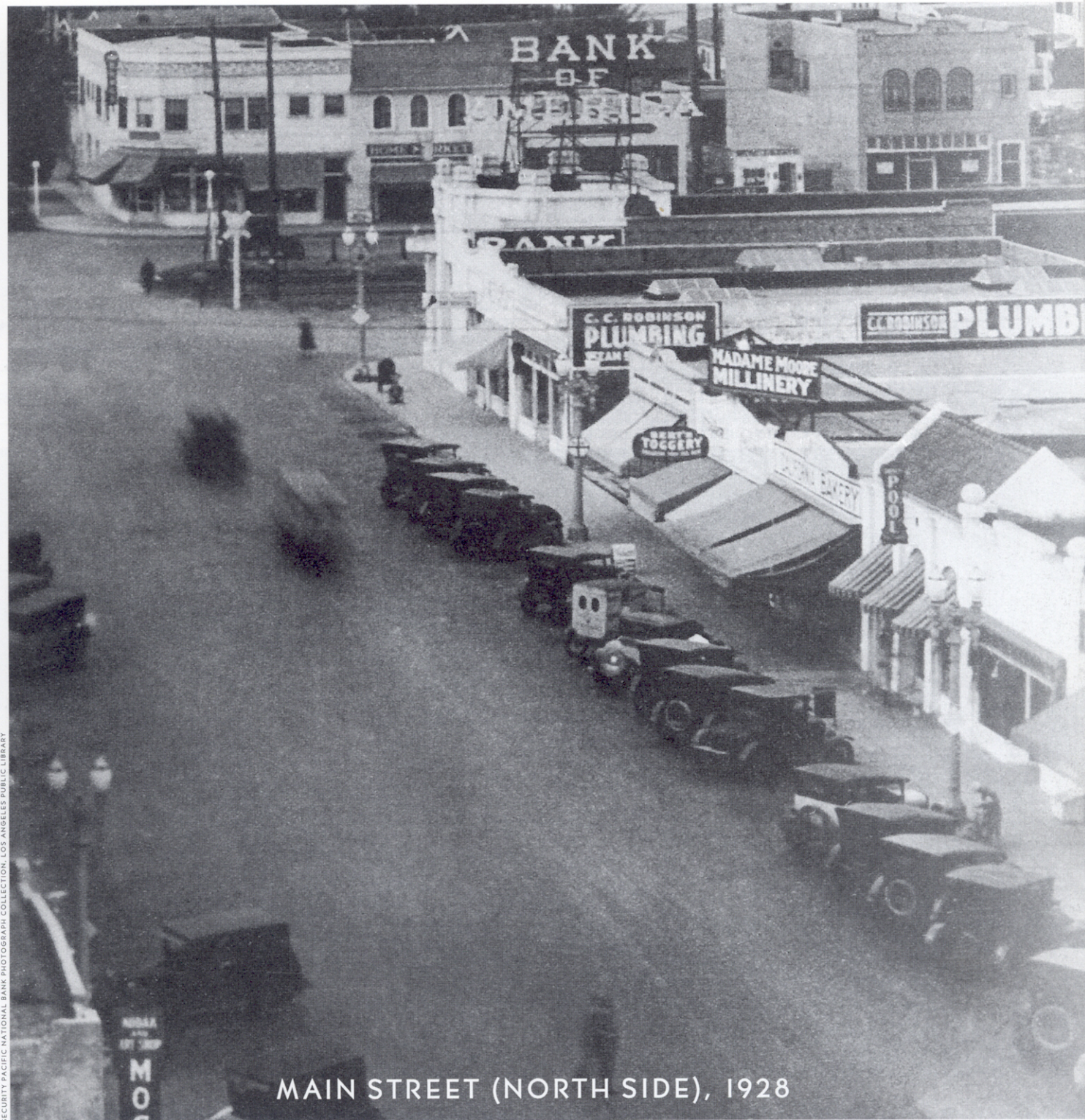
4. Get the Culver Hotel in the picture. Shooting from the middle of Main Street towards the hotel [cropping the image so as not to show its top floor] created an image of a busy city center, with the hotel taking the part of an office building, hospital, or such like.

By studying the films closely, Main Street can be seen changing from year to year, even by the month. As the images on pages 32–35 reveal, shops would

come and go, just as they did in the '70s [when many movie fans first visited the street and encountered "The Pet Dinette" instead of the Steller Brothers' hardware store] and just as they do today. For example, a store calling itself "Cute Kiddie Shoppe" occupied the building at number 3846 in the fall of 1927, as seen in *Putting Pants on Philip* and *Leave 'Em Laughing*; by June 1928, it was replaced by a boots & shoes store, which announced its business with a giant boot on the roof, as seen in

Two Tars. Similarly, a large dollar sign above the Main Street Malt & Supply store [3842], possibly advertising a loan company, was in evidence in 1927, gone in 1928.

Interestingly, the corner building which housed both the Culver City Branch of the Bank of Italy and Mosier's Art Shop circa 1928 was entirely rebuilt in 1930 for the Bank of America, featuring a "modern" art-deco exterior. This can be seen in some Hal Roach talkies such as *High Gear* [1931]



MAIN STREET (NORTH SIDE), 1928

and *Something Simple* [1934]; see also the bottom photograph, pages 26–27. In the 1960s this Bank of America building had in turn been replaced by a horrible example of concrete-and-glass architecture, but it was still the Bank of America. In the fall of 1997, Culver City locals were surprised to see this 1960s building being demolished and replaced by an exact replica of the 1930 version, including the art-deco front. This “restoration” extended to the houses next door, resulting in the rebuilding of the

“Culver City Department Store” at 3845 [see photos, page 28].

Through the years, businesses would move from one address to the next as better spaces became available. “Bert’s Togger” occupied half a building at 3820 Main Street in 1928. It later moved a few doors up the street to number 3840–42, where it was still in operation during the ’60s. Steller Brothers’ hardware store originally occupied the shop at 3817, on the corner of the second alley. It later moved up the

street to 3833. Following some business dispute between the Steller brothers, it is now called “Stellar Hardware.” Perhaps the only commercial business still operating from its original Main Street location today is a bakery called “Grand Casino” [French Bakery], originally called “California Bakery” and located at number 3824. The California Bakery is visible as a reflection in the shop windows across the street in *Liberty* [1928], and in a still from *Angora Love* [1929]. (Text continues on page 36)

SOUTH SIDE

Mosier's Art Shop
7004
E.H. Grose, jwlr.
7004

DEPENDABLE
Dry Goods
Always

YOU SHOP with
CONFIDENCE Here!

Culver City
DEPARTMENT STORE
3845 MAIN STREET

Hub Pharmacy
7008

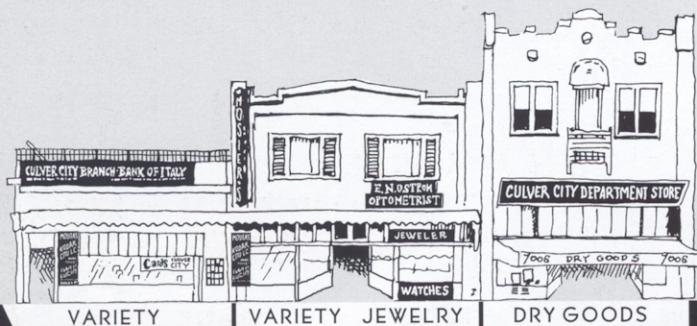
W.S. McNeir
7010

CULVER BOOT SHOP

"POLL PARROT SHOES for BOYS and GIRLS"



The Original Self Service
3833 Main Street



VARIETY

VARIETY JEWELRY

DRY GOODS

3853

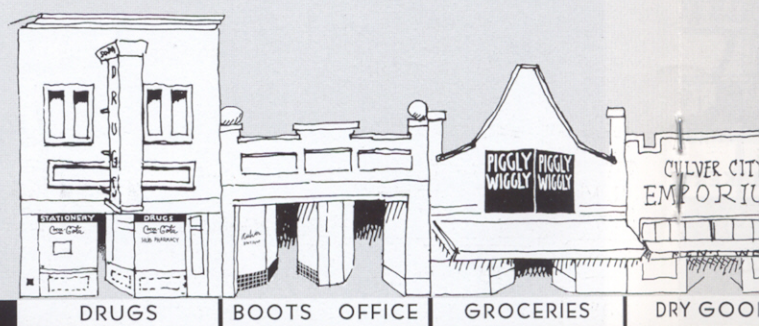
3851 - 3847

3845

7000

7004

7006



DRUGS

BOOTS OFFICE

GROCERIES

DRY GOODS

3841 - 3839

3837 - 3835

3833

3829

7008

7010

7012

7014

CULVER
BLVD.

MAIN STREET CULVER CITY



LEAVE 'EM LAUGHING (NOVEMBER, 1927)

In this composite of several screen shots from "Leave 'Em Laughing," the stores at 3853, 3851-3847, and 3845 Main Street can be identified.

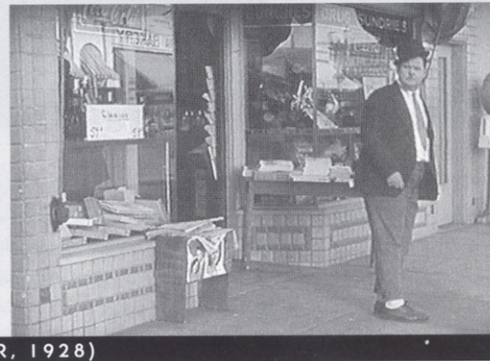


ANGORA LOVE (MARCH, 1929 - STILL)



LIBERTY (OCTOBER, 1928)

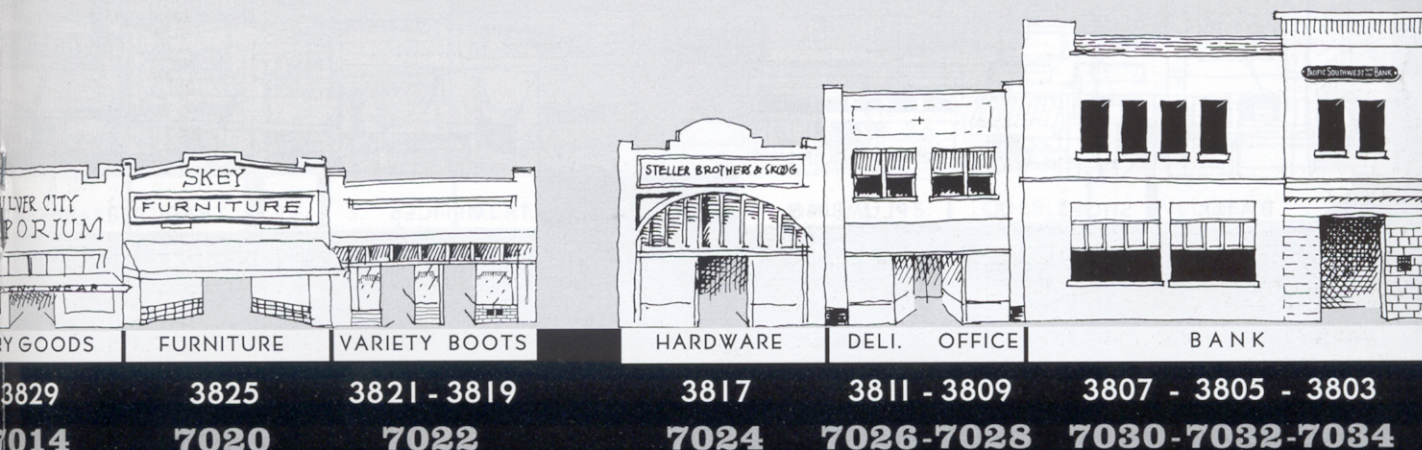
These film images were enhanced and retouched so as to show a maximum amount of street. The Main Street shops nearest the Culver Hotel were seen most frequently in films: the art shop, the jeweler, the department store, and the drugstore ("Hub Pharmacy") across the alley. Here Stan and Ollie walk in front of



#3847 ("Watches"). Ollie saunters on as far as the drugstore, then looks back. We don't see the alley in between the two shops.

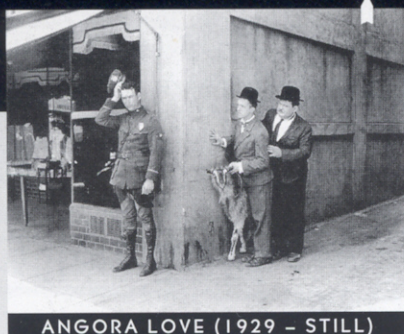
The doorway to Ollie's left can also be seen in the still photo from "Angora Love," above.

IN THIS ILLUSTRATION Culver City's Main Street is represented as it looked back in 1927-1929, the years when the Hal Roach comedies were filmed here. The descriptions of the shops (on the "sidewalk") come from the Sanborn fire insurance map (editions 1924 and 1929). The names printed along the top of the page come from the 1928 Culver City phone directory. The grey street numbers are the old addresses, the white numbers denote the current ones.



VENICE BLVD.

BAGLEY AVENUE LOS ANGELES



ANGORA LOVE (1929 - STILL)

The set in this still looks very much like a studio back lot, but it's Main Street. The boys are standing in the alley between a shoe store (3819) and the hardware store (3817). Barely visible in the shop window is a reflection of the sign for "California Bakery" (3824), diagonally across the street.



PUTTING PANTS ON PHILIP (SEPTEMBER, 1927)

The scenes with the bus in "Putting Pants on Philip" were shot traveling down Main Street again and again. Here Babe is seen dragging Stan up the stairs while the hardware store at #3817 is just visible in the background.



In this closeup, we can see the shop next door to the hardware store (3817) and Harry Culver's office building at 3807.

NORTH SIDE

VENICE BLVD.

SEE
Our new arrivals of Spring Merchandise.
Especially—
Complete Line of **SPORT SHIRTS** \$1.00 to \$2.95
— ALSO —
The New Shades and Styles
STETSON HATS \$5.00
Bert's Toggery
3820 MAIN STREET



BANK	SHOES	S.	PLUMBING
3802	3804-3806		3808
7039	7037-7035		7033

VACANT



OFFICES	G.F.G.	RADIO	BAKERY
3818	3820-3822		3826
7027	7025-7023		7019



PUTTING PANTS ON PHILIP (1927)

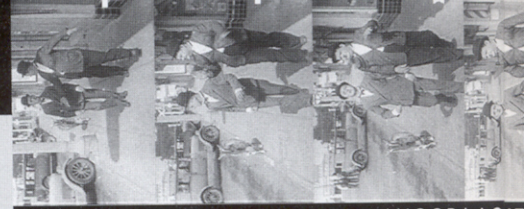


These two pick-up shots were both made in front of the old Bank of America, on the corner of Venice Blvd. The bottom one was intercut with footage of the Culver Hotel.



TWO TARS (1928)

Visible here is the empty lot across the street and the sign advertising Robinson's Plumbers at number 3808 (see below).



ANGORA LOVE

The walking shot in "Angora Love," above, shows the storefronts between the numbers 3820 and 3838 (Daley's). Comparisons can be made almost frame-by-frame; the fourth frame clearly shows the barbershop pole. The shop at number 3840-3842 was used before this sequence (bottom right); from there, the boys run towards the corner of Culver Boulevard and turn left.



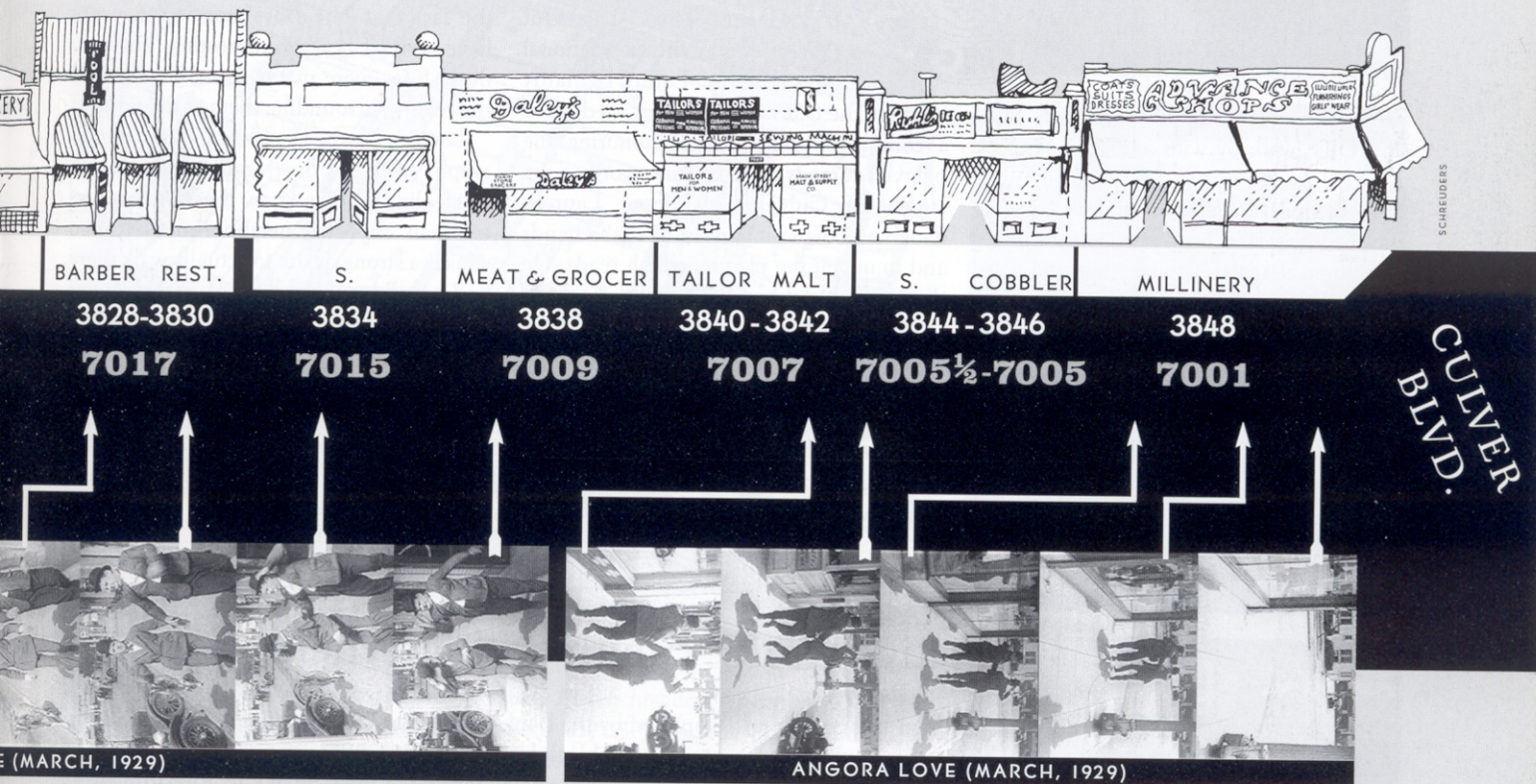
ANGORA LOVE (MARCH, 1929)



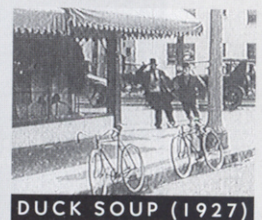
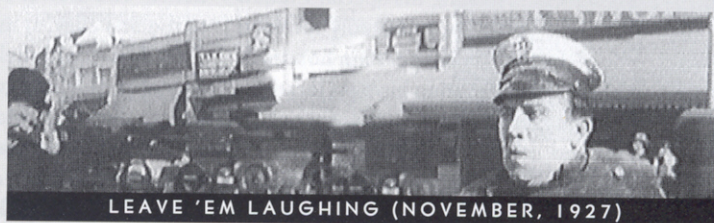
The same stretch of Main Street seen from above, 1928

People's Finance
& Thrift Co.
7005

Pacific Building
& Loan Assn.
7001
Advance Shops
7003



Like the south side of the street, the first few shops on Main Street were photographed most frequently. Here one can study the street almost month by month by looking at the film images. The view from the top of the bus in "Putting Pants on Philip" provided valuable information on these few shops: unlike the others, it shows the top of the "Advance" clothing store. The large black sign advertising the tailor at #3840 can be seen here as well as in "Leave 'Em Laughing" and "Two Tars." This is the same tailor shop as the one in "Angora Love," bottom.



The corner of Culver Boulevard is briefly seen in both "Duck Soup" and "Angora Love," and also in a still for "Two Tars."

The "Cute Kiddie Shoppe" at nr. 3846, visible in both "Putting Pants on Philip" and in "Leave 'Em Laughing," was replaced by a boot store in "Two Tars."



The image from "Angora Love" (right) may look like a film set, but both the "Tailor for Men and Women" and the "Main Street Malt & Supply Co." were actual Main Street stores. The "Piggly Wiggly" store, diagonally across the street, is visible as a reflection in the window.



Another shop surviving only in the form of a window reflection is "Piggly Wiggly" at 3833. [This was the first self-service grocery store, opened originally in Memphis in 1916.] The name sign can clearly be seen as a reflection in the shop window across the street at number 3842, as Stan and Ollie walk by with a goat in *Angora Love* [1929].



A complicating factor in investigating these addresses is that the street's numbering system changed between then and now. Old telephone books of Culver City [see box: "Good detective work"] are useless without a key to the street numbers. In the 'Twenties, Main Street addresses ran from 7000 to 7039 in the direction from Culver to Venice Boulevard; today, the numbering runs from 3800 to 3849 in the opposite direction. Old utilities and fire insurance

maps contain valuable information on these numbers, as well as facts relating to types of business.

In July 1997, a ceremony took place in front of Stellar Hardware. The "Way Out West" tent of the international fraternity of Laurel & Hardy fandom, the Sons of the Desert, dedicated a commemorative plaque "honoring the beloved comedy duo and their work on the streets of Culver City." Stan Laurel's daughter Lois was present to shake hands and to unveil the plaque, which reads: *On this site, in October of 1927, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy filmed scenes from their comedy classic "Leave 'Em Laughing."* [It would perhaps be nitpicking to point out that the filming actually took place a few doors up the street.] The rear of the hardware store building is covered by a Laurel & Hardy mural painted in 1996 by François Bardol.

Some fans like to be photographed in front of it. But activities such as these have nothing to do with the purely visual sensation we have tried to convey by reconstructing these locations so carefully: *what do you see through the eyes of a camera in 1928?* Not the fact that "the Boys" may or may not have walked here is interesting, but how these films were made, using elements of the reality surrounding them at the time.

Looking at these old films and photographs over and over again has generated the feeling that we know these streets better than our own neighborhood. It also causes a strong desire to actually walk there and to undertake a tour of each familiar store, each lamppost, each back alley and pavement crack. This desire has elements of nostalgia, but also a sense of realism. By means of this inexpensive and harmless detective work, we may gain some useful knowledge about the way the Hal Roach technicians worked.

"Good detective work:" Smith vs. Satterfield

RESEARCHING and documenting old film locations is an interesting hobby attracting some interesting characters. The field of Laurel & Hardy research has yielded two: ex-police detective Leon Smith and retail employee Bob Satterfield.

Unfortunately, as so often happens in hobby-within-a-hobby circles, these two gentlemen are in opposite camps and "will neither nod nor speak." According to the Satterfield entourage—the editors of *Pratfall* magazine—"detective" Smith obtained his "evidence" on the sly, not through original research. During the years Satterfield was preparing his special *Pratfall* issue [roughly 1977–1984], the magazine repeatedly received calls from Smith requesting advice on finding certain houses or streets, without revealing that he was writing his own locations book. According to *Pratfall*, several hard-won discoveries by Satterfield, Richard Bann and others turned up without any credit in Smith's work. [Leon Smith first published *A Guide to Laurel and Hardy Movie Locations* and *Following the Comedy Trail* in 1982 and 1984 respectively, with an updated edition appearing in 1988; Satterfield's *Pratfall* issue "Laurel-and-Hardywood" appeared in 1985.]

On the other hand, Satterfield's publications are not free of mistakes—mistakes which were not carried over in Smith's books. Some examples: **Leave 'Em Laughing**—Satterfield insists that the Culver City Department Store, such an essential setpiece of this film, was located at 3833 Main Street: "Contrary to reports on other Laurel & Hardy locations books, the building is still standing. It took a little detective work to find out it is now called True Value Hardware." Three years before, Leon Smith had written: "The Culver City Department Store seen in ... the film was demolished several years ago and

replaced by the Bank of America." The Bank of America then occupied a block formed by 3853, 3851–3847, and 3845 Main Street, the latter being the site of the Culver City Department Store. Smith also offered this verification: "Note the distinctive three-edge cap running along the top of the building [of #3841]—very evident in the film and still photographs."

Angora Love—Satterfield believes the still photograph with the goat in front of the Culver Boot Shop was taken at 3811 Main Street: "The boys stood just to the right of The Pet Dinette." The Culver Boot Shop was actually located to the right of the first alley, at number 3837.

Two Tars—Satterfield places the shops seen in the opening sequence [Daley's groceries, Tailors, and Ruhls Ice Cream] on the south side of Main Street: "The Pet Dinette, at 3815 Main Street, can be compared to the store buildings seen in the film. This can also be verified with good detective work, checking the 1928 phone book for the ice cream store, and matching it to the address on Main Street in Culver City today." Although there is indeed some architectural kinship between the shop at 3811–3909 [south side] and the one at 3840–3842 [north side]—hardly surprising, considering the street was built in such a short time span—Satterfield's conclusion is wrong. Leon Smith had written: "The buildings on the northeast corner were supposedly in the background of the opening segments of the film.... Persistent rumor has it that some opening scenes of the film were shot in front of 3815 Main Street. I cannot verify this as an authentic site."

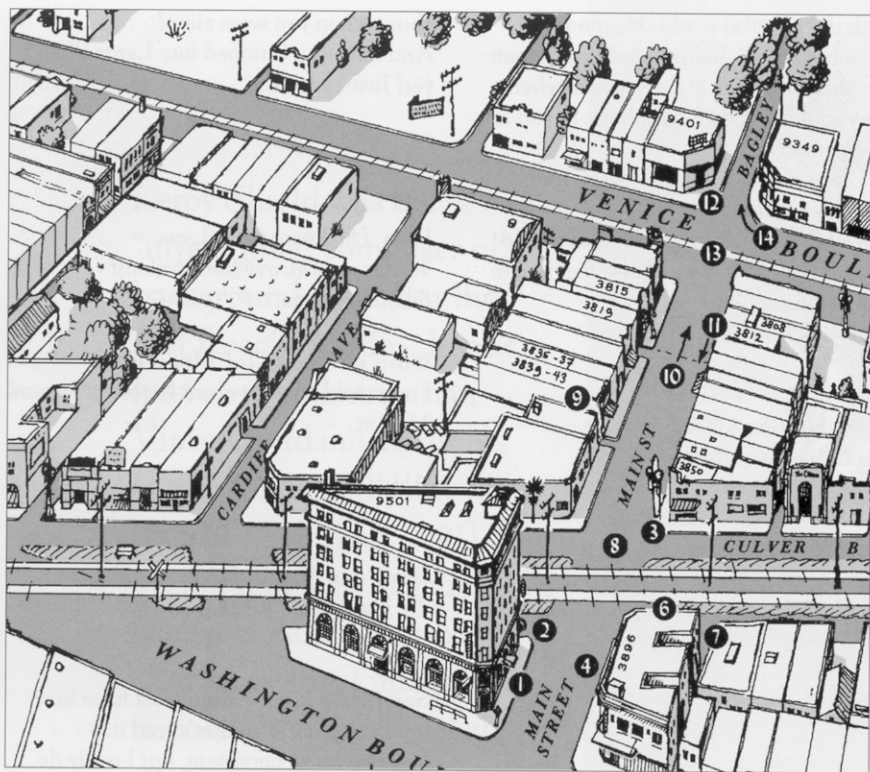
Note—The editors of Pratfall have announced an updated and revised edition of their Laurel & Hardy locations guide to appear in the summer of 2000.



Ex-cop
Leon Smith



Satterfield
in Main Street



An early attempt to visualize the Main Street area was undertaken in 1986 by "Blotto" magazine.

DURING a visit to Main Street in 1994, film historian Richard Bann grew disappointed at seeing so many changes "for the worse" compared to the world of yesteryear as seen in films or film stills. He was heard to mutter: "From now on, I will only watch the films..." Inspired to render this defeatist attitude unnecessary, we resolved to rebuild, if only in "virtual reality," the Culver City streets exactly as seen in the films which Bann—and countless others—love so much.

Based on maps, stills, and the films themselves, a team of computer graphics experts in Utrecht, the Netherlands have occupied themselves for the best part of 1998 to recreate Culver City's Main Street area in a 3D model. The idea was quite simple, and therefore very complicated in its execution. Each building structure, each sidewalk and curb, each lamppost and traffic sign was reconstructed in virtual space and, through the miracles of software, made visible in fully rendered images, which can be made to move in an actual "walk-through" animation. Because the computer images match the historical material exactly, seamless edits could then be made between clips from Laurel & Hardy's silent films and bits of computer animation, resulting, in effect, in a virtual tour of the 1928 street.

Some results of this project were included in the TV documentary *De Bril*

van Piet Schreuders, shown by NPS on February 15, 1999; the makers intend to continue work on the model, which may be marketed in CD-ROM format at some point in the future.

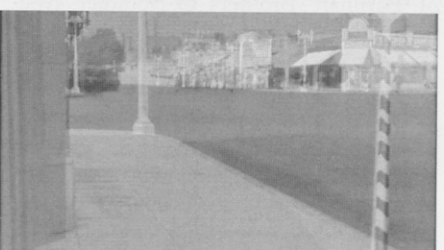
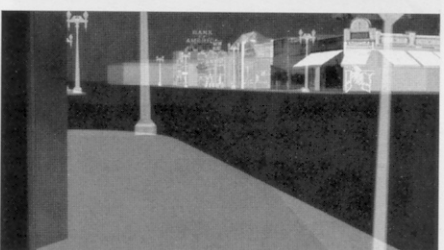
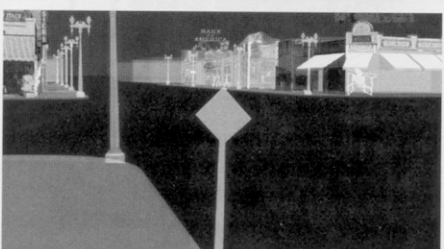
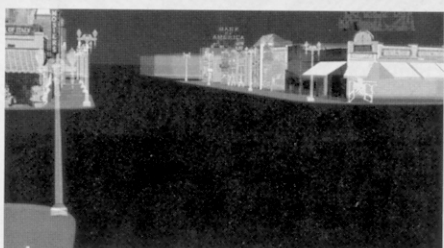
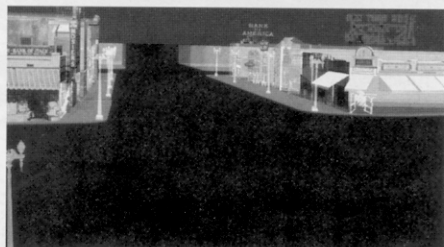
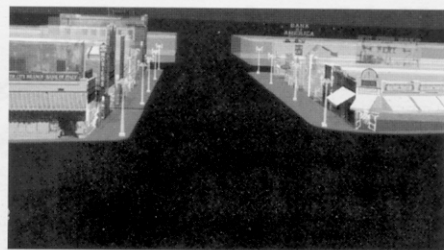
—PIET SCHREUDERS

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Bert Haagsman, Amsterdam
Guido van Eekelen, Delft
Sgt. Ed Henneberque, Culver City Police Dept.
Randy Okada, Culver City City Hall
Eddie C. Pearson, The Culver Hotel
Steven J. Rose, Culver City Chamber of Commerce
Bob Satterfield, San Bernardino, California
Randy Skretvedt, Buena Park, California
Michael Swift, Map Library, California State University at Northridge, California
Dace Taube, Regional History Collection, University of Southern California
Zeppers Film & TV bv, Amsterdam
Angelika M. Zimmermann, Taurusfilm GMBH, Munich

Source material:

Lucinda W. Pennington and William K. Baxter, *A Past to Remember: The History of Culver City*. © 1976 City of Culver City
Julie Lugo Cerra, *Culver City: An Illustrated History*. Chatsworth, Ca: Windsor, 1992
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Animation sequence—From bird's eye view to a view from the Culver Hotel