

ECHO PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWS

SPRING 2005

VOLUME 9, NUMBER 3

President's Corner

Ron Emler was the classic, grass-roots neighborhood activist. He took a do-it-yourself approach to community problems and was a strong believer in the power of the individual to make a difference. Ron didn't seem to wait for money or the approval of a large group to implement an idea—he simply did it. As many of you know, Ron passed away in early March.

When it seemed as if Echo Park would disappear under a wave of crime, Ron took it upon himself to recruit neighbors to join a patrol service and giant neighborhood watch. How do you fight graffiti, illegal dumping, and urban decay? Ron was on the front-lines with neighbors to paint out tagging, pick up trash and plant street trees.

And when he wanted to spark interest in neighborhood history, Ron decided to write a book: "The Ghosts of Echo Park."

"I'd been traveling through southern Oregon, in '97, and saw this book about Jones Valley with these sketches of a one-room schoolhouse with this folksy kind of commentary. You know, something like your Aunt Eleanor would do," said Ron in a Los Angeles Times story. "And I thought, why don't we write a book about Echo Park?"

It was a far larger, complex and expensive task than Ron had ever imagined. But, much to his surprise and others, "The Ghosts of Echo Park" tapped into a ground swell of interest in Los Angeles and neighborhood history. It was far from slick and the research was a bit thin, but for many long time residents, Ron's book validated their love for a neighborhood that was rich

President's Corner continued on page 7

Save the date!

EPHS Quarterly Meeting & Featured Presentation:

EDENDALE EXCAVATED:

Wednesday, April 13, at 7 PM
Williams Hall at Barlow Hospital
2000 Stadium Way

Explore the earliest days of Edendale, the century-old community along the Echo Park-Silverlake border that became the true birthplace of Southern California film production. Journalist and historian Eric Gladstone will discuss Edendale's colorful beginnings and present, with archival photographs, an overview of the rise and fall of "the Atlantis of Movieland."

The EPHS quarterly meeting is open to the public and will also include an update on the historical society's upcoming events, programs and an overview of neighborhood preservation issues.

Echo Park Lake Began as a Reservoir

The first quarter century

Ten years ago, neighborhood activists and history-minded residents got together to form the Echo Park Historical Society. Although that was a significant development for our neighborhood, another, equally important milestone went uncelebrated: Echo Park Lake turned 100, with nary a party nor streamer to mark the occasion.

A decade later, the EPHS remains determined not to let our lake go unnoticed. So, to celebrate our beloved lake, each of the next four newsletters will touch on the history of the lake – how it was developed and what it became. (Please see related stories on pages 4 and 7.)

Echo Park didn't start out as a man-made lake. Instead, its earliest use by the city was as a reservoir, storing water in a section sometimes known as the city's "West End." In those years, the hills and canyons that were poised to become our neighborhood were thought of as the city's west side.

The Los Angeles Canal and Reservoir Co. formed Reservoir No. 4 in 1868. The company obtained the water by digging a

Echo Park Lake continued on page 5



Morton Avenue Lots Catalyze Neighborhood

The residential properties collectively known as Morton Village have been listed for sale, catalyzing residents concerned that the result could be the razing of an eclectic group of bungalows and an apartment house surrounded by grassy yards harboring lemon, grapefruit, peach, grapefruit, pine and palm trees. Some of the nine white-painted bungalows date back to 1912.

Morton continued on page 4

Calendar of Events

April

History Happy Hour:

Monday, April 11, at 7 PM

El Compadre Restaurant, 1449 Sunset Blvd., three blocks east of Echo Park Ave. Please RSVP to 323-860-8874

Echo Park Historical Society

Quarterly Membership Meeting:

Wednesday, January 12, at 7 PM

Please see the meeting box on Page 1 for more details.

Spring Ahead Renovation Workshops:

Saturday, April 9 & 16 at 10 AM

The workshops are free to EPHS members and \$5 for all others. Please reserve a spot by calling (323) 860-8874. We will reply with location information.

Echo Park Lake Anniversary

Walking Tour: Sat, April 9 at 10 AM

Starting Place: Echo Park Boathouse, 751 Echo Park Ave. Reservations are required. Please Call (323) 860-8874.

Downtown Echo Park & Lake

Walking Tour: Saturday, April 23

Starting Place: Southwest corner of Sunset Blvd & Lemoyne St. Reservations are required. Please Call (323) 860-8874.

MAY

History Happy Hour:

Monday, May 9 at 7 PM

Please see April events for details.

Echo Park Lake Anniversary

Walking Tour: Saturday, May 14 at 10 AM

Please see April events for details.

Echo Park Stairway Tour:

Saturday, May 28 at 10 AM

Starting Place: Elysian Heights Elementary 1562 Baxter St. at Echo Park Ave. Reservations are required. Please Call (323) 860-8874.

JUNE

Echo Park Lake Anniversary

Walking Tour:

Saturday, June 11 at 10 AM

Please see April events for details.

History Happy Hour:

Monday, June 13 at 7 PM

Please see April events for details.

Elysian Park Walking Tour:

Saturday, June 25 at 10 AM

Starting Place: Fremont Monument at North Broadway and Elysian Park Drive. Please Call (323) 860-8874.

NEWS

EPHS Hires Consultant to Guide Lake Effort

The EPHS has hired Historic Resources Group to help us have Echo Park Lake designated as a cultural historic monument by the City of Los Angeles. The firm, with extensive experience in preservation consulting, will conduct the necessary research and guide the application through the city review process. Our plan is to submit the application to the Cultural Heritage Commission for review this summer and have the lake declared a monument this year to coincide with its 110th anniversary of opening to the public.

Instead of nominating individual structures in the park as landmarks, the EPHS will seek to have the entire park grounds declared a monument. Protecting "cultural landscapes" is a cutting-edge concept in the preservation field, and we expect other historic and park support groups to study our example.

Nominating the lake is an expensive proposition, and we will be asking EPHS members and supporters to help us with research and financial donations to defray the expenses. Please contact us at (323) 860-8874 or ephs@HistoricEchoPark.org if you would like to help.

Film Center Students to Document Local History

Recently, the Echo Park Historical Society teamed up with the Echo Park Film Center on an innovative documentary film program that casts a spotlight on neighborhood history.

On a Saturday morning in mid-March, the EPHS gave more than dozen, young students enrolled in a documentary filmmaking program a crash course in neighborhood history. Historical society volunteer David Zahniser gave the students, ages 14 to 18, an extended version of his quarterly walking tour of downtown Echo Park and the lake. That was followed by a display and discussion of historic photographs of the neighborhood.

The downtown & lake tour is often referred to as "Echo Park 101" since it serves as a primer on neighborhood history while touring its most important landmarks, including Jensen's Recreation Center, Angeles Temple and Echo Park Lake.

The history lesson was part of the film center's City of Angels Community History Project. Funded in part by a grant from the City of Los Angeles, the 10-week long program teaches the fundamentals of research interview technique,

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Founded 1995

The Echo Park Historical Society is dedicated to the preservation and promotion of the diverse cultural and architectural heritage of our community.

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Fellowship Parkway artist fasted for sake of vision

Former Echo Park resident Middleton Manigault (1887 – 1922) had a brief but acclaimed career as a modernist painter, ceramicist and furniture maker. Believing that fasting could heighten his sense of awareness and creativity and allow him to “see colors not perceptible to the physical eye,” he would fast for extended periods while working on paintings. While Manigault did show an amazing palette, this practice eventually led to his death by starvation at age 35.

Following his death, Manigault faded into obscurity for many years, largely due to the scarcity of his works known to exist (at one point, he destroyed up to 200 of his works because he felt that they were unworthy of his signature). Recently, however, there has been renewed interest in his oeuvre, sustained by a small, devoted circle of scholars and collectors.

Manigault was born in London, Ontario, to prominent parents who encouraged his interest in drawing. At the age of 18 he was commissioned by his hometown to make renderings of public buildings, which were reproduced and sold as postcards. In 1905 he moved to New York to attend the New York School of Art, where he was mentored by Kenneth Hayes Miller. In a short time Manigault became the hit of the New York art scene, his art collected by J. Paul Getty and Arthur Jerome Eddy and featured in prestigious shows at the Armory and the Whitney. As a painter he was versatile and highly emotional.

In 1915 Manigault’s life turned sharply in a different direction when he interrupted his successful career as a painter to volunteer as an ambulance driver in World War I. He was sent to Flanders, site of some of the heaviest fighting. After being exposed to mustard gas, he suffered a nervous breakdown and was discharged. From this point

on his health would slowly deteriorate. Returning to New York he found it difficult to concentrate on painting. Helping him through his bouts of depression was his wife, Gertrude, whom he had married just days before going off to war. Despite his declining health, Manigault did continue to experiment and create some brilliant works. Seeking a milder climate and slower pace, the Manigaults moved to Echo Park in 1919, purchasing a house on Lemoyne St. in Fellowship Park. This change led him to focus more on decorative arts, and he produced beautiful ceramics as well as furniture. He also received a lucrative commission to design flatware for Oneida.



Christ Appearing to Mary: courtesy of Hollis Taggart Galleries

Beth A. Venn writes in *Middleton Manigault: Visionary Modernist*, a catalog published by Hollis Taggart Galleries in New York: “It seemed that almost immediately upon his arrival in California, Manigault enthusiastically embraced the basic premise of the Arts and Crafts movement – that craft and handiwork could be elevated to the aesthetic level of painting.”

Manigault’s fatal mistake came when he accepted a job in San Francisco. With Gertrude in Los Angeles, there was no one to monitor his fasting. On August 25, 1922, Gertrude received a telegram saying that Manigault was very ill. She took the train to San Francisco and arrived to find him emaciated and semi-conscious. After checking into the hospital, the doctor said it would be about a month before he would regain his strength. He never did. On August 31 Manigault was pronounced dead of starvation and neurasthenia. He had essentially martyred himself for his art.

Middleton Manigault’s work is part of the permanent collection at the Columbus Museum of Art in Ohio and the Gibbes Museum of Art in Charleston, S.C. - *Dave Ptach*

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Morton Village Catalyzes Neighbors

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"[Morton Village] is being sold as a massive development opportunity which could result in the eviction of two-dozen households!" reads the text on a petition opposing major change for the lots,

The petition, currently being circulated by Village residents, fellow community members and also available at Chango coffeehouse, notes that a pair of four-story buildings have already been proposed for nearby Echo Park Avenue – which crosses Morton Avenue just a few tracts down from Morton Village.

"We love Echo Park's historic bungalows, courtyards and rustic character," the petition reads, "and would be appalled by rows of hulking, multi-story complexes running up the canyons that make up Echo Park Avenue and Morton Avenue."

The real estate listings of the properties at 1633, 1635, 1637, 1639 and 1641 Morton Avenue include notations about the possibilities of turning a single-family home into up to eight units, and, doors down, adding four or five units. The 1641 Morton listing boasts of a, "great opportunity in upcoming Echo Park neighborhood."

Is that a copywriting misnomer for "up-and-coming" or the backdoor disclosure of intent to saturate the area with enough unites to create a new neighborhood? A message left for Joseph Chandler, the Sotheby's International Realty agent who represents the majority of the Morton Village properties, was not returned.

Nan Wollman, a five-year resident of Morton Village, said she discovered her home was on the market in late January when the landlord put up signs. That lack of advance notice has stirred resentment, she said. That's in addition to fears of dense development and any possible preservation – or at least, continuity – issues.

"Whatever they build next is not going to be like this," Wollman said. "Its not the way things are done now. And for that reason, it's worth preserving, for it's charm and beauty."

Charm alone doesn't guarantee that Morton Village, as currently constructed, will endure. Recently crafted but not yet implemented City of Los Angeles zoning restrictions might mean, however, that a behemoth structure cannot rise there.

The new Echo Park, Silver Lake, Elysian Valley Community Plan was approved by the City Council last summer and is now cascading into effect as the zoning maps are published," wrote Mitch O'Farrell, Deputy District Director for Councilmember Eric Garcetti, in an e-mail to EPHS. "One element of the Plan is in regard to updated zoning for the area of the bungalows. A 'Q' (Qualified) condition has been applied to the area which prohibits lot ties. That would make it very unlikely that it could be developed in a nature different from what currently exists."

O'Farrell wrote that he has been closely following the Morton Village situation.

Landscape Architect Michael O'Brien has studied the community plan and worries that a developer could surmount its proposal to ban buildings covering more than two lots. "All of Morton Village," O'Brien wrote EPHS, "could be adjusted to be only one lot, which would allow an apartment box of 28 units extending some 188-feet along the street."

O'Brien believes that losing the Morton Village homes would be a blow to the neighborhood. "They contribute to the historic low density character of the area," he wrote. "What would replace them would probably be soulless apartment boxes having no charm, or worse, looking like Irvine, which I don't think we want to see Echo Park devolve into."

- Jeremy Rosenberg

Echo Park Lake 110th Anniversary Walking Tours

In honor of Echo Park Lake's 110th birthday this year, the EPHS will be adding a monthly Echo Park Lake Anniversary Tour beginning Saturday, April 9, to its line up of walking tours.

The Echo Park Lake Anniversary Tour will be held on the second Saturday of every month from April through November. The approximately 1-1/2 tour starts at 10 AM at the Echo Park Boathouse, located at 751 Echo Park Ave. As with our other tours, reservations are required. Tours are free to EPHS members and children under 12. We ask a \$3 donation of all others.

We will also continue to hold our quarterly Echo Park Downtown & Lake Tour.

The anniversary tour is part of our programs to celebrate the lake's 110th anniversary of opening to the public. Please click on the "lake link" on the home page of HistoricEchoPark.org for more in depth history and information about the lake.

CORRECTION:

In our Winter Issue we reported that Estelle Lawton Lindsay once lived at 2414 Echo Park Blvd. The correct address is 2416.

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Echo Park Lake: The First 25 Years

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ditch that sent water flowing from the Los Angeles River – in the area now known as Los Feliz – along a zigzag path that emptied into the reservoir.

Los Angeles passed up on the chance to purchase the land around the lake. But by the late 1880s, Thomas Kelley – a carriagemaker whose name was spelled with and without an “e” in various documents – purchased the property along with five other speculators.

Kelley subdivided the area into the Montana Tract, listing its lots for sale in an 1887 edition of the L.A. Times.

In those years, Angelino Heights had just gone through its first major development boom, with cable cars sending prospective buyers from downtown Los Angeles west on Temple Street.

The notion of waterfront property must have sounded very appealing to the half-dozen businessmen who owned the lakeside property. But they soon discovered that the city still held the right to overflow the reservoir by up to 40 feet – an option that, if exercised, would have rendered their land worthless.

In those years, Reservoir No. 4 was held in check by a dam in the vicinity of Bellevue Avenue. From there, water traveled down the Woolen Mill Ditch to a mill near present-day Fifth and Figueroa Streets, not far from where Kelley lived.

Kelley petitioned the city to provide a quitclaim, essentially a land swap, converting the reservoir lands into a park and private residences. That request, and quite possibly a legal challenge, led to three years of debate by the parks commission, the city council and the mayor.

In 1891, the city’s health officer inspected the dam and determined that, if it were to hold a greater volume of water, it would pose a danger to residents who lived south of Bellevue Avenue.

“The existence of this reservoir at its present site I consider a menace to the life of everyone living along the Arroyo de los Reyes,” he said, according to his statement in

the council’s minutes. “I have seen this reservoir so full during the rainy season that I feared the bank would give way.”

Two months later, city leaders struck a deal with the men who owned the land around the reservoir. Kelley and his associates – including William LeMoyne Wills, who like Kelley, would later serve on the school board – gave up 33 acres of land for a park.

In exchange, the city agreed not to overflow the reservoir land, making the remaining land held by Kelley and his associates – including the street that would soon become Sunset Boulevard – far more valuable.

When Mayor Henry Hazard signed the paperwork in 1891 allowing the park to be created, he envisioned a grand boulevard on Alvarado Street that would transport residents from Westlake (now MacArthur Park) to Echo Park Lake and then northeast to Elysian Park.

“Open a good drive into this park on a continuation of Alvarado Street passing Reservoir No. 4 which should be ornamented and few cities would have as fine a drive or one containing a greater variety of scenery,” said Hazard, in his message to the council.

The city began work landscaping the park in October 1892. By 1895, the park and accompanying boathouse were completed. But it didn’t exactly win rave reviews in a Times article published on Jan. 1, 1896, which states, “There has

perhaps been less talk, newspaper and other, about his park than about any other, and it does not seem, thus far in its existence, that it were worthy of much.”

Designed in the rustic style, one bridge helped pedestrians reach the island, while a second passed over the lake’s northwest corner, where the ditch delivered water from the Los Angeles River (and lotus now grow).

By 1899, city leaders were intent on adding even more green space, by extending the parkland south to Temple Street. Bounded by Temple on the south and Bellevue on



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Restoration Station

New Salvage Program Launched

Hoping to fill a need for neighborhood property owners, the Echo Park Historical Society is pleased to announce that low-cost architectural salvage is now available for local restoration projects.

Common items such as doors and window sashes and even old hardware are now available for a fraction of the cost at local salvage dealers.

To qualify, the item must be used for the restoration of a structure within Echo Park or Angelino Heights. In order to ensure a successful program, salvage recipients must be EPHS members and installations must be verified by the EPHS.

To build up our supply of materials, we are also taking donations of items.

So, if you know of an old door on the sidewalk, let us know and we'll pick it up! Your donation may even be tax deductible!

For more information contact program coordinator Kevin Kuzma at salvage@HistoricEchoPark.org.

Another Salvage Source

In addition to the EPHS's new salvage program, a new salvage dealer has opened in nearby Silverlake, at "Sunset Junction," the intersection of Sunset and Santa Monica Boulevards. Housed in a 1920s concrete warehouse under the 4100 Bar, Silverlake Yards carries a number of interesting salvage items, from 1910 five-panel doors to 1950s bar stools. If you have priced salvage items lately, you'll be pleasantly surprised by Silverlake Yards' competitive prices. In addition, owner Bruce Baker is offering EPHS members 20% off any purchase.

Silverlake Yards Architectural Salvage is open Friday through Sunday at 1085 Manzanita Street; (323) 667-2875.

Spring Restoration Workshops

With the rains hopefully behind us, EPHS would like to help you get a jumpstart on that restoration "to do" list:

Wood Window Restoration: Saturday, April 9th at 10AM. Ropes broken?

Rotten wood? Painted shut? Learn the low-tech but largely forgotten skill of repairing & maintaining your wood windows, a major part of your home's historic character.

Hardware & Woodwork, Its Care & Repair: Saturday, April 16th at 10AM. Learn the simple skills that will help your home look its best; including paint stripping, door lock repair & hardware cleaning.

Both workshops are free to EPHS members and \$5 for non-members. Please RSVP to Kevin Kuzma for directions; (323) 860-8874.

– Kevin Kuzma



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Lake: 1st 25 years

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the north, the area was completed by 1907, with an extensive network of playing fields and courts for tennis and croquet.

One year later, the Echo Playground had a beautiful one-story clubhouse that served many of the neighborhood's needs.

Built by the same firm that went on to design the Southwest Museum in Mt. Washington, the clubhouse was only the city's second recreation center, offering the neighborhood's first lending library and numerous sports, music and civic activities.

Still, Echo Park residents remained unsatisfied. By 1912, there were already calls to replace the Victorian-style boathouse. One resident complained about the peanut shells that littered the park grounds. Another voiced outrage at the site of couples "spooning." Things got worse by late 19-teens. By then, motion picture companies on Allesandro Street – now Glendale Boulevard – had been using the park as a filming location. City leaders responded by barring Keystone Studios, home of the Keystone Kops, from shooting any of its comedies at the lake, on the grounds that too many flowers were being trampled.

By 1920, many of the hills surrounding the lake were still untouched. Farmhouses lined the northern edge of the lake, while four-unit, Craftsman-style apartment flats ran up Echo Park Avenue and Alvarado Street.

Kelley died in 1906, the same year he built a house for his sister at 1467 Echo Park Ave.

Within a few years, Kelley's heirs had sold off much of his land to Henry Christian Jensen, who built the Sunset Pharmacy at Sunset and Echo Park and the motion picture house known as the Globe Theater – now Guadalupana – at 1624 Sunset Boulevard.

Still, the biggest development boom in Echo Park's history – one that would have serious consequences for the lake – was just a year or two away. Those changes would make the lake even more of a hub for the neighborhood. – David Zahniser

storytelling, lighting, cinematography, sound recording, special effects and editing.

These technical and artistic tools will form the foundation for a collaborative short documentary film examining and celebrating the students' neighborhood and family histories and the local and global issues that affect them.

EPHS Seeks Book Donations

EPHS members and supporters can help promote reading and awareness of neighborhood history by participating in our new history book donation program.

Members can pledge to buy a book from our selected Echo Park History Reading list that will be donated to the Echo Park and Edendale library branches that serve our community. The final book list is being worked out and will be posted on www.HistoricEchoPark.org. Titles range from *Chavez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story* to *The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth* and the children's book *City of Angels*.

This program, headed by volunteer Rosie Betanzos, is part of our ongoing educational efforts to raise awareness and appreciation of neighborhood history as well as historic preservation. We plan to make donations on an annual basis, and if successful, will also contribute volumes to school libraries as well.

The books will be purchased through Skylight Books, the independent bookseller in Los Feliz, which has generously offered to sell the books at a discount. Skylight has also offered to ask its patrons to purchase books for the donation program.

'Temporary' Bridge Repairs Opposed

In preparation for the annual Lotus Festival, the department of Recreation and Parks has proposed "temporary" repairs for the bridge's railings to allow the bridge to be open for the festival.

After meeting with RAP staff, the Echo Park Historical Society, with the support of the Neighborhood Council and Council member Eric Garcetti's office, has opposed these temporary repairs because so often in Echo Park, temporary can become permanent. After examining the metal bars recommended for the repair, the Historical Society has proposed that RAP come back with plans for a permanent restoration. With so many positive things happening— the boathouse restoration, new tree plantings, the return of the Lady of the Lake, a temporary repair seemed a step backward, recommending instead that RAP recognize the bridge's historic nature and do the repairs using historically accurate materials and finishes.

Additionally, EPHS opposes addition of a second bridge, which was suggested to increase capacity on the island. As it is now, fire marshal guidelines allow no more than 49 people on the island. This seems reasonable, and the Historical Society, along with other local organizations, feels it should remain this way. Restoration and preservation of the bridge and island are our first priority, not increasing revenue.

Delta Bungalow Gets 2nd Chance

When it comes to the Chicken Corner bungalow on Delta Street we repeat Yogi Berra's famous dictum it ain't over till it's over. Recently EPHS reported that Insite development planned to break ground in February of this year for a low-income housing complex at Chicken Corner, so named for the chicken-in-leather mural that once graced the Delta Street wall of the Del Mor apartment building. Insite rejected EPHS's proposal that the classic bungalow be preserved – no pun intended – in site. EPHS efforts to have the bungalow moved were hobbled in part by a tight time line. It looked almost certain that the bungalow would be Echo Park history, preserved in memory and as salvage.

In the meantime, controversy concerning minimal parking for the complex flared in the neighborhood. Eric Garcetti's office reportedly received more calls on the project than any other in the councilman's tenure, primarily because of the parking issue. By February, Insite had dropped the project, making a deal to sell the lot to Civic Enterprise Associates developer of Mount Washington, which, at press time was in escrow. Civic Enterprise Associates also planned to purchase the convalescent home parcel next door. EPHS board member Kevin Kuzma says Civic Enterprise Associates "has a reputation for being a conscientious developer. We hope that this new developer proves even more receptive to community concerns [than Insite] and will live up to their track record of conscientious development."

At press time, Civic Enterprise Associates had not announced its development plans, though it is likely that any proposal will involve the removal of the bungalow. To date, there are two prospects for the bungalow, one in West Adams, the other a couple of blocks from its present site, and EPHS remains open to proposals for saving this remarkably intact example of its type.

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President's Corner

in memories and had a strong sense of place.

The self-published book, which made its debut in 2000, made the Los Angeles Times best seller list, and it was constantly being restocked in bookstores across the city—as well the Magic Gas station down the street from Ron's house. About 4,000 copies of the book, created in partnership with resident Susan Borden and other neighbors, was sold in two editions.

Ron was probably the person who was most surprised by the book's success and its enduring popularity. The EPHS still receives requests to purchase the book, which is sadly out of print. Unlike an academic history book, *Ghosts of Echo Park* is fun and approachable—and filled with pictures. It makes an immediate connection with the reader, and has proved a priceless tool in promoting Echo Park history.

We will miss Ron dearly. But he and his book will serve as a long-lasting and well-loved inspiration as to how one person and an idea can make a difference.

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