

Even Californians Admit That Beverly Hills Is . . .



WACKY, WORRIED BUT WONDERFUL

by RICHARD G. HUBLER

VISITING BEVERLY HILLS for the first time, an anthropologist reported of its inhabitants: "As they drew near us, they began to howl like wolves."

The men, he went on, were bronzed and clean shaven, below normal height, with low foreheads, tiny eyes, flat noses and large mouths. The women had straight hair with fashionable bangs and used a great deal of paint to prevent sunburn, for social affairs, and especially when they were in love.

The families, he declared, were the smartest and wealthiest in the area. Sickness was treated mostly by psychological practitioners or resorting to an endless number of steam-baths. The natives used a good deal of tobacco and were habitual gamblers and drinkers.

Such were the observations on the now-extinct Beverly Hills Indians, made by the Franciscan friar, Father Crespi, of the Spanish expe-

dition which discovered the spot in California in 1769.

The community is still proud of being an elegant tribe sufficient unto itself. Like a golden, 5-square-mile, liver-shaped island in the midst of the smoggy 454-square-mile sea of Los Angeles, Beverly Hills retains its own peculiar individuality. Its 30,000 citizens form a distinct unit, with their own schools, clubs, police and fire force, oil well, Boy Scouts, mansions, mayor, chamber of commerce, council, 70,000-volume library, post office and newspapers. They pay one of the lowest tax rates in California for their sixth-class city, although their incomes may be unofficially rated as among the highest not only in the state but in the world.

Beverly Hills became famous in 1926 when, in one of the smartest publicity stunts of the century, Will Rogers was elected honorary mayor. Installed in drizzling rain, Rog-

OldMagazineArticles.com

ers declared that all the budding town needed for progress was a little scandal and a few murders.

Today, it has an international reputation for exclusive smartness—but it is growing as overcrowded as a slum. A sample dilemma is the fact that the residents own 4,000 more cars than their garages will hold—most of them Cadillacs, Lincolns or expensive foreign jobs. With only a few exceptions, vertical buildings of more than six stories are forbidden, and the city can expand only horizontally.

With virtually no industry except a large furnace plant, Beverly Hills does a roaring business of \$120,000,000 a year in retail sales. A traffic of 300,000 cars a day is shunted through its main streets, while its eight banks boast \$200,000,000 on deposit.

The business of the citizens is largely concerned with the production of motion pictures—possibly 200 film notables live in the town—as opposed to the “private people” who run the solid core of business, ranging from crafting swank dog collars to confecting dress styles which rival Paris.

With an estimated average yearly income of \$15,000, homes that range into the stratosphere above \$50,000, more than one telephone per person, one and a half cars per family and 1,200 swimming pools, Beverly Hills is entitled to the chic reputation it has acquired.

Its 96 miles of wide streets and boulevards and 38 miles of alleys are patrolled constantly and quietly by the 70-man police force—one of the 15 radio cars cruises past a specific point every half-hour. The officers break up necking parties by

sitting and waiting behind the love-feast or by turning their spotlight on it. Strollers are often picked up and politely asked their business; if they have no alibi, they are escorted to the nearest bus station.

The streets, most of them curving and maze-like, are wide and sometimes centered with cycle and bridle paths. Many are named for trees—such as Elm, Pine, Laurel, Palm—and are generally carefully planted with the proper species.

SOCIETY IN BEVERLY HILLS is divided into three parts. The first is the rapidly-vanishing cult of the native Californian set; the second consists of the movie people—actors, writers, directors, producers, agents; the third comprises the businessmen and *nouveaux riches* from the East.

None of these mix any better than oil and water, and social life on the distaff side consists largely in straining to get to the top (those already there devote their time to charitable enterprises). The tactics involved consist of holding expensive shindigs, cocktail jamborees, genteel school ceremonies and, on occasion, the passing of the long green.

The parties run to scores of cases of champagne, swimming pool fall-ins and solid gold souvenirs. The decorations sometimes consist of thousands of fresh roses or hundreds of bunches of hothouse grapes. A moderately good free-for-all costs \$20,000.

A fourth, and little known, element of Beverly Hills is that of the gangsters and shady folk attracted by the wealth and independence of the community. Most of these have criminal records and are either hiding out or engaged in such lucra-



tive trafficking as dope, gambling or prostitution.

As late as six years ago, Bugsy Siegel, the Western czar of Murder, Inc., made Beverly Hills the unobtrusive headquarters for West Coast syndicated crime. His murder—still unsolved—in the sittingroom of his girl friend, Virginia Hill, was considered a considerable affront to the people of the town and a special crusher to Chief of Police Clinton H. Anderson.

"We've only had two homicides in the last 25 years," says the affable Chief. "The other was a housemaid who was killed by her husband, whom she had deserted."

Miss Hill commented: "It looks so bad to have something like that happen in your own house."

The point which upset everyone was the fact that the Siegel murder violated the city's unwritten law: if you want to blow your horn or blast your tommy-gun, go somewhere else to do it. It was the violation of this protocol which shocked Anderson, especially when the mob had all the length of the lurid Sunset Strip, right next door, to do it in.

These acute splits in municipal personality have been a boon to psychoanalysts and doctors. "It costs me \$70,000 a year just to keep my suite and laboratory open," says one, "but it's worth it."

There is one doctor to every 48 persons, one of the highest ratios known anywhere. Most of them make a comfortable living by being specialists, many of them special-

izing in ailments of the gastric system which result from high tension. The "head-feelers"—as the professional devotees of Freud, Adler and Jung are vulgarly known—have zoomed from four in 1945 to 90.

The tastes of the citizens are sometimes peculiar but not unusual. With ten bookshops, the largest sellers are often risqué cartoon and joke books; but with seven churches, the sale of the modernized Bible equals and often surpasses this. Occasionally some residents order "20 or 30 feet of books" to fill up a space in their homes or offices.

Though the dress of the men is informal, casual and loud—two-tone suits, bright print shirts, loafer shoes, sport coats and no hat—there is a quiet air of genteel snobbery evident in the field of women's wear. Only sable will cause one female to look twice at another; mink is something worn with slacks to walk the dog. It is notable that some of the more extreme gowns shown in the shops—at prices that sometimes reach well into the thousands—are actually worn to social functions.

Attention is often hard to get, even with the most obvious devices—as in the case of a producer's wife who turned up at a cocktail party with a huge, blazing diamond clip on a jet-black suit. No one mentioned it.

The matron stood it as long as she could, then leaped to her feet. "It's stifling in here!" she cried dramatically. "I guess I'll have to take off my 14-diamond, platinum \$11,500 clip!"

The most exclusive meat shops turn up their noses at Western beef; one or two sport a sign ONLY EASTERN MEATS SOLD HERE. A \$300 or-

der for backyard barbecue filets is common, but sales are higher on the once-plebeian corned beef.

One drugstore in the heart of town advertised a shaving brush for \$250 and a hairbrush—"one of three in the world"—for \$500. Barbers in the more elite shops receive \$5 and \$10 tips. Among the 2,175 registered pooches, there are \$30,000 poodles and \$2,500 dachshunds.

In the realm of hobbies—after golf, swimming, tennis and various indoor sports such as bridge, gin rummy and canasta—the denizens of Beverly Hills are suckers for any new game, generally playing it for fantastic sums and with even more fantastic feuds afterward.

LIKE MOST SUCH WEALTHY developments, Beverly Hills has had a long, intricate and fascinating history behind its façades of greenery and stucco. After its discovery, the aborigines were chased off, and Beverly Hills was Mexican-granted to Maria Rita Valdez—a descendant of the original guide for the discoverers.

In 1822, it consisted of about 4,500 acres, watered by two streams from Benedict and Coldwater Canyon. It was called Rancho el Rodeo de las Aguas and covered roughly the present area of the city.

It developed slowly. By 1841, there were only 1,100 people in Los Angeles and about 30 in Beverly Hills. Used to graze black Mexican

cattle, the ranch was raided by Apaches in 1852, and three persons were killed on the site of the present women's club.

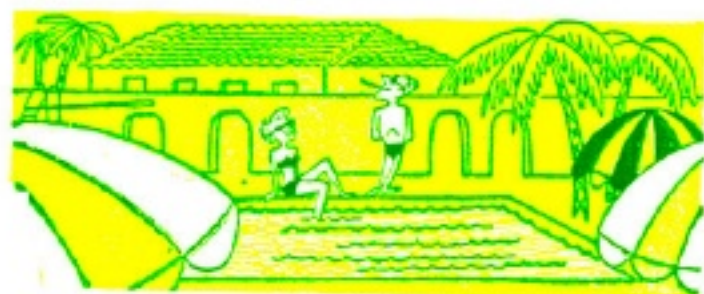
The ranch was sold two years later to a couple of Western entrepreneurs who paid \$500 in cash, \$500 in notes—and \$3,000, 27 years later. The deal started off a series of exploitations that included a brief oil-drilling craze and a sheep-raising fad.

In 1887, some land promoters took over and sold lots on the pledge that a canal would be dug from the middle of the "town" to the sea. The 1893 panic left a lonely railroad station standing in the midst of a vast field of wilted beans.

In 1906, the whole was purchased for \$670,000 by the Rodeo Land & Water Company and organized as "Beverly Hills" on January 23, 1907, in honor of Burton E. Green, president of the company, who named it after a place called Beverly Farms in Massachusetts.

The first private home was built in November of the same year by Henry C. Clarke, but development lagged until it was selected as a home-site by Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., and this started a fashionable boom. The building of the Pickfair mansion on the highest foothill overlooking the town was a great occasion. It was Doug who suggested a wall about the place to keep out *hoi polloi*.

From 1922 until 1930, Beverly Hills, like Florida, enjoyed an increasingly frenzied boom—population booming 2,486 per cent—which prompted Will Rogers to opine: "Everybody round here sells, nobody buys to keep. What's worrying me is who is going to be the



last owner." When Rogers himself settled down, he bought a ranch outside Beverly Hills proper.

When the Depression arrived, the town went through it with flying colors. It had surmounted a water problem by drilling its own wells; a cement plant had been excluded from the neighborhood; and the failure of one bank was offset by another that stubbornly refused to close its doors even at the admonition of the Government.

Stock brokers found the town a fertile pasture (there are now 20 of them). When a contracting firm complained it was losing \$54 on a \$75,000 contracting job, a city official dug down and paid the difference in cash on the spot.

In 1930, Beverly Hills claimed about 17,000 inhabitants—a number which has almost doubled in the last twenty years. Most of the motion-picture stars who built within its confines came there because they were attracted by the notion of having large estates within easy distance of the sea and the beaches. At a pleasant elevation of 200 to 961 feet above the waves, the sun was fine and smog was unknown.

Some of the settlers were George Burns and Gracie Allen (with her hundreds of bottles of rare perfumes), Edward G. Robinson (with his genuinely important collection of modern French painters), Joe E. Brown (with his special room of autographed athletic trophies), Ginger Rogers, Wallace Beery and Lionel Barrymore. Not all of these stayed, but a few old-timers still profit from their original real-estate investments in the area.

Some of the most spectacular estates remain, such as the 20-acre

Pickfair where Mary and her husband, Buddy Rogers, still live. The showplace, however, is still the estate of the bespectacled comedian, Harold Lloyd, the second largest in Southern California. Its 25-room house has 27 telephones, a stream for canoeing and a private nine-hole golf course.

Beverly Hills these days harbors more motion-picture executives than it does actors or actresses. The air of glamor which once invested the city has largely vanished, to be replaced by one of solid and secure prestige. Most of the present estates are in the foothills of the mountain backdrop, above Sunset Boulevard, one of the well-known streets of the U.S.

South of Sunset, the acreage is much less per house, but the architecture and landscaping is no less striking among the Beverly Hills "middle class." Still further south, below the streetcar lines of the Pacific Electric railway, lie smaller homes and apartments; and even below that the bungalows, more apartment houses and inferior rungs of town society.

The heterogeneous and marvelous architecture of Beverly Hills resembles that of a pastry chef gone mad. There is every possible range of style and treatment—from Provincial French, early American, Aztec, Egyptian, Roman, Southern plantation, Mediterranean, Spanish, Colonial, Georgian, and in more recent years a tendency toward cathedral and esoteric modern. Each is executed with finesse. The money lavished upon them is as apparent in the gimcrack work as it is in the rain-gutters.

The landscaping features a noticeable lack of any long-time

growth; there are few great trees except the originally-imported palms and eucalyptuses. The effects of quick massed growth and color are everywhere evident. Geraniums and multi-colored ivy are used for ground cover as much as lawn.

The children raised amid such a sumptuous atmosphere have a certain amount of precocity, and are far from unaware of their parents' fame, importance or wealth. Their audiences at the functions of the half-dozen private schools, four grade schools, the \$700,000 high school, and/or kindergartens are likely to represent assorted millions in talent or cash. A favorite rope-jumping rhyme that is currently popular among the small fry is: "Don't step on a crack, you'll break your mother's Cadillac!"

The younger daughter of a movie star once queried her mother about a friend: "How did she know she was going to have a baby?" The mother was left breathless by the response of her older child: "Silly! It was in Louella Parsons' column. She can read, can't she?"

The administration of Beverly Hills is done for love rather than money. Five councilmen are elected for either two or four years, and one serves as mayor. None is paid.

As a result of the sedulous conservatism of this continuing group, the town has a collection of extraordinary city ordinances. The law requires a lawn for each residence; no

tree may be chopped down on pain of imprisonment or fine; no "un-seemly" noises must be emitted after ten in the evening; FOR SALE signs in residential areas must not be larger than 10 by 20 inches.

According to the normal California complex, the weather of Beverly Hills is supposed to be sub-tropical ideal. The average is claimed to be 72 in the summer and 52 in the winter. Rainfall is estimated at 18 inches a year, but this is sometimes deceiving. Unindoctrinated residents have been known, on rising, to look out at the impeccable sunshine and shriek: "Another lovely day!"

Beverly Hills residents themselves sometimes complain about the effete life. Though their high school has a magnificent gymnasium with a swimming pool beneath a hydraulically-parted basketball floor, it seems that the pupils of the school are "too gently reared" to win football games.

Even though Christmas trees may be decorated with ermine tails at Yuletide and the apartments in one of the two great hotels of the town rent as high as \$1,000 to \$1,500 a month, Beverly Hills has no hospital. And there is not much spontaneous human nature present: few children are born in Beverly Hills, and the number of infants is said to be only half that of pets.

And, since the town has no cemetery, no one is buried there either.

👑👑👑 Coronet 👑👑👑

Endless Variety in Stories and Pictures

November, 1953

p. 113

OldMagazineArticles.com