



STAFF REPORT

Meeting Date: June 21, 2016

To: Honorable Mayor & City Council

From: Cheryl Friedling, Deputy City Manager

Subject: Request by Mayor Mirisch to Add a Nameplate Recognizing Will Rogers as Honorary Mayor of Beverly Hills to the "Recognition and Appreciation" Wall Listing of Beverly Hills Mayors in the City Hall Rotunda

Attachments:

1. Photo – Recognition and Appreciation Wall – Mayors (Early)
2. "The Lost History of Will Rogers" by Russ Levi

INTRODUCTION

Mayor Mirisch has requested that the City Council approve the installation of an engraved nameplate in the City Hall rotunda to commemorate Will Rogers as Honorary Mayor of Beverly Hills.

DISCUSSION

Will Rogers was an American cowboy, vaudeville performer, humorist, philosopher and actor. He traveled around the world, made 71 movies and penned over 4,000 nationally syndicated newspaper columns. Will Rogers was one of the most popular figures in the 1930s, earning wide-spread praise for his political wit and movies. His folksy style and anecdotes were appreciated by a national audience which allowed him to gently poke fun at gangsters, prohibition, politicians and other topical issues of the day.

Route 66, along with several statues, schools, airports and buildings are named after Will Rogers, including several in Oklahoma (his home state). In California, Will Rogers State Historic Park and Will Rogers State Beach are located in Pacific Palisades and there are several schools in California named in his honor.

In Beverly Hills, Will Rogers Memorial Park is located at Sunset Boulevard and Beverly Drive.

According to "The Lost History of Will Rogers" by Russ Levi (attached), Will Rogers moved to Beverly Hills in 1925, and along with Mary Pickford, became the city's chief promoters. As a result of press coverage resulting from their promotional efforts, a land

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boom and migration ensued. Rogers became more engaged in city government, helping to mobilize voters to oppose annexation of Beverly Hills by the City of Los Angeles.

As a result of his advocacy and promotion of the Beverly Hills community, the president of the Beverly Hills Board of Trustees named Rogers 'The Honorary Mayor of Beverly Hills' in either 1925 or 1926. Will Rogers was the only individual honored with this designation. Subsequently, the California Secretary of State declared that honorary titles were illegal and invalid.

FISCAL IMPACT

The only fiscal impact is the cost of casting a new brass nameplate and affixing it to the City Hall rotunda. It is anticipated that the costs would be \$200.

RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council provide direction to staff.

Cheryl Frieling
Approved By



Attachment 1

FRANK N. AULL
1919

MAYORS

SILSBY M. SPALDING
AUGUST 1927 - JULY 1929

PAUL E. SCHWAB
JULY 1929 - MARCH 1933

EDWARD E. SPENCE
MARCH 1933 - MAY 1941

JAMES L. KENNEDY
JUNE 1941 - APRIL 1942

ARTHUR L. ERB
APRIL 1942 - AUGUST 1945

EDWARD P. DENTZEL
SEPTEMBER 1945 - APRIL 1948

OTTO A. GERTH
APRIL 1948 - APRIL 1950

F. BRITTON McCONNELL
APRIL 1950 - MAY 1951

DEAN OLSON
MAY 1951 - APRIL 1952

DAVID TANNENBAUM
APRIL 1952 - MARCH 1953
JUNE 1954 - JULY 1957

FLOYD E. FISCHER
MARCH 1953 - MAY 1954
JULY 1957 - APRIL 1958

GENERAL HAROLD L. GEORGE
MAY 1954 - MARCH 1958
SEPTEMBER 1959 - JANUARY 1960

GEORGE W. DAVIS
MARCH 1955 - JUNE 1956
APRIL 1958 - SEPTEMBER 1959

HUGH W. DARLING
JANUARY 1960 - APRIL 1961

JACK FREEMAN
APRIL 1961 - APRIL 1962

GENERAL LEROY H. WATSON
APRIL 1962 - APRIL 1963

EUGENE W. GUNTHER
APRIL 1963 - APRIL 1964

LEONARD HORWIN
APRIL 1964 - APRIL 1965

FRANK CLAPP
APRIL 1965 - APRIL 1966
APRIL 1969 - APRIL 1970

JACOB M. (JAKE) STUCHEN
APRIL 1966 - APRIL 1967
APRIL 1970 - APRIL 1971

A. FREDRIC LEOPOLD
APRIL 1967 - APRIL 1968
APRIL 1971 - APRIL 1972

GEORGE SLAFF
APRIL 1968 - APRIL 1969
MARCH 1973 - MARCH 1974

RICHARD A. STONE
APRIL 1972 - APRIL 1973
MARCH 1977 - MARCH 1978

PHYLLIS SEATON
APRIL 1973 - MARCH 1974

APRIL 1990
APRIL 1995

VICKI RE
APRIL 1991 -

APRIL 1994 -
MARCH 2000 -

THOMAS S
APRIL 1996 - M

MARCH 1999 - M
MARCH 2003 - M

MERALEE GO
MARCH 1997 - MA
MARCH 2002 - MA

LES BRON
MARCH 1998 - MAR

MARK EGERN
MARCH 2001 - MAR
MARCH 2004 - MAR

LINDA J. BRISK
MARCH 2005 - MARC

STEPHEN P. WE
MARCH 2006 - MARCH

JIMMY DELSHA
MARCH 2007 - MARCH
MARCH 2010 - MARCH

BARRY BRUCKER
MARCH 2008 - MARCH
MARCH 2011 - MARCH

FRANK FENTON
MARCH 2009 - MARCH

NANCY KRASNE
MARCH 2009 - MARCH

WILLIAM W. BRIEN
MARCH 2012 - MARCH

Attachment 2

The Lost History of Will Rogers

Will Rogers was presented the title of "honorary mayor" when he lived in Beverly Hills. Beverly Hills, CA

By Russ Levi (Open Post) - October 10, 2011 5:10 am ET – Beverly Hills Patch



While doing research for a book featuring photographs and summaries of Beverly Hills Citizen archives, I discovered that, lost in history, Will Rogers' honorary Beverly Hills mayoral title was taken away from him. He also moved out of our beloved city during his later life. Why did this happen? Please read this story about one of our town's first residents to find out.

Known as Oklahoma's "favorite son," Rogers was born to a prominent Cherokee Nation family in Indian Territory (now a part of Oklahoma) in 1879. He traveled around the world three times and made 71 movies (50 silent films and 21 "talkies") during his career.

After spending 10 years in The Flo Ziegfield Follies, Rogers moved to Beverly Hills in 1925. He so loved the sparsely populated "Shangrila to the West of L.A." that his booking and business offices joined him here. When one peruses the pages of the Beverly Hills Citizen, it cannot be denied that almost every personal and political wisecrack that Rogers quipped was published. He also supported many community endeavors, including the erection of our first true civic center in the early 1930s as well as the development of our last remaining major piece of land into .

At the time, Beverly Hills was a quiet, leafy enclave several distant miles from Los Angeles. Wealthy residents owned both a car and one or two horses. Favorite horse

paths were found on both the "Strip Park" (now known as) along Santa Monica and Wilshire boulevards, at Reservoir Park (now), along Sunset Boulevard and on the median trail down the center of Rodeo Drive just north of the developing commercial district (the eventual Golden Triangle).

Both Will Rogers and "America's Sweetheart," resident and renowned actress Mary Pickford were, perhaps, the city's chief promoters. In 1919, a dozen years after northern streets were carved out by the Rodeo Land and Water Company, Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks bought land on Summit Drive and built "Pickfair."

In the early sixties, when my family owned the Beverly Hills Liquor Castle, this writer used to deliver merchandise to the estate for Pickford and her last husband, the quick-smiling Buddy Rogers. If I only knew then, sitting in her kitchen, to whom I was speaking...

With Rogers and Pickford attracting press to Beverly Hills, a mass migration followed some ten years after the city was incorporated. A wisecracking political humorist, Rogers wrote of the land boom in 1923:

Lots are sold so quickly and often out here that they are put through escrow made out to the 12th owner. They couldn't possibly make out a separate deed for each purchaser; besides, he wouldn't have time to read it in the 10 minutes' time he owned the land.

Because of Rogers and Pickford, the movie colony was well-entrenched in the community. By 1928 Harold Lloyd, John Barrymore, Robert Montgomery and Mary Hopkins had built residences here.

When Rogers became involved in local government the city received international advertising and the boom continued. The population in 1920 was 674; in 1924, it was 5,000; by 1930, it was 17,429. The issuance of building permits in 1918 totaled \$35,200; in 1919, \$304,900; in 1921, \$787,729; in 1922, \$1,838,994.

In 1923, annexation to the City of Los Angeles was proposed by council members. Rogers and Pickford helped to mobilize voters against the plan. Those for annexation argued that L.A. would provide an adequate supply of higher-quality water to support the community's continued growth. Pro-L.A. supporters left bottles of sulfur-smelling water on the doorsteps of every home in Beverly Hills with a label that read: "Warning. Drink sparingly of this water as it has laxative qualities."

Despite these campaign tactics, annexation was defeated in a referendum with a vote of 507 to 337. The following year, the city voted to approve \$400,000 in

bonds to purchase the water system from the Beverly Hills Utilities Company and drill additional wells.

This fight for an independent city was arguably the first union of show business and politics in the United States. Our first dedicated school building, Hawthorne School, soon opened, along with the incorporation of our own school district that separated us from L.A.

While filming a talkie in Washington, D.C., the U.S. House of Representatives declared Rogers a "Congressman at Large." Because he was one of our own, the president of the Beverly Hills Board of Trustees (there was no mayoral designation then) named Rogers the "Honorary Mayor of Beverly Hills," which was presented to him by S.M. Spalding. (Please note the spelling of "Spalding," as in Spalding Drive. People often mistakenly add a "u" when spelling that street name.)

Here's another error by historians: They sometimes write that Rogers received his honorary title in 1926, but the microfisch tapes of the Beverly Hills Citizen has articles that claim 1925! Rogers became the first and (to date) only person honored as such in Beverly Hills.

Unfortunately, and almost lost in distant history, a couple of years later when the California Secretary of State surprisingly declared such honors were illegal and invalid, both D.C. and Beverly Hills dropped Rogers' honorary titles. True to form, the comedian joked that he was thrilled that he got out of those offices "when the going was good."

In 1929, when horses were restricted to horse paths in Beverly Hills, Rogers moved out of town because he wanted to ride his horses "wild west style." He built a large ranch in Pacific Palisades—that still exists today—and lived there until his death at the young age of 56. Rogers died in a tragic plane crash with aviator Wiley Post near Barrow, Alaska in 1935.

Sunset Park, across Sunset Boulevard from the , was renamed in Rogers' honor in 1952. It is known as .

Thank you for reading, Russ.

