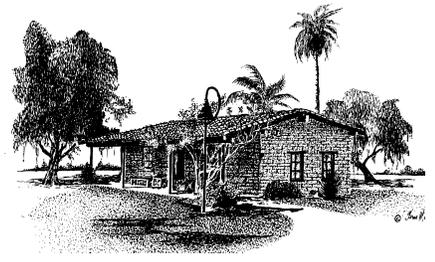


# Fairview Register

Monthly publication of the Costa Mesa Historical Society, a non-profit 501(c)(3)

MEMBER: CONFERENCE OF CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETIES, NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION, AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY



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NATIONAL HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

## The Life of Refugio "Ralph" Leon

History books don't always mention men like Refugio Leon. But thanks to a 2003 oral history at the Historical Society Museum, his story can be told.

Refugio's family moved to Costa Mesa's west side in 1922 when he was just a toddler. He lived in the city for 87 years before passing away in 2009.

His father had been a farmer in Arizona. In Costa Mesa, he first worked as a gardener for Fanny Bixby and Carl Spencer. Later, he farmed the mesa, too.

Life wasn't easy for the Leons, especially during the depression. The extended family (which included 19 kids) had no indoor plumbing, gas, or electricity. A wood stove provided heat, and they lit their house with coal oil lamps. With no ice box, they had to eat their food before it spoiled.

Refugio attended Main School until it was damaged by an earthquake in 1933. He finished his schooling at grade 8.

"You've got enough education as long as you can handle a pick and a shovel," his father said. "You can make a life. You've got to quit school and go to work."

So, he went to work for Japanese farmers on the west side like Bob Omori and George Inokuchi. Eventually he earned enough money to buy a '26 Chrysler, which he drove to the movie theater in Santa Ana in his scant free time.

In 1936, he met the love of his life, Mary Saragosa. The two married in 1940 and never parted for 69 years. Only death separated them.

When the US entered WWII, Refugio was working at Harvey Bear's farm near present-day South Coast Plaza. Refugio was a hard worker, so Bear secured him two deferments. But there was no delaying a third time. Refugio joined the army and

was immediately placed under the command of General Patton. He fought in the Battle of the Bulge, where he suffered a grave injury to his leg. He returned as a war hero honored with a purple heart.

Refugio convalesced in Long Beach, then returned to Costa Mesa where he began building a family. Life was still hard, but bit by bit things changed. They bought a TV around which neighbors gathered to watch the Sunday Night Movie. In 1952, he built a new house with all the modern conveniences – including, for the first time, indoor plumbing. Even so, his daughter still collected bottles for cash to buy movie tickets.

Refugio worked with Bear until the farmer moved away. He worked at a farm in Huntington Beach, then eventually he got a job at Cla-Val, where he stayed on for 35 years. That was where he earned his nickname, "Ralph."

"Haven't you got a different name besides [Refugio]?" someone asked. "It's pretty hard for me to pronounce, calling you Refugio."

It was Ralph after that.

In his retirement, Ralph was often seen in Lions Park, making friends with everyone he met. And, it's said, he put his farming skills to good use in his home garden.

His early years might have been hard, but he looked back on them fondly.

"The life nowadays is hurry, hurry, hurry, hurry, hurry and run here and run there and all that," he said. "Before, when we had hard times as kids, we just took it as it came. That's it."

*We'd love to hear and preserve more stories like this — yours, too. Give us a call if you'd like to share.*

OCTOBER EVENTS

### TOM TITUS, LEGENDARY THEATER CRITIC, OPENS SPEAKERS' SERIES

Our 2019-2020 Speaker Series kicks off with a bang as we're joined by legendary theater critic Tom Titus. Titus has written about local theater since 1965. And didn't just write about it. He performed in plays and directed them, too. He even performed in the first production of the Costa Mesa Civic Playhouse. Later, he served as the Irvine Community Theater's artistic director for 31 years. It's hard to imagine anyone who knows more about the theater than Tom Titus. If you love the performing arts, don't miss this.

**When:** 2 p.m., Sunday, October 20 **Where:** Historical Society Museum, 1870 Anaheim Ave.

### VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

Attention Local History Aficionados: Become a docent at the Diego Sepulveda Adobe in Estancia Park. We will train. Commitment is 2 hours per month.

For more information, please contact the society at 949.631.5918 or email us at cmhistory@sbcglobal.net.

OCTOBER CALENDAR

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
29	30	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31	1	2

Museum	Adobe	Speaker
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Promoting and preserving Costa Mesa's history is our mission

FAIRVIEW REGISTER, FAIRVIEW, LOS ANGELES COUNTY, CALIFORNIA, MARCH 2, 1889

# The Other Side of History

BY TESS BERNSTEIN

*Have you ever seen those TV shows that investigate hauntings? They always end up at the local historical society to research the history of the house or land. In fact, the West Coast wing of The Atlantic Paranormal Society (TAPS), the organization behind the hit TV show Ghost Hunters, once contacted the Costa Mesa Historical Society for info. But it's not just professional ghost hunters we hear from. We get lots of visits from regular Costa Mesans who want to know about the things that go bump in the night. This month we celebrate Halloween by sharing a few of the spooky inquiries we've gotten.*

## The Sisters

One day a call came into the society. Gladys answered the phone, and we overheard her becoming increasingly blunt. "Well, you will just have to come in," she said until she hung up. Later that day, two young sisters came in very upset wanting to know the history of their house. After we talked for a bit, they finally told me "the real reason" for their visit. Once while home alone they heard footsteps coming from upstairs and listened as the noise descended the stairway. Another day they heard the front door open and close and what sounded like keys thrown on to the counter. When they looked, no one was there, there were no keys, and the door was still locked.

## Theater Ghost Lady

A girl came into the society and wanted to know the history of the \_\_\_\_\_ movie theater because she believed it to be haunted. When she and her friend walked into theater 9 one day, they saw an older woman wearing 19th-century clothes. She appeared almost translucent, then, just like that, she vanished. For reasons of her own, the friend sat in the same seat the specter had occupied. It wasn't long before she felt ill and left. The girl stayed to finish the movie but found herself distracted by a bone-chilling cold around her seat, colder than the rest of the theater.

## Haunted Apartment

Once we received an email from a woman who didn't mince words about why she was inquiring. She lived in a fairly new apartment — so what were those strange noises she heard every night? She wondered if it was built on top of... something.

## DEA House

A young man came in one day and wanted information on the house he had just rented. We looked up his address and talked for a bit. Then he said, "Let me tell you the real reason I'm here." He had only lived there a short while when things seemed to fly off the shelves, and he heard strange noises and loud bangs. His wife and three kids were so frightened they didn't want to stay there alone. So these days what would you do? He Googled his house and found a photo of DEA agents swarming all over it. Could this be the source for the strange activity?



The Costa Mesa Historical Society has old phone books, newspapers, photos, and other databases available to help you answer both your normal and paranormal historical questions. Do you have unusual activity in your house? Knowing the history may shed some light. We'd love to hear your stories. Just tell me "the real reason why."

*Tess Bernstein is a long-time society volunteer and board member. She first got involved with the society to investigate her own haunted house.*

## More Haunted Places in Costa Mesa

There's no shortage of places in Costa Mesa that people believe are haunted. The October 27, 2006, *Orange County Register* lists a few:

**Costa Mesa City Hall** Some claim to have seen a ghost dressed as a 19th-century police officer at the building's entrance. Witnesses claim the Victorian is ticketing a "scantily clad" woman.

**Estancia High School** Many have reported crying babies and faulty light fixtures in the science department, as well as an extreme chill apparently unrelated to the school's subzero air conditioning. Others claim to hear athletic ghosts taking a dip in the pool or shooting hoops.

**South Coast Plaza** If it's 3 a.m. you may want to stay clear of Nordstrom's... unless you want to get hit by a flying mannequin.

# Society's Ghosts Wonder Where the Humans Are

By Bob Palazzola

*We knew that the need for volunteers was always an ongoing problem. However, I was surprised to find out that it was even a concern for ghosts of our building. Are you listening Tess?*

*The following article is from our Fairview Register newsletter as it appeared in the May 1989 issue, apparently written by one of our ghostly inhabitants.*

## "A Message From The Ghosts"

To be honest with you the ghosts are really inhabiting the Historical Society. We have a lot of fun with the many collections of happenings of Costa Mesa. Just wish more of those humans would show up and get things together so we don't get so mixed up sometimes. We know you humans get so busy making history you forget it needs to be sorted and put together, so even us ghosts can find what we want to read.

We saw in the newsletter last month a volunteer sign-up form was enclosed. Don't you humans read the newsletter?

Looking on the president's desk, only one person replied that they would help. Now you know that it takes more people to run this society of the city of Costa Mesa. The group has officers and Board members. According to the minutes, some of them even miss sometimes.

The quilts that are on display are sure pretty and nice to roll up in when we play. Only thing is we have a hard time getting them back hung up pretty like they are supposed to be for public to view. We thought about getting in the picture cards and messing them up, but the new shelves and picture storage is going to be so nice, we can find our ghost friends much easier.

I want to tell you that the ghosts of the Costa Mesa Historical Society really appreciate the work you humans are doing, but please hurry so we can find what we want to read. Somebody's coming... Good-bye.

## IMPORTANT: Society Elections of Officers and Board Members

November is fast approaching and so are our annual elections. This is where you, our members, have the opportunity to become a candidate or nominate another member for any of the following positions: President, 1st Vice President, 2nd Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and Board Director.

Our officers and board members can't leap tall buildings in a single bound, aren't faster than a speeding bullet, or more powerful than a locomotive.

They are just ordinary people from the community who are interested in preserving our local history. If you're interested or need more information, please call or stop by.

If you're not interested in any of the positions above, perhaps you would enjoy participating by being on one of our committees. Why not check us out? We could use you.

## Shop with us on Amazon

Every time you start your order with Amazon Smile, Amazon will donate to the Costa Mesa Historical Society – at no cost to you. Visit [costamesahistory.org/smile](http://costamesahistory.org/smile) before making your next purchase. You can use your existing Amazon account.

## Temporary Parking Instructions

Please note: entry to the historical society parking lot is currently limited to Anaheim Avenue.

## Dues Overdue?

Make sure your dues are up to date by looking at your **dues expiration date** on the address label to the right of your name. If your dues are due, renew online at [costamesahistory.org/membership](http://costamesahistory.org/membership), mail in a check, c/o Susan Weeks, Treasurer, or drop it off on a Thursday or Friday from 10am to 3pm. Membership dues are listed on the back page.

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\* Or schedule an appointment at 949-631-5918.

I N S I D E

Tom Titus Speaks • Refugio "Ralph" Leon  
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& More!

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**Membership Categories**

	<b>Annual</b>		<b>Lifetime</b>	
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Business and Professional	\$100.00			
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