



Notes from the Archive

Seaver Center for Western History Research
Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County
September 2020

Welcome to Notes from the Archive, a publication of the Seaver Center for Western History Research, a section of the History Department.
If you are informed by what you read here, please share it with a friend or colleague.

How in the world do people find the collections of the Seaver Center?

THE COLLECTIONS

The Seaver Center is in its ninth year as a member of the [Online Archive of California](#) (OAC) community. OAC is a freely accessible gateway to detailed collection information for more than 200 institutions including archives, historical societies, libraries, museums, and special collections throughout the state. The University of California's California Digital Library operates the OAC.



The California Digital Library is moving towards developing into a nationwide archival network, but in the meantime, the world can find us even if someone is unfamiliar with the OAC or does not enter through its front-door. For example, when keywords are entered into a web search engine, OAC entries may very well come up first, particularly if those keywords match a collection title. Christopher Dower in Ocean Grove, Victoria, Australia, found us earlier this summer.

THE RESEARCHER

Here is Christopher Dower's research story.

It all started with my interest in Triumph sports cars. After owning and restoring a series of Triumphs over my lifetime, in 1998 I purchased a very sorry looking Triumph TR8 convertible from a dealer in Adelaide, South Australia. The TR8 had recently been imported from California. I set about completely rebuilding the car to something approaching "as new" condition. When I sold the car to another Triumph enthusiast three years ago, I retained some mementos of the rebuild and one of them was the original California license plate, or number plate, as we would say in Australia. The number plate surround has the name "Hollywood Sport Cars" emblazoned on it, so being curious by nature, I started to undertake some research into Hollywood Sport Cars on the internet.



Christopher Dower



TR8 Number Plate



Car photo taken during a Royal Australian Flying Doctor Service fundraising event

A fascinating story started to emerge!

Hollywood Sport Cars was operated by the Vandagriff family at 5766 Hollywood Boulevard from 1960 until 1993. They reputedly became the second largest Ferrari dealer in the world after commencing with British Marques in 1960. It was interesting to note that many celebrities had patronized HSC over the years, including Steve McQueen, the Rolling Stones, Alice Cooper, and someone called Elvis.

I had commenced my research by using Google maps to look up the current site at 5766 Hollywood Boulevard. What a disappointment! The site was clearly past its best and is in fact in the process of being re-developed. My curiosity about the history of the site was quickly rewarded when I discovered that the original building was built for a local celebrity auto racer/dealer Ralph C. Hamlin.

The building was designed by Morgan, Walls and Clements in 1924 and featured a "cast stone Churrigueresque surround flanked by perforated bond brick grills." The architectural firm was apparently famous in LA for their work in designing a range of significant buildings in the city... Unfortunately the original building was damaged in the 1994 Northridge earthquake.

Naturally, I wanted to see what the original building looked like and so I followed an internet trail that led me to the Seaver Center for Western History Research at the Natural Museum of Los Angeles County. I discovered that the Museum held a Ralph C Hamlin Collection and so, I e-mailed the Seaver Center and was fortunate to make contact with Betty L Uyeda, the Collections Manager. Betty was very helpful and she soon sent me some photos of the original building at 5766 Hollywood Boulevard and what a joy it was for me to be able to reach back over time to see the commencement of the auto dealers' presence on the site.



Photo at left and below from the Ralph Hamlin Collection

P-115-4-222 no. 17



Photo dated circa 1950s shows the building to have seen better days. P-115-6-351

Further research yielded many historic photographs of Hollywood Boulevard and the many iconic places/events/buildings that have passed through the pages of history. Growing up in Australia during the 1950s, our culture was significantly influenced by events in the US and being able to establish a personal link, however tenuous, with this period was personally enriching for me.

This research has been made very easy, due to the wealth of information that has been recorded and preserved in institutions such as the Seaver Centre. Having an interest in History and wanting to know a little more about how we got to be where we are now, helps us all!!

As a retired High School Principal, I had participated in, used and initiated Research to help guide my professional work over my career. I am now firmly of the view that Research is for everyone, everyday! In my case, it was enormously satisfying to be able to use the resources available, to anyone with an Internet connection and some time, to develop a more complete and enriched

understanding of the important things in my world.

PS I am still searching for a photo/s of the Hollywood Sport Cars building in the period 1960 - 1993.

Christopher Dower July 2020.



Plan your research visit

Call 213.763.3359 or

Email seavercenter@nhm.org

Limited services are available while the Seaver Center is closed until further notice

The Collections

[Search the Online Archive of California](#)

Over 370 general collections

Over 290 photographic collections

Digitized Collections

[Search over 34,000 images](#)

The collections are a part of the History Department of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.

The Seaver Center opened in 1986 through a generous grant from the Seaver Institute.



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