



# EAGLE ROCK VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Spring, 2022

## Auto Service in Eagle Rock A Zoom Tour of Eagle Rock's Automotive Businesses

Although Eagle Rock's development was made possible by the construction of the L.A. Railway in 1906, our long romance with the automobile began soon after. Beginning as a rich man's plaything, the car increasingly became an everyday desire and necessity for life in far-flung Los Angeles. The privacy and convenience of the personal car overshadowed and eventually totally replaced the extensive local and interurban rail networks that made Los Angeles' development possible.

The fragile nature and constant needs for fuel, oil, tires and water made the corner service station a necessity. Many car enthusiasts opened small businesses to provide these and other mechanical services. The story inside this issue outlines the changes in these services over the years at Juett Clements Lenny, the largest independent, family-owned service station in early Eagle

Rock. Many others came and went over the years.

We will take a Zoom tour along Colorado Boulevard and look into the auto facilities past and present along the route on April 19 at 7:00 P.M. A link will be posted on our website and in our email blast.

During the bulk of the twentieth century, automotive services were the dominant type of businesses along Colorado Boulevard. Beginning with sales out of garages, car dealerships grew. By the 1960s, dealerships were by far the largest businesses on the Boulevard. The dual nature of the Boulevard as our main street and a vital link in regional transportation drove this development. This combined with the then-substantial undeveloped space in the areas between concentrations of hometown service businesses encouraged highway-oriented development. Dealerships finally left the area when their need for space exceeded that available.

Beginning late in the twentieth century, the need for automotive services had declined causing many of the small service businesses to close. Retail had also evolved toward larger centralized malls, still oriented toward the car and often physically discouraging access by any other means.

Countering this concentration was the desire by many to re-emphasize the hometown services provided by the Boulevard. Efforts were made to encourage pedestrian oriented businesses. The revitalization of the Boulevard occurred but paradoxically, the primary means of access to these businesses continued to be the private car. Fuel and mechanical services thus remained a vital part of the urban mix.

**GAS, LUBE, OIL, TIRES, REPAIRS**  
**AUTO SERVICE IN EAGLE ROCK**

**COMPLETE ZOOM THE BOULEVARD**  
**WITH ERIC WARREN**  
**TUESDAY**  
**APRIL 19, 7:00**  
**EAGLE ROCK**  
**VALLEY**  
**HISTORICAL**  
**SOCIETY**

**GASOLINE**  
**GREASE**  
**OIL**  
**TIRE**  
**WASH**  
**BATTERY**  
**SERVICE**

Kinney & Guerry Matchbook  
VISIT OUR WEBSITE [EAGLEROCKHISTORY.ORG](http://EAGLEROCKHISTORY.ORG)

## Hello, Eagle Rock!

Thank you, ERVHS Members, for your continued support.

If you missed our February general meeting presentation, here's a short link: <https://bit.ly/36ONq3f>, Access Passcode: +Z\$0uHtd.

This month I would like to highlight some of the projects that members of Eagle Rock Valley Historical Society have been working on recently. Our Treasurer Katie Taylor, our Vice President and Archivist Eric Warren and myself have continued our collaborative work on the NELA (North-East LA) Leadership Group. This group is comprised of Highland Park Heritage Trust, Occidental College (Special Collections and College Archives, as well as the History Department) and ourselves. The group recently celebrated our ten-year anniversary, but also said goodbye to Oxy's driving force, Dale Stieber. She retired as the head of Occidental College's Special Collections and College Archives on January 6th, but also gave up the reigns to the group. We will miss Dale, but wish her well in retirement. The most visible facet of NELA Leadership Group collaborations, at least to our members, is the care and scanning of old NELA newspapers, including the Eagle Rock Sentinel and Eagle Rock Advertiser. We are happy to report that Occidental College has agreed to house the NELA newspapers in their library building, starting in November 2022. Hopefully we can now concentrate on getting more issues scanned. Other facets include working together on NELA Stories, which is recordings of long-time residents or otherwise notable people, and community outreach. We have some other interesting collaborative projects brewing, so stay tuned!

We all have noticed that gasoline prices have gone to record levels in very recent weeks, so it seems very timely to delve into the history of gasoline stations along Colorado Blvd and Eagle Rock Blvd (known as Central Ave before 1923). Over one hundred years ago, gas stations didn't look the way that they do now – in fact the first car owners in the area had to go to hardware stores and early mechanics to get gasoline. Our VP and Chief Archivist, Eric Warren, will show us some photos of how Eagle Rock's gas

station landscape changed over the years. One of the earliest gas stations still exists at 1659 W. Colorado Blvd, and is currently for sale along with the old Clairville Plumbing building. This gas station building is from 1919 and was moved to its present location in 1931, making it one of the oldest still-standing gas stations within car-centric Los Angeles!

That's all for now – I hope to see you at either our general meeting on April 19th, 2022 @ 7pm and/or our Ice Cream Sundae, Sunday August 7th, 2022 – more details later!

**David Dellinger, President**  
Eagle Rock Valley Historical Society



QR CODE

Scan to access our website with your phone.

The objectives of the Eagle Rock Valley Historical Society

- to preserve, clarify through research and to perpetuate the history of Eagle Rock Valley
- to make this history available to students, researchers, libraries and all interested persons
- to preserve and protect our local landmarks, especially the Eagle Rock

Membership is open to all who would further these objectives

Public Archive Hours 10 to 12 every Saturday  
at the Center for the Arts, Eagle Rock  
2225 Colorado Blvd. Eagle Rock CA 90041  
for information call 323-257-1357

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Layout, David McNutt  
Contributors, Katie Taylor, David Dellinger

Visit our website at:  
[eaglerockhistory.org](http://eaglerockhistory.org)

**If your mailing label dates before 2022, it's time to renew your membership. Please take a moment and mail your check now. A dues form and envelope are included with this newsletter.**

**Thanks, We depend on you**



# Pumping Gas at Age 12

by Rick Clements

Editors note: The reprinting of this article was suggested by Melody Peterson, longtime editor of this newsletter. It appeared here in 2004.

In the summer of 1950 at the age of 12 and grossly overpaid at 15 cents an hour, I began working at the Texaco Station and Garage on the corner of Colorado Boulevard and Shearin Avenue in Eagle Rock.

My employers were my father and Fred Lenney owners of the business since 1928.

A lot had changed in the previous 22 years. The streets were now paved; Mr. Lenney no longer overhauled engines and transmissions; and my father no longer vulcanized retreads.

One of the original owners, Mr. Juett, had gone on to pursue a teaching career, but the name, Juett Clements Lenney, never changed.

During the war, they sold refrigerators and washing machines out of the west wing of the property, and before that they repaired bicycles. But if there were changes from 1928 until 1950, they were nothing compared with the changes that have taken place in the industry since then.

In 1950, self-service gasoline was illegal in Los Angeles so we washed windshields: checked tires, oil, water, bat-

The beginning of the business, George Juett's Eagle Rock Tire shop. It was located on the south side of Colorado Boulevard at 2114. The building still exists much modified.

(ERVHS-Juett)



The author, Rick Clements in 2004. Clements died December 26, 2011. (ERVHS- Marcyn Clements)

tery, and pumped the gas. There was no such thing as gasoline nozzles that automatically shut off when the tank was full. Instead, the attendant had to bend an ear to the fill pipe and listen for the gurgling sound that indicated the tank was getting full.

As a neophyte attendant, I got more than one earful of regurgitated gasoline until I got the hang of it. Fortunately, about half the customers declined a fill-up and requested something like 82 cents worth or five gallons. When it came time to pay, plastic credit cards with magnetic strips had yet to be invented. Credit cards in those days were cardboard. The attendant wrote the credit card number; customer name and address; and the amount charged in an invoice book and gave the customer his receipt (often smudged from greasy fingers). Juett Clements Lenney even carried the credit of a few customers, a practice begun during the lean years of World War II.

During the war, gasoline was rationed and the hours of operation were pared back to 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, closed Saturday at one in the afternoon, and closed on Sunday. After the war, my father and Mr. Lenney saw no reason to expand the hours. They valued their time at home with their families, and the



## Our Town, Our History

Juett Clements Lenney around 1930; note the tower of the original fire station 42 in the background. (ERVHS-Peggy Lenney)



Rick Clements, Fred Lenney and George Juett around 1930. (ERVHS-Marcyn Clements)

customers seemed to accept that.

There were only two grades of gasoline then and, of course, they both contained lead. At Texaco, the regular and ethyl were called Fire Chief and Sky Chief, and the price differential was three cents. Unless there was a gas war, the prices were 26.9¢ and 29.9¢. Motor oil was quite often sold at the gas pumps, and ours was in one-quart bottles that we refilled from 55-gallon drums. It was several years later that we began using oil in cans.

One of the most unfortunate changes that has taken place today is the impersonal nature of the business. In 1950, most of our customers were regular. By the end of that first summer, I knew many of them by name and a little about their lives, and they knew me. The buying and selling of gasoline was a friendly and pleasant transaction.

Cars in those days had service intervals that seem unbelievable today. Oil change and lubrication were recommended every 1000 miles or 30 days, whichever came first. Oil filters were changed every other time.

Lubrication service consisted of pumping grease into fittings on the suspension system, oiling the rear leaf springs, checking all fluid levels, removing squeaks from doors and other moving parts, and cleaning all windows and vacuuming the interior. For this we charged \$1.25. Oil was 35 cents per quart.

Front wheel bearings were cleaned and repacked

every 5000 miles for \$3. Instead of air filters, there were devices called air cleaners that trapped foreign particles in an oil bath. These were usually serviced every 4000 miles depending on the type of driving that had been done.

The differential and manual transmission fluid was changed every 10,000 miles. Lubrication was such an important part of our business that our longtime employee, Howard Basham, did nothing else, and my mother (Frances), who acted as our bookkeeper, set up a system that enabled her to send out reminder post-cards to our customers. The garage was located on the east portion of the property and could accommodate six cars. Fred Denney, the most cheerful person I have ever known, was the master mechanic.

The most frequently performed services were tune-ups and brake relines. Brakes wore out on cars at about the same rate they do today, and brake mileage was completely a function of driver habits, as it is today.

Cars needed tune-ups about once a year for maximum performance. To do engine diagnosis and tune-ups, the only specialized tools required in addition to the normal wrenches and screwdrivers were a feeler gauge, timing light, and a tool to set the gap on spark plugs. Today, with computer-controlled engines and the extra requirement to perform smog certification, specialized tools can run a mechanic over \$70,000.

In addition to being responsible for the business operation, my father sold the tires and repaired flats. If a customer drove carefully, he could expect to get

## Our Town, Our History



Juett Clements Lenney in 1960. (Peggy Lenney-ERVHS)



Fred Lenney around 1970 just before his retirement and the sale of the property. (Peggy Lenney-ERVHS)



Jim's Burgers, now Oinkster, in 1988. (Eric Warren photograph-ERVHS)

around 30,000 miles on a set of tires that cost about \$30 each for the better ones. Of course, one also had to purchase a tube (tubeless tires were a few years off). Tires did not have the interior steel belts they do today, and tire fractures were somewhat common, particularly if cars were driven on dirt roads. Sadly, they were only repairable in about half the cases.

I worked at the station that summer of 1950 and every summer through college. After I got out of the Marine Corps, I worked there fulltime for about a year while trying to figure out what I wanted to do in life.

Mr. Lenney retired in the early '60s, and my father finally retired in 1970 and sold the property. The old Spanish-style adobe buildings were razed and an eating establishment (Jim's Burgers) was built.

Over the years, there have been incredible changes in the gasoline and automotive service business. But the one thing that never changed at Juett Clements Lenney in its 42 years in Eagle Rock was the commitment on the part of the owners and employees to provide customers with the best possible service at the fairest prices and to participate in the affairs of the community.





at the Center for the Arts, Eagle Rock  
2225 Colorado Blvd. Eagle Rock CA, 90041

**GAS, LUBE, OIL, TIRES, REPAIRS  
AUTO SERVICE IN EAGLE ROCK  
TUESDAY, APRIL 19, 2022 7:00**

**ICE CREAM SOCIAL  
FRIENDSHIP, MUSIC, PRIZES  
SUNDAE, AUGUST 7, 2022, 1:00 ?**

**ERVHS ANNIVERSARY BANQUET ?  
CELEBRATING 61 HISTORIC YEARS  
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2022 6:00**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Category:

Individual \$20    Business \$35    **New**

Family \$25    Life \$300    **Renewal**

Will you help with the ongoing activities of the ERVHS ?

Yes    No

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Publicity    Displays    to help

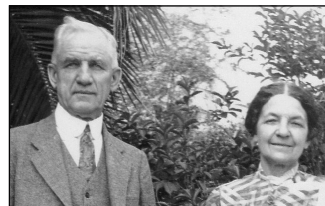
Other \_\_\_\_\_

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Clip and mail to: **ERVHS**  
**c/o Center for the Arts**  
**2225 Colorado Blvd.**  
**Eagle Rock, CA 90041**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Member's Corner



### The Harsh Family

Although Sandy Harsh Soutar no longer resides in Eagle Rock, she was born and raised here. Eagle Rock is at the core of her family's history spanning almost 100 years.

She generously shared her family's stories.

In 1916 Charles and Bertha Harsh moved to Eagle Rock from the mid-west for health reasons. In 1919 they bought what was then the Parker Estate, a plot of land that extended from Hill Drive to Colorado Blvd. They sold off some of the property, built a new home, and settled in for the next 97 years! Sandy's father, Richard, and his siblings were raised there. After WW II, Richard returned home, married Barbara and began to raise his own family. Sandy and her five sisters attended Dahlia Heights Elementary and Eagle Rock High School. Sandy remembers raising chickens at home and selling the eggs to her teachers at Dahlia!

After decades of memories, the passing of Richard in 1994, and of Barbara in 2006, the Harsh Estate sat empty. Sandy and her sisters had started their own lives and families outside of Eagle Rock. They tackled generations' worth of "attic treasures" on the property, held a big family reunion, and sold the estate in 2016. "Eagle Rock is inside of me," Sandy told me. "it was a huge part of how we developed and who we became. We all have strong emotional ties to Eagle Rock." Thank you for sharing with us, Sandy!

—Katie Taylor