

Boulder-born O'Brien a silent-film star

by Silvia Pettem

Eugene O'Brien was a dapper and debonair star of Broadway theater and silent films. Although he died in 1966, he's still one of our neighbors, buried with his parents and brother in Green Mountain Cemetery.

In 1902, O'Brien accepted a minor acting role in a stock company at Elitch Gardens in Denver. Before long, the handsome 21-year-old University of Colorado medical school drop-out moved to New York City where his rich baritone voice eventually landed him the part of a Hungarian soldier in a quartet in a vaudeville play.

"Less than three months ago, the name of Eugene O'Brien had about as much significance for Broadway theatergoers as that of the most obscure actor in some far-off rural community," wrote a New York critic in 1909. "Yet, in one single night, he [O'Brien] achieved a success, the glory of which must ring in his ears yet."

O'Brien then left the theater and moved up the silent-film ladder. Family and friends in Boulder got to see him perform when he appeared in his first silent film, "The Lieutenant Governor," shown in February 1915 at the Curran Theater, the site of the Boulder Theater on 14th Street.

Before long, O'Brien was one of an all-star cast headed by the well-known actress Ethel Barrymore. He then co-starred with early film favorites Mary Pickford, Norma Talmadge, and Gloria Swanson. He was insured for a million dollars, received "an almost unbelievable salary," and was appearing in moving pictures all over the world.

A local reporter interviewed O'Brien on a visit to Boulder, en route from Hollywood to New York. The movie star said that he had noticed many improvements in Boulder and that walking the streets made him feel like a boy again. He also stated that he was anxious to return to the "legitimate stage" and preferred acting before an audience to being in films.

By 1928, during the era that "talkies" made their debut, he left the movie industry for good. The next year, he moved into a Hollywood hacienda, telling a reporter that he was "untroubled by girls and reveling in athletics, gardening, and most of all in bachelorhood."

O'Brien made his final visit to Boulder in 1952 for the funeral of his brother George. But Boulder obviously stayed in the mind of this native son. When he died at the age of 85, his body was returned to Boulder and interred in his family plot. Walk down and visit him sometime.

Silvia Pettem's latest book, "Positively Pearl Street: A Chronicle of the Center of Boulder, Colorado, 1859 to Present," is available at local bookstores and at www.silviapettem.com



Silent film star and Boulder native Eugene O'Brien, left, is buried in Green Mountain Cemetery.

2nd Quarter Neighborhood Real Estate Market Watch, April 1st-June 30th

SALE PENDING		CURRENTLY AVAILABLE	
2255 Mariposa Ave.....	\$599,000	525 20th St.....	\$879,000
1507 Bluebell Ave.....	\$849,000	1505 Bluebell Ave.....	\$950,000
1401 Mariposa Ave.....	\$2,500,000	1405 Bellevue Dr.....	\$989,500
HOMES SOLD		1320 Bluebell Ave.....	\$1,235,000
1901 Columbine Ave.....	\$557,500	1345 Mariposa Ave.....	\$1,495,000
285 Fair Place.....	\$782,000	1480 Sierra Dr.....	\$1,595,000
1502 Columbine Ave.....	\$810,000	520 14th St.....	\$1,995,000
525 13th St.....	\$1,407,000	690 11th St.....	\$2,249,000
1901 BLUEBELL Ave..	\$1,500,000	2010 Mariposa Ave.....	\$2,299,000
600 11th St.....	\$2,595,400	1498 King Ave.....	\$2,490,000
		265 Bellevue Dr.....	\$2,490,000
		1529 Columbine St.....	\$2,995,000
		1480 Bellevue Dr.....	\$3,550,000
		35 Bellevue Dr.....	\$3,995,000

Quarterly Comparison	2nd Qtr-2008	vs.	2nd Qtr-2007
# of Homes Sold.....	6 homes		6 homes
Average Price.....	\$1,275,316		\$779,390
Median Price.....	\$810,000		\$570,910
Average Price/sqft.....	\$392/sqft		\$265/sqft
Avg. Days on Mkt.....	139days		91days
Purchase Price to List Price.....	102% avg.		98% avg
Lowest Price.....	\$557,500		\$496,935
Highest Price.....	\$2,595,400		\$1,570,000

Information from IRES Multiple Listing Service deemed reliable but not guaranteed

GOODACRE & CO
REAL ESTATE

jon hatch, broker associate, GRI, ABR
2450 broadway
boulder, colorado 80304

desk 303.449.3434x117
cell 303-513-2834
www.goodacreproperties.com
www.jonhatch.net
hatch@goodacreproperties.com