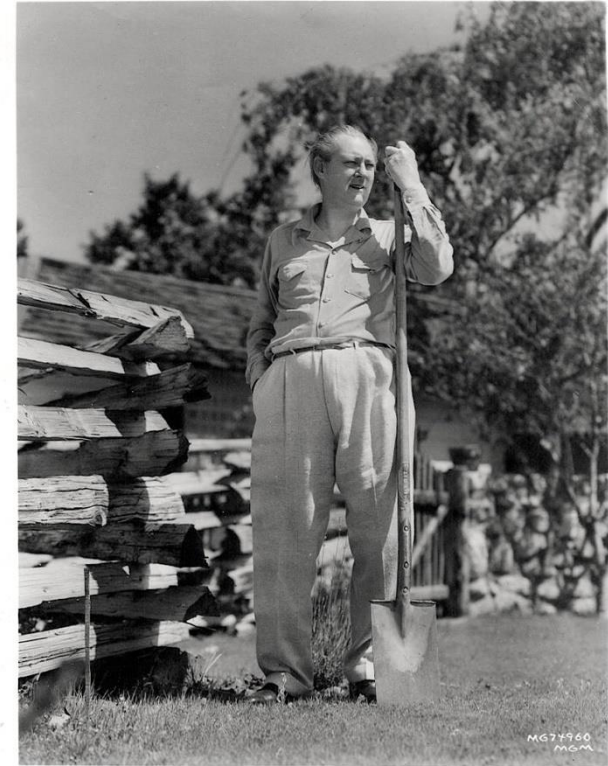


## Chatsworth Celebrities Lionel Barrymore

# Chatsworth Celebrities – Lionel Barrymore

- Lionel Barrymore (1878-1954) was a member of the theater’s “royal family” of Barrymores – Lionel, Ethel and John.
- His parents were Maurice Barrymore and Georgiana Drew, reigning stage stars of their day that came to America in the 1870’s and performed *Hamlet* in New York, also performing in London often.
- While Lionel’s parents traveled to their performances, the three children lived with their grandmother in various great houses in Philadelphia.
- All of the children were well educated in the arts and theatre.
- In 1938, at the age of 60, Lionel purchased 22 acres in Browns Canyon at 11050 Independence Ave, Chatsworth.
- Lionel was Honorary Mayor of Chatsworth in 1952, and died of a heart attack in 1954 at the age of 76.
- Lionel is the great-uncle of Drew Barrymore, who had a breakout role as a child actress in *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), which had scenes filmed in nearby Porter Ranch.



Lionel Barrymore at his Chatsworth Ranch, photo courtesy of Jerry England

# Chatsworth Celebrities – Lionel Barrymore

- From Lionel's 1951 autobiography, 'We Barrymores', "*his father had been middleweight amateur boxing champion of England in an era when fighters did not wear pillows on their hands*".
- His father: "*Maurice was a wit and a talented performer to whom there were two abiding mysteries in life: he never correctly estimated either his bank account or his capacity to hold liquor*".
- His father introduced Lionel to Mr. Clemens (Mark Twain). "*Lionel proceeded to recite paragraphs of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn to Mark Twain, to the point that at the end of his recital there were tears in Twain's eyes.*"

Georgie Drew Barrymore, with her three children, Ethel, Lionel and John



# Lionel Barrymore's early career

- Lionel made his debut on the New York Stage at 15 (1893) in "*The Rivals*," in which his grandmother, Louisa Lane Drew, played Mrs. Malaprop. "I stunk," Lionel opined afterward, and he recalled that his grandmother left him a note telling him regretfully he was "somewhat inadequate" and was no longer needed in the cast.
- Later she told him to continue on the stage.
- Lionel said in later years he had "no stomach" for the stage but became an actor because it seemed the easiest way to make a living.

An 1887 portrait in the Library of Congress of Louisa Lane Drew as Mrs. Malaprop in "*The Rivals*"



# Lionel Barrymore's stage career

- Lionel had a very successful stage career, with 40 different stage appearances, from 1893 to 1925.
- Most of the performances were on Broadway in New York, many of them running for over 100 performances over multiple years.

In 1918 Lionel Barrymore appeared in "*The Copperhead*" as Milt Shanks, which ran for 120 performances at the **Shubert Theatre** on Broadway in New York



# Lionel Barrymore's silent film career

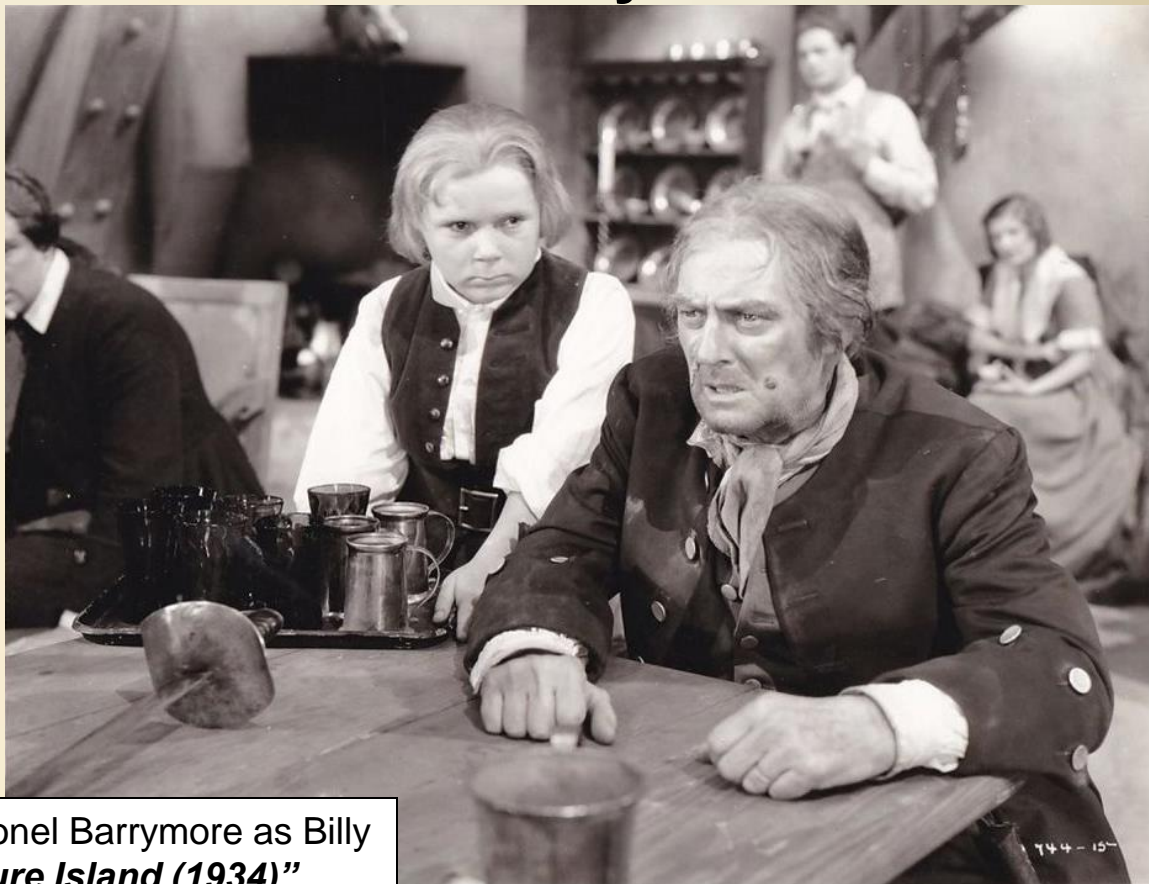
- During his stage career, he began working at Biograph Studios in New York with D. W. Griffith.
- One of his first silent movies was "***The New York Hat (1912)***", with Mary Pickford and Lillian Gish.
- He also was in "***Judith and Bethulia (1914)***" that was filmed in Chatsworth.

A screenshot of the Biograph short (sixteen minutes) "***The New York Hat (1912)***" showing Mary Pickford and Lionel Barrymore



# Lionel Barrymore's career in Hollywood

- In 1925, he left the theatre, signing a contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. He would become good friends with Louis B. Mayer.
- He made an easy transition to talking movies in 1929 because of his stage training.
- He preferred movies to stage acting, "it was much easier and you didn't have to memorize your lines".



Jackie Cooper and Lionel Barrymore as Billy Bones in "*Treasure Island (1934)*"

# Lionel Barrymore's career in Hollywood

- He appeared in a total of 131 silent movies, and 82 talking movies, for a total of 213.
- He is given credit for inventing the boom microphone, saying “why don't you put it on the end of a fishing pole?”
- **“Captains Courageous”** would be the last picture with Barrymore standing.



Mickey Rooney, Lionel Barrymore (as the captain)  
Spencer Tracy, and Freddie Bartholomew in  
**“Captains Courageous (1937)”**



# 1936, a catastrophic year, at the age of 58

- Lionel broke his hip as he leaned on a drafting board, upset it, tripped and fell. After a slow recovery, he gradually learned to walk a little. Then in 1937, while working on the movie *Saratoga* with Clark Gable, he tripped over a sound cable, fell heavily and snapped his hip again. As he said in his autobiography, “this time I did not come out on my feet”.
  - Walking was difficult and dangerous for him, and he chose to confine himself to a wheelchair for the rest of his life.
  - Louis B. Mayer instructed his MGM writers to invent scenes for Lionel where he did not have to walk; he could sit behind desks, he could act in beds, he could be in a wheelchair.
  - He ended up making over forty movies after the second accident.

# Lionel Barrymore's career in Hollywood

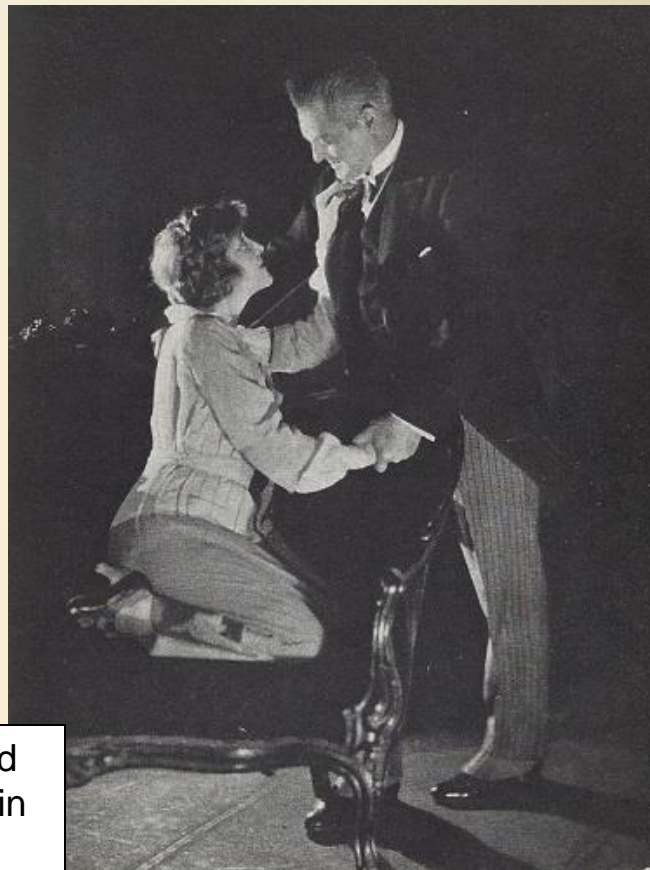
- He became best known as a grumpy and irritable character actor.
- He also performed on CBS radio as Ebenezer Scrooge from 1934 to 1953, broadcast annually on Christmas Day.

Lionel Barrymore (as Henry F. Potter in a wheelchair) and James Stewart in *"It's a Wonderful Life (1946)"*



# Lionel Barrymore's personal life

- In 1904 at the age of 26, Lionel married Doris Rankin who was 16.
- They went to Paris where Lionel studied art for two years.
- They had two daughters, neither of which survived infancy.
- In 1923 Lionel married his second wife Irene Fenwick.
- In 1926 they built a 10 room house at 802 No. Roxbury Drive in Beverly Hills.



Irene Fenwick and  
Lionel Barrymore in  
the Claw 1921

# Lionel Barrymore's personal life

- Lionel's second wife, Irene Fenwick, died on Christmas Eve in 1936 at the age of 49, at their home for 10 years at Roxbury Drive in Beverly Hills. Irene had been unwell for many years.
  - Lionel mentions in his autobiography that he and Irene were no contribution to the night-life side of Hollywood.
  - During Irene's illness they became close friends with Mrs. Mary Ellen Wheeler and her three daughters, Violet, Florence and Murdie (Florence and Murdie were registered nurses). As Irene's illness became worse, the Wheelers were often at the Roxbury home.
  - *"Their presence and friendship is one of the blessings that have been showered on me, one of the arrangements made from above, for they were with me in the garden on the afternoon of Christmas Eve, 1936, when Irene suddenly died."*

# Lionel Barrymore's personal life

- *“I was supposed to go on the radio in ‘A Christmas Carol’ the next day. Jack (John) took my place.... I went home with the Wheelers. I never returned to Roxbury Drive.”*

A recent photo of 800 (was 802) North Roxbury Drive, Beverly Hills. Zillow has the estimated value at \$10 Million, 5,709 sqft. on ½ acre with a swimming pool, ten rooms, two-stories with Spanish tile, built in 1926.



# Lionel Barrymore's personal life

- *When Irene died, so did Lionel Barrymore. Unable to stay at the Roxbury Drive house, the Wheeler's moved him in with them. He took only his personal belongings with him, while the rest of Roxbury remained intact.*
- *Irene's personal items remained as she had left them. Lionel retained a caretaker to mow the lawn and trim the bushes and a housekeeper to keep the inside cleaned, dusting the rooms and polishing the brass door knocker. He turned 802 North Roxbury Drive into a shrine to Irene.*
- *He would never live in the house again, though he would visit and remember his lost love. Since it kept her memory alive for him, he couldn't bring himself to sell it.*
- *Keeping the Roxbury Drive Memorial drained his wallet and in 1949, thirteen years after his wife's death, he was forced to sell the house and all of Irene's treasures to pay back taxes.*

# Sycamore Woods - 11050 Independence Ave

- In April 1939, Lionel announced his purchase of 22 acres in Chatsworth.

## **Barrymore Buys Ranch.**

The mania for ranching has caught up all the stars, even Lionel Barrymore. But the grand old veteran declares he'll be different in one respect, at least—he'll raise nothing but sagebrush, jack-rabbits, sycamores and live-oaks. Recently Barrymore moved from Malibu to a 22-acre parcel near Chatsworth.

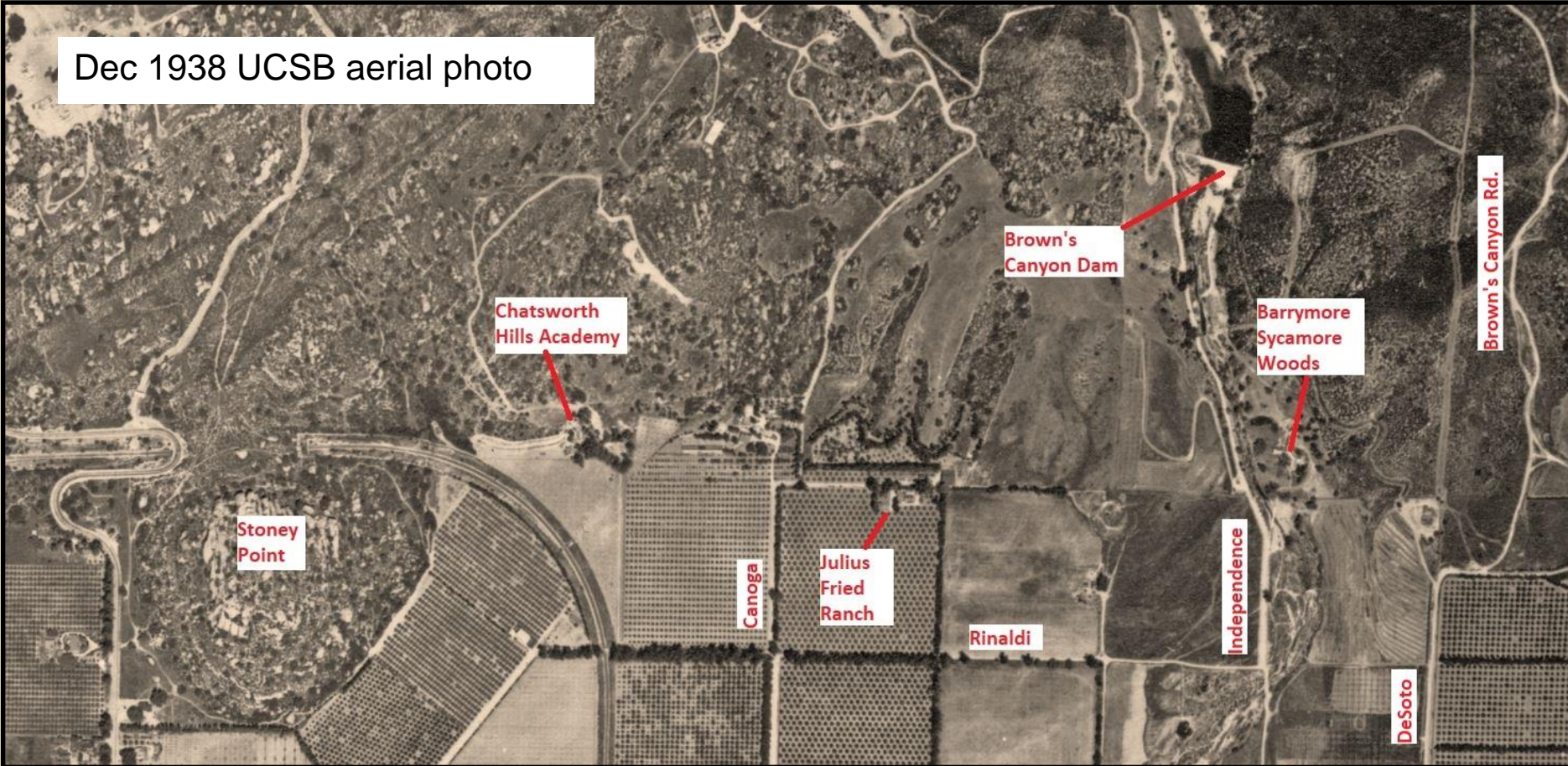
"I'm no gentleman farmer," he said. "I'm an actor and I bought that place for a hideout. It's way up in the hills, five miles from nowhere. Nobody can ever possibly find it—and that has plenty of advantages in Hollywood. If I didn't have a driver, I couldn't find it myself."

Barrymore said his first neighborly greeting was from an adjoining rancher, who told him to help himself to all the oranges, lemons and grapefruit he wanted.

"That convinced me," said the actor, "that nature is going to have a free hand on the Barrymore acres."

# The Neighborhood in 1938

Dec 1938 UCSB aerial photo

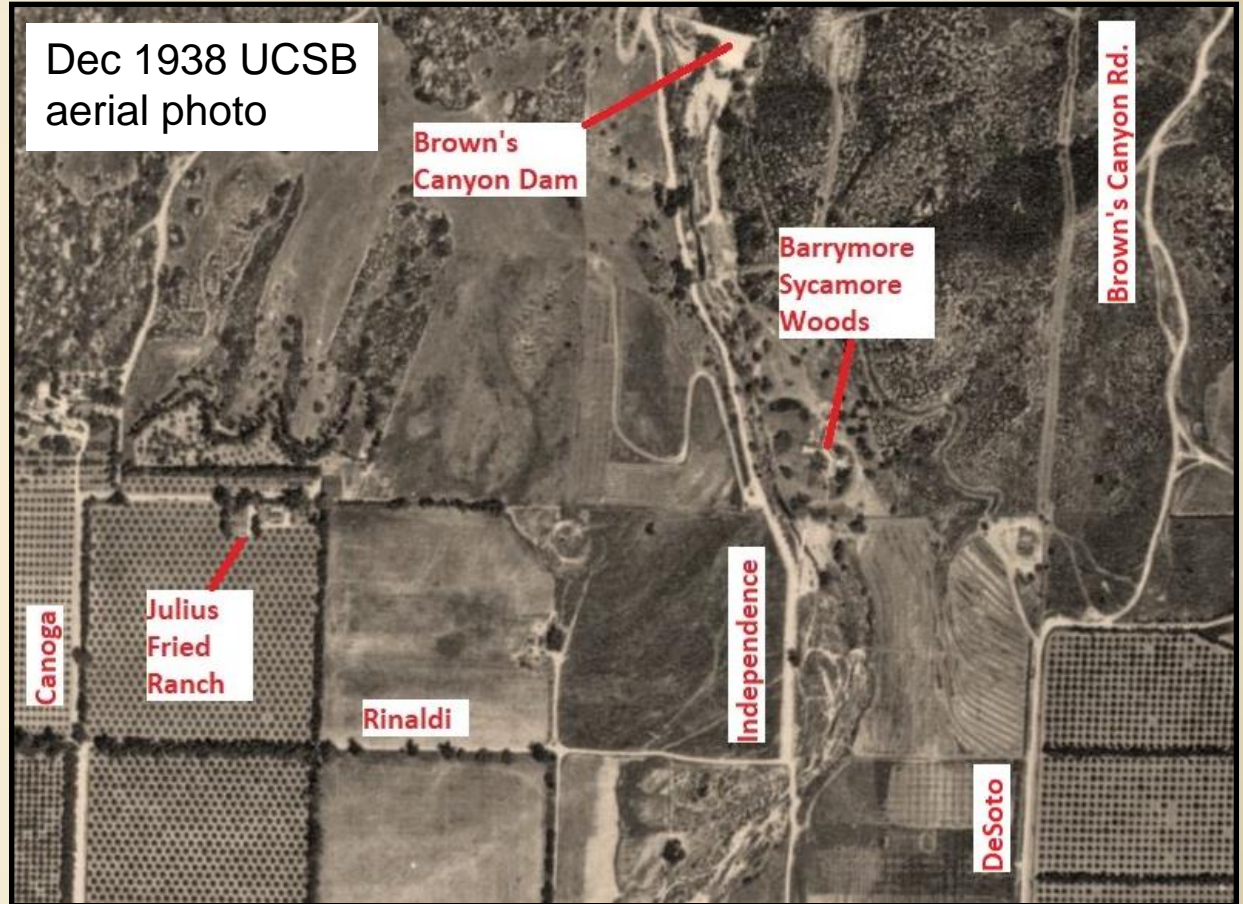




# Driving Directions to Sycamore Woods - 11050 Independence Ave

When writer Gene Fowler wanted to visit him, Lionel gave him these directions:

"Go straight along Sepulveda, almost to San Fernando, left on Devonshire Blvd until you come to 'Popes Market', where you turn right on Canoga Blvd and follow the road until you come up to the gates of the ranch"



# 80 years later - Sycamore Woods - 11050 Independence Ave

Dec 1938  
UCSB  
aerial photo

**Barrymore  
Sycamore  
Woods**



**Independence**

**Rinaldi**

2018 Google  
Maps. The red  
circle is the  
approx. location  
of the Barrymore  
house site.

Ronald Reagan Fwy  
118

De Soto Ave

De Soto Ave

De Soto Ave

tic St

Varitel Ave

Idi St

Sierra Canyon School  
Lower Campus

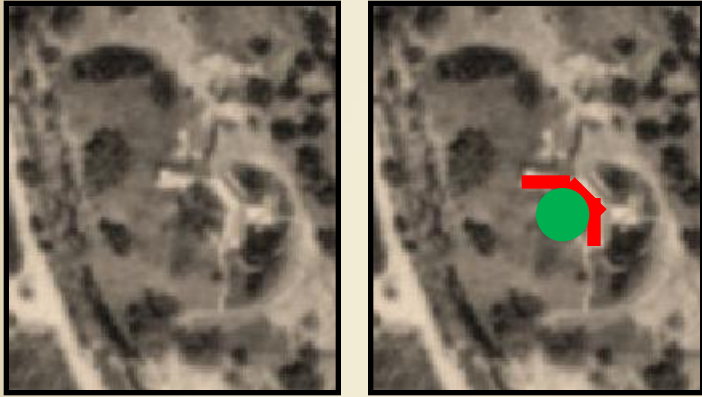
Browns  
Canyon

Paradise Nursery

Paul's MBZ service



# A photograph of the ranch house - 11050 Independence Ave



House outline in red, Sycamore outline in green

Dec 1938 UCSB aerial photo above,  
circa 1960 photo at right.

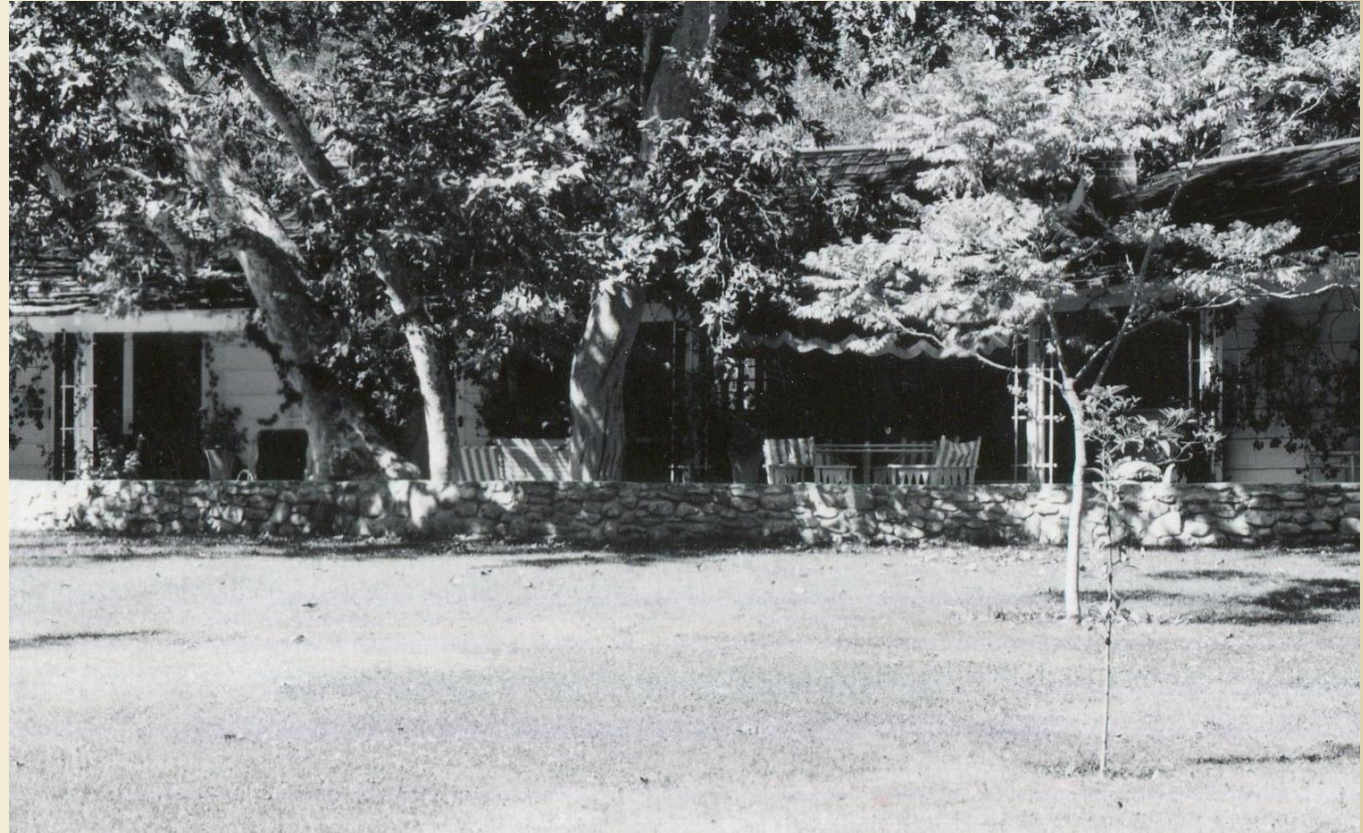
The Barrymore estate was described  
as a rambling ranch house. The house  
surrounded a huge sycamore on three  
sides, with the tree shading the  
westerly porch/patio.



## A photograph of the ranch house - 11050 Independence Ave

A enlargement of the previous photo, highlighting the porch and patio, and shade from the sycamore tree.

Notice the retaining wall in front of the porch, a similar wall will be seen later in the barbeque area behind the house.



## Another photograph of the west porch - 11050 Independence Ave

Excerpts from the 1941 Los Angeles Times article:

*"He is the lonliest man in Hollywood and yet one of the best loved in all America."*

*"Stranger still, he maintains two homes, one for himself, one for his memories."*

*"Barrymore lives in a rambling farmhouse out at Chatsworth. Here he raises roses, orange trees, Indian corn and razorback hogs. The hogs came about by chance, being acquired to root out the rattlesnakes."*

Photo at right, 1941 Los Angeles Times article



The star who "never wanted to be an actor" rests at his farm

**LONELIEST MAN IN AMERICA**

# More photographs of the ranch - 11050 Independence Ave

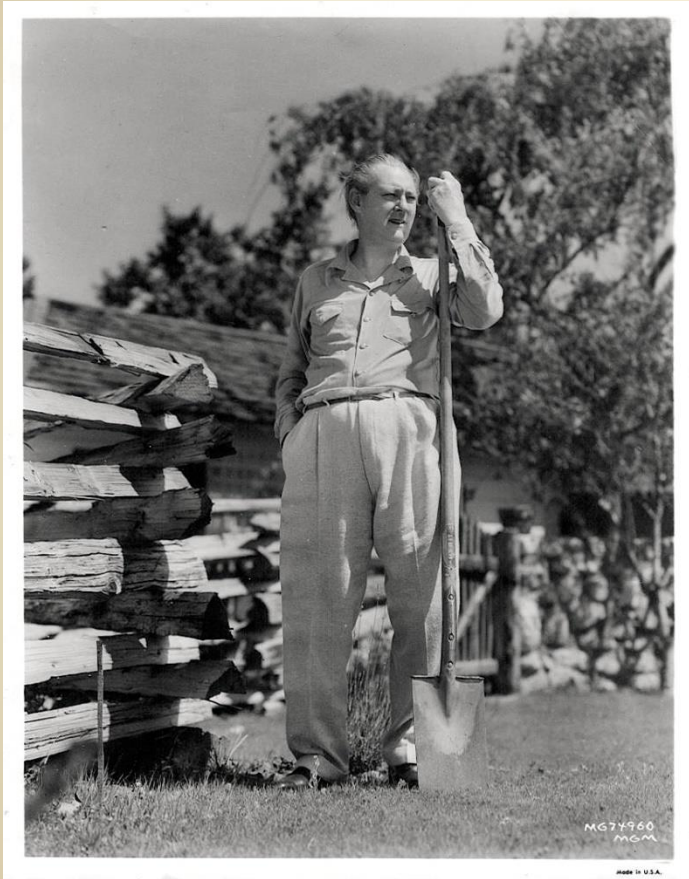


Photo at left,  
courtesy  
Jerry England

Photo at right,  
Lionel Barrymore  
with his dogs  
Sally and Johnny



## The barbeque area - 11050 Independence Ave

The following photos were taken in 2011, before completion of the Sierra Canyon School athletic fields. The barbeque area was behind the Barrymore house, built into the slope on the east side of the property.

The area still exists today, on the east side of the lacrosse field.

Main entrance to  
BBQ and patio  
area, looking east



## The barbeque area - 11050 Independence Ave



BBQ and patio  
area, looking east



BBQ patio  
looking south



## The barbeque area - 11050 Independence Ave



Retaining walls  
north of patio area



Steps from patio  
north

## The barbeque area - 11050 Independence Ave



Retaining walls in front of the patio at the house



Similar retaining walls north of today's barbeque patio area

## At Lucy's Ranch

1944

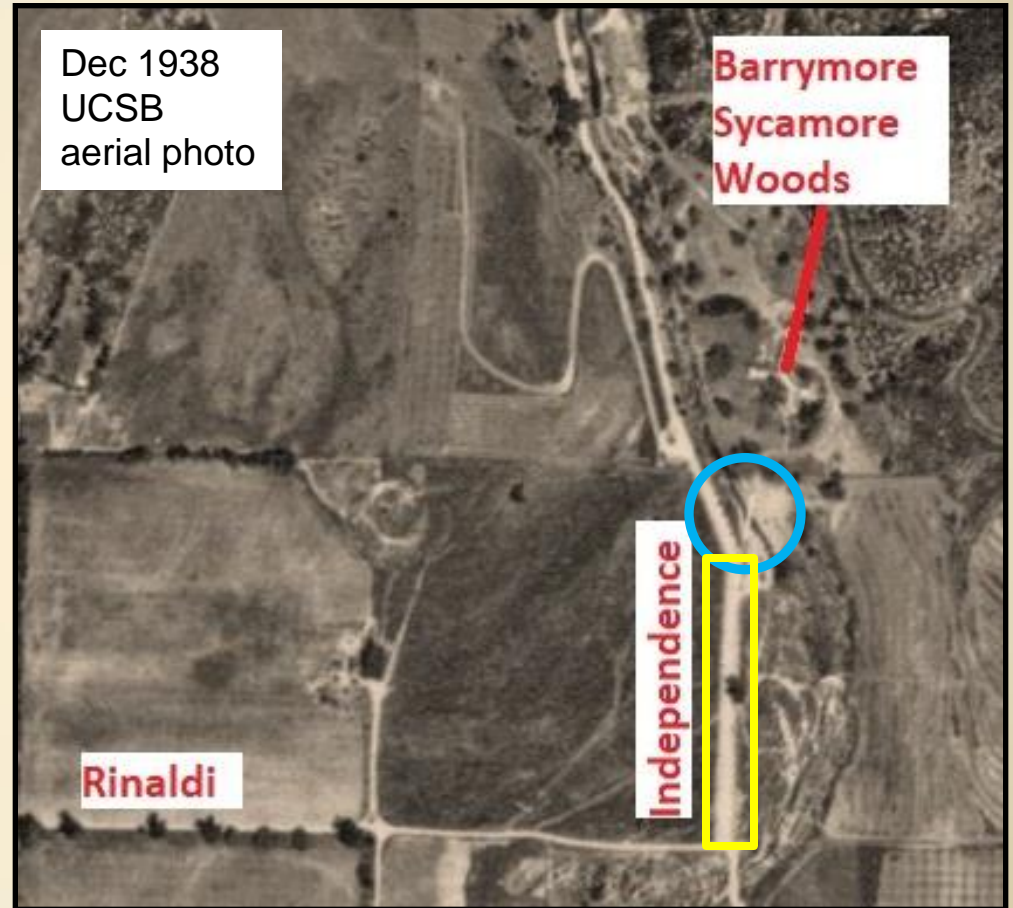
Lucille Ball and Lionel Barrymore  
at Lucy and Desi's Chatsworth  
ranch for Lucy's birthday party



# The Barrymore easement and access to his ranch home

Notice that in 1938, access to the house required the crossing of Brown's creek. (blue circle)

Sierra Canyon School provided us with title search documents from their lower campus, which at that time was owned by Reginald and Mary Wild. Included was an Aug 13, 1938 easement to Lionel Barrymore. It was 30 ft wide, along the eastern line of their property, ending 150 ft. south of the northern edge of their property. So Barrymore crossed the creek before he got to the north end of the Wild property. (easement in yellow)



# The Barrymore easement and access to his ranch home

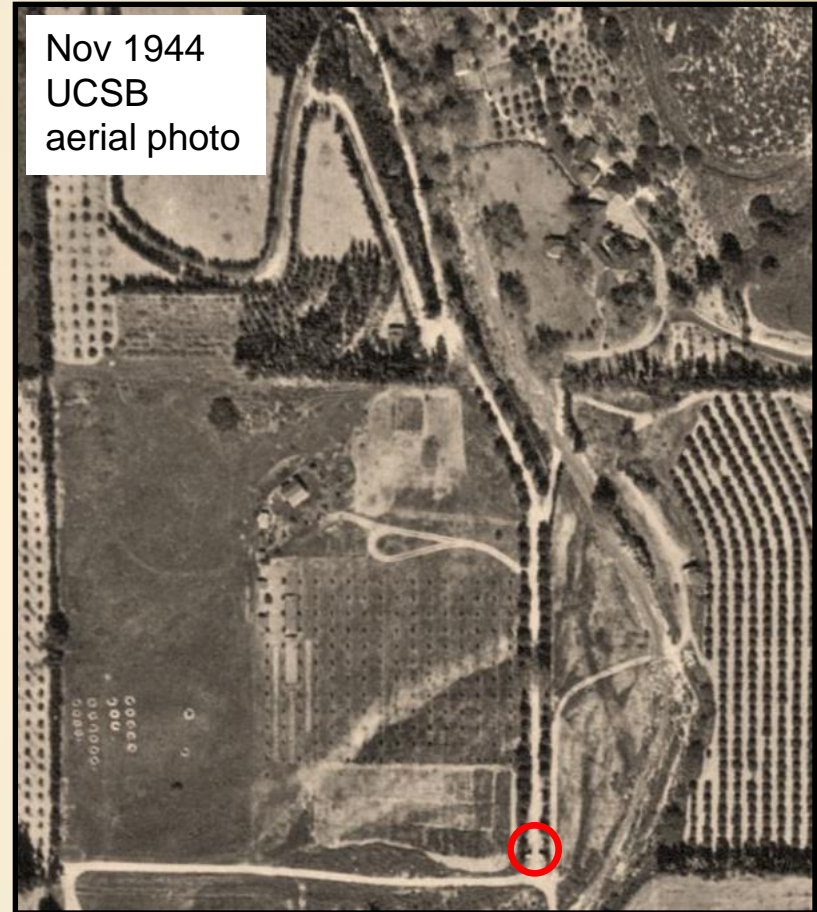
- By 1944, trees lined the Barrymore easement on the Wild property (some of those trees remain today).
- Another entrance road from DeSoto was added.
- There was a gate with pillars at the entrance to the Barrymore estate at Independence and Rinaldi (circled in red in the photo on the right and the closeup below)



# Pillars at the entrance to Barrymore's ranch home



Emma Johnson Graves (1873-1962), riding Duke.  
“Pillars at the Entrance to the home of Lionel  
Barrymore movie star”



## Sycamore Woods residents in 1940

The 1940 census listed the following residents at the Barrymore estate:

- Lionel Barrymore (62),
- friends Mary Ellen Wheeler (66), Violet Wheeler (42) and Florence Wheeler (40)
- Servant Alonzo Miller as cook with his wife Willie as maid.
- Murdie Wheeler (38) with her husband Stanley Campbell (30) lived in nearby Studio City.

14	Independence	11050A	035000	BARRYMORE	Lionel Head	0	M	W	62	
15				WHEELER	Mary Ellen friend	7	F	W	59	
16					V. Venson friend	7	F	W	39	
17					Florence friend	7	F	W	37	
18					MILLER	Alonzo servant	7	M	N	53
19					WILLIE	Willie servant	7	F	N	42

# The Wheeler/Campbell family connection

- Murdie Wheeler and husband Stanley Campbell had Barrymore connections.
- Stanley worked at MGM as a makeup artist for Lionel Barrymore (and his more famous brother John Barrymore), and was also Lionel's driver.
- Murdie and Stanley were married in 1938, two years after Lionel left the Beverly Hills house and the same year Lionel began building Sycamore Woods.
- In 1942 two of the pallbearers for John Barrymore were WC Fields and Stanley Campbell.
- In 1952, when Lionel Barrymore was installed as Chatsworth Honorary Mayor, Stanley Campbell was present and also said a few words.

## Actor Voices Gratitude

Election of officers and installation of Barrymore took place Tuesday night in the Chatsworth Community Building following a chicken dinner served to a capacity assemblage by the Chatsworth Woman's Club.

Schonfeld presented the honorary mayor's certificate to Barrymore who expressed gratitude to his neighbors and fellow townspeople for the honor paid him.

"I am not going to impose on you by saying anymore," he said when called on for a speech.

Jan 10, 1952 Van Nuys News

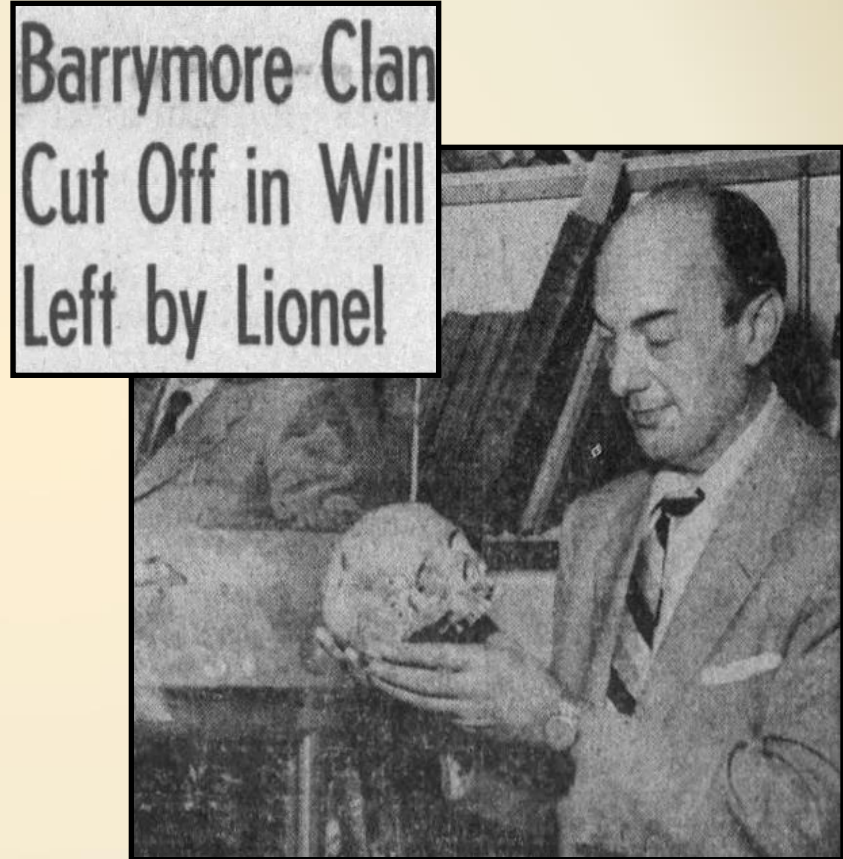


# Lionel Barrymore's years in Chatsworth

- Lionel Barrymore remained active in Hollywood from 1939 to 1954, when he died of heart congestion at the age of 76.
- He had a special car with controls that would allow him to drive to sound studios in Hollywood.
- He also was a renowned painter, music composer, and was considered for an Academy Award for Best Director. He appeared in a total of 213 movies, 38 of them filmed after he moved to Chatsworth. He also broadcast "A Christmas Carol" on radio each Christmas from 1934 to 1953.
- In 1951 he wrote an autobiography, "We Barrymores". Once a week for 10 months he would drive his car 20 miles to his collaborator, where they would sit in the car and chat while a secretary took notes in the back seat.
  - His thoughts on Chatsworth *"My domestic arrangements today are as pleasant as any man's. I live in Chatsworth, a place about the size that would be sneered at as a farm back East but is solemnly called a "ranch" in Southern California. At first, it was my ambition to raise chickens. When marauding weasels got them, I decided that there was no profit in producing rodent food and purchased a cow...."*
  - *I am usually on the road through the San Fernando Valley by 6 o'clock in the morning...."*

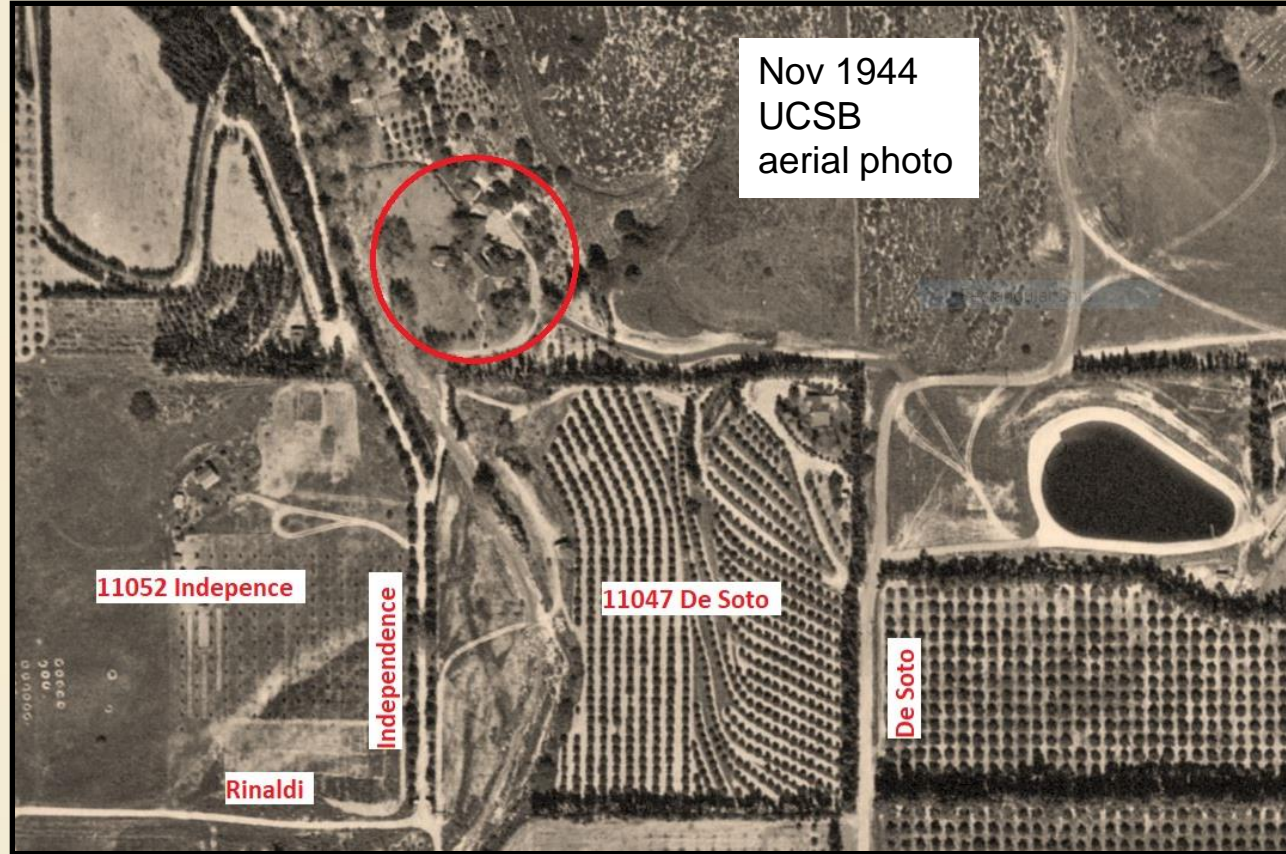
# The Barrymore estate becomes the Wheeler estate

- In 1954 Lionel Barrymore's will named the second daughter Florence Wheeler as the sole beneficiary of his \$25,000 estate.
- In July 1955 it was published that Lionel owed \$40,000 in back taxes, and a Judge hoped to salvage \$25,000 from sale of paintings, etchings, music, literary and other rights.
- There was an auction held on Wilshire Blvd. later that year, that included over 1,000 items collected by Barrymore, including his own recordings such as "Casey at the Bat", and the skull that his brother John used when he played Hamlet.



# The Barrymore estate becomes the Wheeler estate

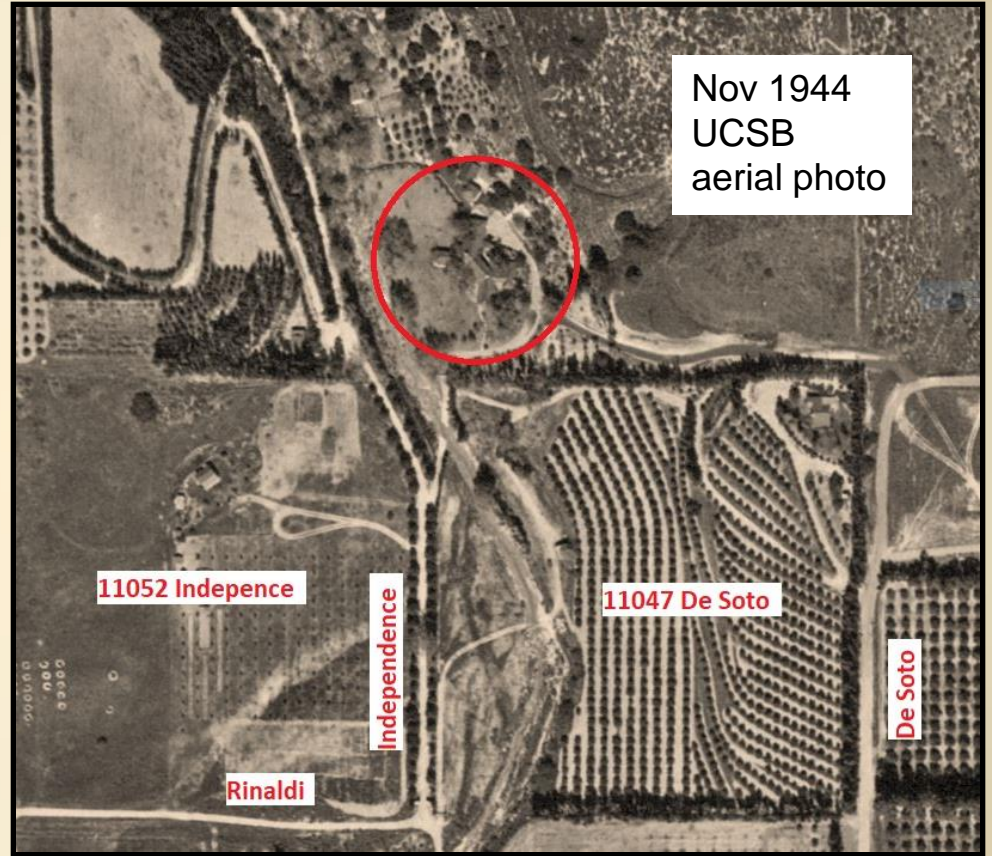
- CHS Life Member, Cindy Cooley Sage, shared her memories of the Wheeler family with us, as she lived at 11047 De Soto, just south of the Wheeler Estate. (Wheeler estate circled in red)
- The Cooley family lived there from 1954 to 1966, on a ten acre lemon ranch that she remembers as heavenly, with lemon blossoms in the air.
- Reginald and Mary Wild lived at 11052 Independence.



# The Barrymore estate becomes the Wheeler estate

- Cindy does not recall the Wheelers ever using the lower Independence access. Only the De Soto driveway right above their house.

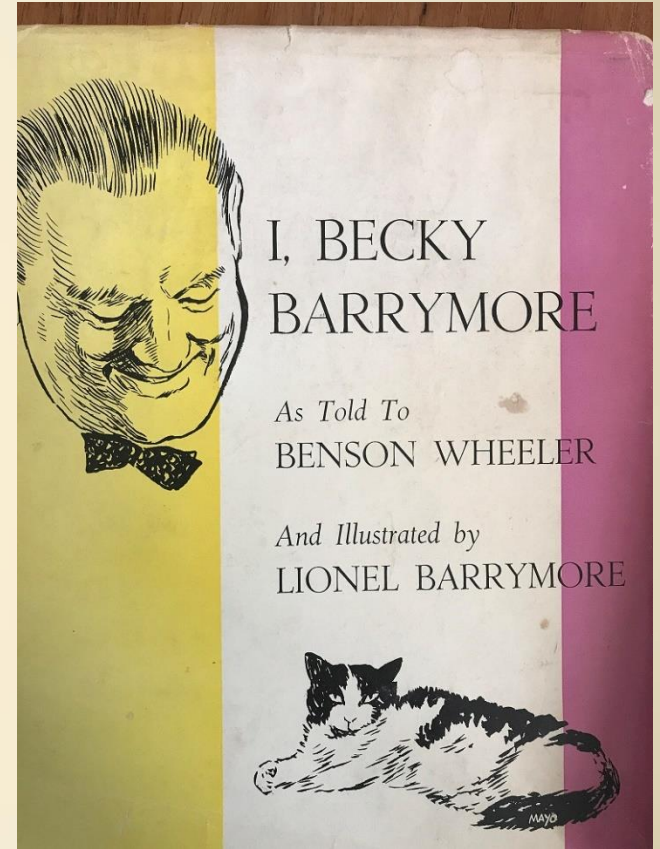
*“It was far superior as an all-weather access (okay, in comparison to the Brown's Creek access, which was seasonally impassible - but remember even De Soto was a dirt road for years). When it rained hard, my dad took us to Chatsworth Park Elementary School with the orchard tractor because of the mud.”*



# The Barrymore estate becomes the Wheeler estate

- In 1959, the first Wheeler daughter, Violet (Benson) Wheeler, published a book, "I Becky Barrymore, the autobiography of a famous cat", illustrated by Lionel Barrymore.
- Benson gave an autographed copy to Cindy's mother, Carolyn.

To my dear friend Carolyn  
With fond love -  
Benson Wheeler  
1960.



# The Barrymore estate becomes the Wheeler estate

## Cindy Cooley Sage's memories of the house:

- *The second daughter Florence was vivacious and spirited. Always full of wisdom and down-to-earth spirituality. Just a wisp of a woman - she was equally at ease in her Hollywood clothes, or her garden duds, with her shears attached somewhere to her.*
- *Their home was rambling and full of treasures (artwork, paintings, silver tea sets, elaborate china, linens, beautiful furniture and all the trimmings of a luxurious '40s-50's lifestyle).*
- *The home was shaped in sort of a crescent and many rooms opened out into some part or other of the gardens and sycamores. Each had a patio surrounded by a low rock wall, making it completely charming. On hot Chatsworth summer days, it was cooler and shaded.*
- *You couldn't quite see the creek from there (but we were small). The lawns seemed endless.*



Florence Wheeler and Cynthia Cooley at her 18th birthday party (11047 De Soto)

# The Barrymore estate becomes the Wheeler estate

Cindy Cooley Sage's memories of the Barrymore/Wheeler house after the 1970 brush fire:

## The cat that survived the 1970 fire

- Orrin and I sifted ashes after the fire. We found some melted jewelry, and melted silver, most likely from their gorgeous sterling silver tea/coffee set.
- How fitting that it was a cat that survived (if only ceramic).
- It's head was just visible in the ashes. We have kept it all these years.
- The Sages kept in touch and visited Murdie and Stanley in their later years in Westlake Village.



# The Barrymore estate becomes a part of the Sierra Canyon School Athletic Fields

- The property was known as the Wheeler estate locally for many years.
- Mary Ellen and Violet died in 1961 and 1963; Florence died in 1969.
- The property was then willed to the remaining sister, Murdie Wheeler Campbell, who had married Stanley Campbell, Lionel's makeup man and driver.
- An October 1970 LA Times article on structure fires (Calabasas Fire), listed 11050 Independence Ave, Owner = Campbell, Damage = \$60,000.
- Murdie and Stanley never lived at the estate according to our searches.
- Cindy and Orrin Sage said that the Campbells lived at Westlake Village in their later years. They died in 1979 and 1978 and are buried with the rest of the family at Rosedale Cemetery in Moosejaw, Saskatchewan, Canada.
- At some point, the property was purchased by Charles Smith, who owned it for a number of years, and it was then sold to Sierra Canyon School in 2007.

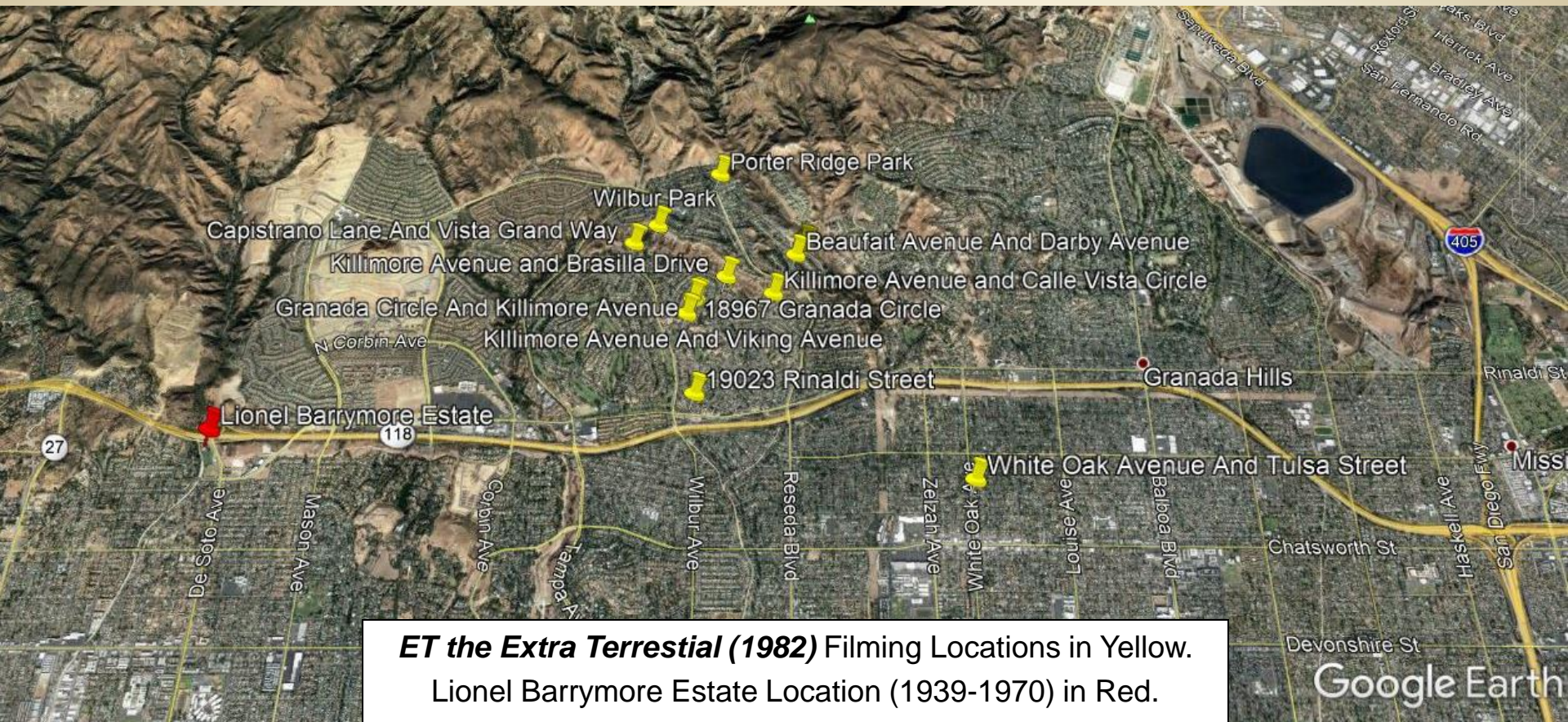


# Drew Barrymore

- Lionel is the great-uncle of Drew Barrymore, who had a breakout role as a child actress in “***E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial (1982)***”, which had scenes filmed in nearby Porter Ranch. She was 7 years old.
- Drew Barrymore is currently filming Season 3 of “***Santa Clarita Diet***” on Netflix, which is filmed in the Santa Clarita Valley.



# Drew Barrymore / ET Filming Locations



***ET the Extra Terrestrial (1982)*** Filming Locations in Yellow.  
Lionel Barrymore Estate Location (1939-1970) in Red.

# Drew Barrymore continues the Barrymore family legacy



# Sources/Acknowledgements

- Sierra Canyon title search documents on 11052 Independence, donated by Howard Wang, founder Sierra Canyon School. Documents include a 1938 easement to Lionel Barrymore.
- 1951 “We Barrymores”, an autobiography by Lionel Barrymore
- Nitrateville.com, BurbankBob 2010 blog post, <https://www.nitrateville.com/viewtopic.php?t=7421>
- Memories and photographs from Cindy Cooley Sage
- Photo archives Chatsworth Historical Society

Prepared by Ann & Ray Vincent, Chatsworth Historical Society, November 2018