

February 16, 1988

Dr. Warren D. Thomas, D.V.M.  
Zoo Director  
Los Angeles Zoo  
5333 Zoo Drive  
Los Angeles, CA 90027-1498

Dear Dr. Thomas;

Enclosed is some information about a Southern California artist named John Ehn, whose works have been honored by the California State Office of Historic Preservation as State Landmark #939.

Mr. Ehn died in 1981 and the family is being forced to divest themselves of a tract of land, in Sunland, which includes the Landmark. The family would like the collection of works to be held together and available to the public. They would like to donate the *Boot Hill* section of the Landmark to a established and stable institution to insure that their fathers' efforts are seen by the largest amount of people in a safe and sympathetic environment.

John Ehn was a professional trapper and the theme of his works is the Old West. A theme which many felt would be of interest to the public visiting the the Los Angeles Zoo. The family believes a relationship between them and the Los Angeles Zoo could be of mutual benefit. Simply put, they hope you would have an interest to display Mr. Ehn's work as an attraction at the Zoo and thereby saving an Historic Landmark, keeping it in Los Angeles and making their fathers' vision available to the public. In the short range the Zoo would receive immediate national publicity for saving a major work of art and a State Landmark from destruction. In the long range you would have a popular attraction that would need only minimal upkeep and would receive continued notice as the home of this environment.

The sculpture itself is acknowledged as a masterwork of its genre and the site is highlighted in the current issue of *The Clarion*, the magazine of the Museum of American Folk Art in New York.

We invite you or a representative to visit the site and we would be most happy to visit you and discuss the matter.

The property is in escrow and we have just a few months to find a proper home.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Seymour Rosen  
Director

## JOHN EHN'S OLD TRAPPERS LODGE

### CALIFORNIA STATE LANDMARK # 939

#### History-Description

In 1941, John Ehn moved his family to California, where he acquired some land at the edge of the Burbank Airport and built a motel. In 1951 he started the construction of "Boot Hill Cemetery" a fantasy of life in the old West, in front of the motel. The project expanded with additions of Western artifacts and assemblage in different areas of the property. In 1981 the site was declared by the California State Office of Historic Preservation, as California State Landmark #939 under an omnibus nomination, "20th Century Folk Art Environments in California."

The site consists of 3 distinct areas...

1. Boot Hill - an approximate 38' x 45' area which consists of 20 reinforced concrete sculptures of various size the tallest of which is approximately 14' tall and 45 wooden or stone "tombstones."
2. Western artifacts, tools, animals, a 20'3" long by 2'4" high concrete wall w/ bas relief portraits, plus tableaux, and more cover the face of the two story office building and an adjacent area.
3. Office Interior - a series of 24 "memory boards" the biggest of which is 3' x 4', an animal pelt, 12 small portrait sculptures, paintings, and framed photographs.

Most of the outdoor pieces on the site were recently restored. Some of the tombstones were refurbished the early part of this year. Minimal maintenance is needed on other outdoor artifacts. All indoor assemblage and artifacts are in good condition.

The Landmark sits on 2 lots within the 2.6 acre site.

Mr. Ehns' work has appeared in museum exhibits and was shown at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Oakland Museum, the Triton Museum and has appeared in books and numerous magazine and newspaper articles and on television.

Because of inheritance taxes and the expansion of the Burbank airport, the family of John Ehn is forced to divest themselves of 2.6 acres of land which includes the California State Landmark #939, "Old Trappers Lodge." The Family wishes that the dreams and vision of their father be kept in the public eye. Shy of finding a buyer who will allow the family to maintain the art work in-situ the family wishes...

To find a new home for the outdoor sections of the environment in toto, as close as possible in location to the original site.

A. Boot Hill.

B. Outdoor artifacts.

The family is willing to donate the works of art to an institution if they will guarantee proper and annual maintenance of the art works. The indoor pieces will be retained by the family and will form the nucleus of an exhibition directed toward art museums. The family will pay for the move.

Enclosed is a site plan along with articles on the landmark from the Los Angeles Times, and a copy of a book based on an exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (see page 42).

Contact person at Old Trappers Lodge is one of John Ehn's daughters...

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