

TREE OF LIFE, 1948

IN 2001, after my relocation to Los Angeles, I contacted an ex-roomer—perhaps lodger is more *apropos*—who had lived for several years at the Franklin house. For privacy's sake, let's call him Chris D. Chris was an artist who, in 1948-49, shared the rent in the north-wing studio with his friend and fellow painter Joe Barrett.

I phoned Chris, who was living with his wife in a beach community several hours north of Los Angeles. We agreed to meet next time he came to L.A.

Some months later, Chris called. He said he was in town and stopped by with his wife for a visit. We talked about “the old days” for about four hours, but nothing of any real consequence surfaced. Since my investigation at that time was *sub rosa*, naturally I made no mention of the “Black Dahlia” or any other suspected criminality. It was obvious that Chris was saddened about my father's passing and his memories of the man were seemingly filled only with fondness and respect. After listening to Chris talk about Dad for a number of hours, my sense was that he considered George his mentor.

I had no further contact with Chris for about two years. By then, my book had been published. In 2004, he sent a letter saying he had read BDA and found it difficult to believe that the George Hodel he knew could have committed such crimes. He remained highly skeptical.

Enclosed in his letter was a photograph of some of the 1948 roomers then living at our home. The photograph was entitled “Tree of Life—Shangri-LA, 1948.” Chris identified each individual in the photo by hand-writing their names next to their “branch” on the tree.



"Tree of Life-Shangri-LA, 1948"

Franklin house tenants from top down:

1. Suzanne D'Albert
2. Gladys Krenak
3. Dorothy Bowman
4. Fuji Walker
5. Tony Walker
6. Chris D
7. George Hodel
8. Ellen Taylor

[1948 tenants: artist Joe Barrett and actress Carol Forman not in photograph.]

I have very few specifics on the various roomers living with us back in the late Forties. I know that Dad did not begin to rent out any rooms until 1948, which was at least one full year after the Black Dahlia murder.

I believe that most of the above named tenants were gone either before or soon after George's arrest for incest in October 1949. We know that Joe Barrett is still there in February 1950, and that George was interviewing prospective tenants as late as March 1950. But based on the transcripts, it sounded as if conditions might have prevented any new occupancy.

I am going to provide a very brief and limited sketch of some of the named tenants because I think it is important to understand that George Hodel, in addition to being connected to Hollywood's elite—A-list writers and directors—also had direct “in-house” connections to its working actors and artists, which might well provide us with some future linkage.

Let's start at the top of the “tree” and work our way down.

SUZANNE D'ALBERT



Suzanne D'Albert, circa 1949

Suzanne D'Albert was born in France on May 12, 1927, and would have been just twenty-one when she moved into the Franklin house. She was reportedly discovered by Paramount mogul Hal B. Wallis. Suzanne spoke five languages (French, English, German, Russian, and Spanish.) Her filmography credits her with twenty-seven acting parts in film and television. Tragically, she died from an apparent suicide from an overdose of sleeping pills in Paris in 1971 at the age of forty-three.

In the photo below, we see Suzanne posing with seven other young women, including Marilyn Monroe and Enrica “Ricky” Soma in a 1949 *Life Magazine* article featuring up-and-coming Hollywood starlets. Monroe, at the time this photo was taken, was in Los Angeles shooting a small part as “Angela” in John Huston’s *Asphalt Jungle*. Ricky Soma would marry John Huston that same year and became his fourth wife. Bizarrely, this photo with Suzanne D'Albert appeared in the October 10, 1949, edition of *Life Magazine*, which was George Hodel’s forty-second birthday. [He had been arrested for incest just four days prior.]



(1) Marilyn Monroe (2) Laurette Luez (3) Lois Maxwell
(4) Suzanne D'Albert (5) Ricky Soma (6) Dolores Gardner
(7) Jane Nigh (8) Cathy Downs

GLADYS NORDENSTROM-KRENEK

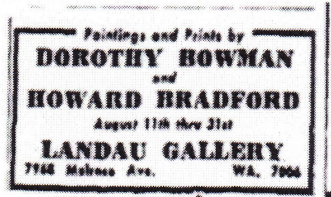
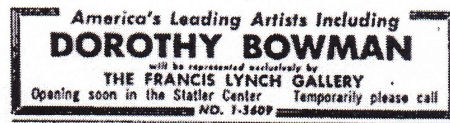
Gladys Norenstrom was born in Mora, Minnesota, on May 23, 1924. I have little information on her life. She was an accomplished composer and shortly after living at the Franklin house, married world-renowned Austrian composer, Ernst Krenek in 1950.

DOROTHY BOWMAN

At the time Dorothy Bowman was renting a room at the Franklin house, she was twenty-one and was already a recognized Los Angeles artist. Her works had been shown at galleries throughout the Southland and she most certainly would have been a friend and acquaintance of fellow artist and regular houseguest Fred Sexton and his wife Gwain.

Dorothy attended L.A.'s Chouinard Art Institute, where she met fellow painter Howard Bradford. The two also studied together at the Jepson Art School in Los Angeles. This is the same school where Fred Sexton was an art instructor and was fired, because according to Joe Barrett, who also attended the school, "He [Sexton] was hitting on all the young girls and half the class left, so Herb Jepson fired him."

Dorothy Bowman and Howard Bradford relocated to the California coast of Big Sur around 1950, where they became part of that community and befriended writer Henry Miller, another famous Franklin house visitor. The two artists eventually married. Both Dorothy and Howard became internationally respected and their paintings and serigraphs can be found in museums throughout the world.



Dorothy Bowman art shows, 1950
[Los Angeles Times]

FUJI AND TONY WALKER

I have no biographical information on Fuji or her son, Tony but I'm sure, like all the others, there's is a story just waiting to be told.

ELLEN TAYLOR

Ellen was the maid. I am not sure exactly when she began working for Dad. Perhaps in mid- to late 1947. From the photograph, we know she was there in 1948 and remained until the spring of 1950.

We also know from the DA tapes that she was a "full-service maid." Sex with George was—from the sound of the explicit recordings—a part of her regular duties. To quote the eloquence of the detective's log, "Sounds like Ellen just gave George another blow-job." It is also clear from the tapes that she wanted and demanded sex and became very upset when George told her, "No, not tonight."

In BDA, in the chapter, "The Franklin House Revisited," I mentioned an interview I conducted with "Bill Buck" [not his real name] who owned and had been living in the house for thirty years, and whose father, a medical doctor, bought the home from Dad in 1950.

It's worth retelling here since I am sure his descriptions, coupled with Joe Barrett's separate comments, clearly suggested that the person described was Ellen Taylor.

BDA page 263:

Another strange incident: Buck told me about the appearance of a "bag lady" who came to the door back in the 1970s or early '80s. "She looked quite old," he said, "but with street people it's hard to tell." I spoke with her and she said, "This house is a place of evil." He said that normally he would have simply dismissed her, but then she continued to describe the interior of the house. "It was very scary," he said. "She obviously had been inside this place before we owned it. She described in detail to me: the great stone fireplace, and your father's gold bedroom, and the all-red kitchen that your father had painted. No question that she was very familiar

with the house when your dad had lived here. She looked at me and said again, 'This is a house of evil.' God knows what connection she had with this place. She left, and I never saw or heard from her again."

Based on a conversation I had with former tenant Joe Barrett, it is my belief that the person Buck described as a "bag lady" was most probably our former maid, Ellen Taylor, Father's live-in housemaid/girlfriend, who lived at Franklin House from 1945 to 1950. In later years, Joe Barrett had run into Ellen on the street in downtown Los Angeles and discovered that she had been in and out of mental hospitals. Joe Barrett described her as "living on the fringe, delusional, claiming she had had affairs with a number of prominent and locally famous personages." (Knowing what we now know, perhaps Ellen was not as delusional as Barrett thought.)

While we cannot be positive that the "bag lady" was Ellen, all the pieces fit together quite well. The discovery and reading of the DA files established that Mother and we three boys were not at the house during the weeks before and after the murder of Elizabeth Short. But now a new question arises—was Ellen? She was questioned by DA investigators in 1950 but unfortunately, hers and many other interviews of George Hodel's acquaintances were not among the DA papers secured in the vault. And, as we know, LAPD's copies have all "disappeared."

CAROL FORMAN

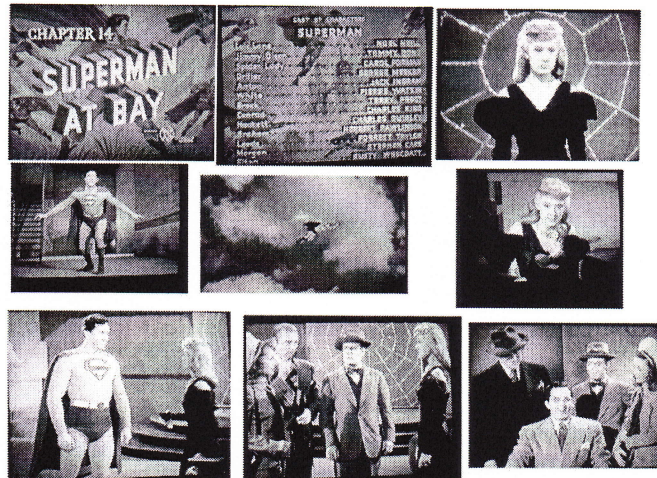
Carol Forman was also a roomer at the Franklin house; she was just not at home when the *Tree of Life* photo was taken. (Unless she took it.)

Carol was born June 19, 1918, and would have been thirty at the time she was renting a room there. According to her filmography, her first part was in the 1946 RKO film, *From this Day Forward*. That same year, Carol had a bit part as a secretary in the *noir*-thriller, *Nocturne*, a story written by Rowland Brown, who, in 1946, was involved in an ongoing romance with my mother, Dorothy Hodel.

In 1947, Carol played Sombra in *The Black Widow*, establishing herself as a leading villainess. True to form, in 1948, she starred as Spider Lady, taking on mild mannered reporter Clark Kent [Kirk Alyn], in Columbia's big screen serialization of *Superman*.



Carol Forman secretary scene in Nocturne (1946)



1948 clips of Carol Forman as Spider Lady in Superman



As if written for a Twilight Zone episode, Carol Forman was selected and appeared on this January 1947 calendar, which was the same month Elizabeth "Black Dahlia" Short was brutally murdered at George Hodel's Franklin house. Then one year later, the unsuspecting actress rented a room and moved into and resided at the crime scene.

CAROL, TIM HOLT, AND MY BRO

My younger brother, Kelvin "Kelly" Hodel, was born in October 1942, just eleven months after the birth of my twin, John and I. He would be Dorothy and George's fourth and final son. Kelly, from an early age, "loved the girls," and believe me—the girls loved him. This 1949 Franklin house anecdote is appropriate:

At the time Carol was living with us at the Franklin house, she was dating film star Tim Holt. The two actors had worked together in a number of B-westerns, including the 1947 *Under the Tonto Rim* and again in 1948 on *Brothers in the Saddle*. Tim Holt, who had just received huge critical acclaim for his role as the down-on-his-luck drifter Bob Curtin in John Huston's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, naturally visited Carol at the house regularly.

Brother Kelly, then aged six or seven, had a terrible crush on Carol. And whenever Tim showed up to take her on a date, Kelly would object, informing Holt in no uncertain terms, "She's my girlfriend." Finally, Holt could take it no longer and took Kelly into the center courtyard, *mano a mano*, and made the following suggestion:

"Look Kelly. You're too young to be with Carol now. I will date her only until you get old enough. And then you and Carol can get married. And I will get on my horse and ride off. Fair enough?"

Kelly agreed. Holt and Hodel shook hands, and the battle for Carol's heart was ended—without having to fire a shot to find out which was the fastest gun alive.



My brother, Kelly, [left] and I in the courtyard of Franklin house, circa 1949

Carole Forman, after appearing in more than twenty-four separate films, then turned her acting skills to television and theatre. She died in Burbank, California, in 1997.

This short peek into the lives of these five Franklin house tenants gives us a much broader understanding of just how eclectic and far-reaching was George Hodel's web of connections.

In the 1940s, his hand was either directly on or at least only one degree away from the power and the politics that was Los Angeles. As he told Baron Harrington on the DA tape:

"I'm the only one that knows how all these things fit together."

EDMUND TESKE

"Bill Buck," the former Sowden/Franklin house owner whom I interviewed in 2001, after telling me about "the bag lady," mentioned a second visitor.

BDA, pages 263-264:

Bill Buck also told me that another man who had visited the house on three different occasions over the years was a photographer named Edmund Teske, "a local photographer and sort of a fixture here in old Hollywood. He had a home just down the street on Hollywood Boulevard. He visited here three separate times over the years and told me he was a good friend of both your father and Man Ray."

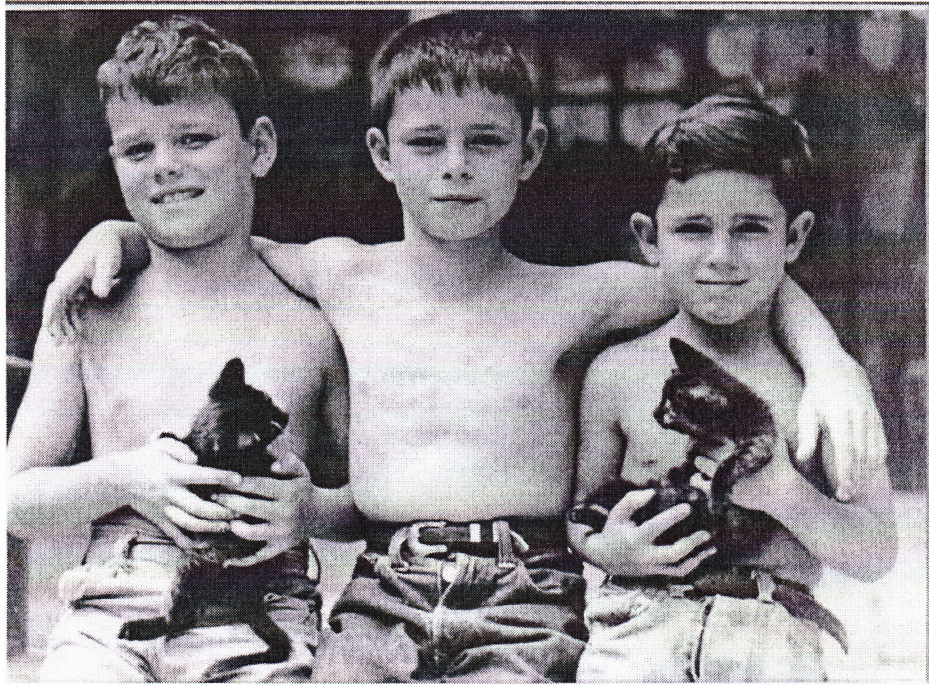
In 2001, I had never heard of Edmund Teske, and his name meant nothing to me. I ignored the information for about a year until it came up again, this time from former Franklin house tenant Joe Barrett.

I was visiting Joe in his home in Ventura, California, and we were looking at some old photographs that my father had given me. One of them showed my two brothers and I standing inside the Franklin house courtyard. I had dubbed it, "The Three Musketeers."

I showed this photo to Joe and told him that I suspected it might have been taken by Man Ray.

Joe smiled. "No, not Man Ray," he said. "It was taken by another photographer friend of George's. His name was Edmund Teske. I know, because I was there when he took it. Teske was a friend of both your dad and Man Ray."

PHOTOS BY EDMUND TESKE, CIRCA 1948



"The Three Musketeers" [Left to right: Steven, Michael, Kelvin]



*Second photo by Edmund Teske taken from inside the living room
[Left to right: Michael, Steven, and Kelvin]*

My brothers are now holding the two black cats while I blow bubbles.

This second reference got my attention. Later, I discovered that Edmund Teske, while ever the eccentric, had a remarkable past and deep ties to Hollywood up until his death in 1996.

Here is an excerpt from the J. Paul Getty Museum on a retrospective called, "Spirit into Matter: The Photographs of Edmund Teske" that ran from June to September 2004.

Edmund Teske (1911–1996) was one of the most significant artist-photographers active in Los Angeles in recent decades. He approached photography as a highly malleable medium, open to the artist's intervention at several points in the creative process. An inventive darkroom technician, Teske created photographs that expressed his emotional and spiritual concerns. His images reveal the power of memory and dreams to transform our perception and understanding of the visual world.

...

And from a Getty Research biography:

...

In the mid-1940s, Teske relocated to Los Angeles, where he initially worked at Paramount Pictures in the photographic still department. He continued to photograph and began to exhibit his images more frequently. His increasing experimentation led to his use of the solarization technique to reverse highlight and shadow. In 1956 he detoured briefly from photography to appear in the film biography of Vincent van Gogh, *Lust for Life*. After 1960 he frequently returned to older negatives, reinterpreting them through the use of experimental printing techniques.

From the Edmund Teske Archives:

Teske was drawn west by the allure of the motion picture industry and a desire to meet Greta Garbo. He worked in the stills department of Paramount Studios. He lived at the Frank Lloyd Wright residence of Aline Barnsdall on Olive Hill where he met Man Ray and other notable folk. He photographed actors and notable folk throughout his career. To name a few: Joel McCrea, Geraldine Page, Kenneth Anger, John Saxon, Ansel Adams, Jim Whitney, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Will Geer, Anais Nin, Jane Lawrence, and others.



*Edmund Teske, friend to Aline Barnsdall, was an artist in residence here at "Hollyhock House" in Studio B from 1944-1949.
Hollyhock House, 4800 Hollywood Boulevard, Hollywood, California*

The Frank Lloyd Wright-designed residence known as "Hollyhock House" rests atop a hill at 4800 Hollywood Boulevard in East Hollywood.

It was built for Aline Barnsdall in 1921, who would later donate the home and its surrounding eleven acres to the city of Los Angeles to be preserved as a public art park.

The home is located only five blocks from the Franklin house and as a child, I have many fond memories of my brothers and I riding our bikes the short distance to play all day in "Barnsdall Park."

"SYNCHRONICITY HAPPENS"

In mid-September 2011, I received notification of the imminent closing of one of Los Angeles's oldest and most respected downtown restaurants, Clifton's Cafeteria at Seventh and Broadway. The notice also contained an invitation for those interested to meet and have a "last luncheon" before the closing and renovation by the new buyer. Although I didn't know any of the dozen or so people planning to attend, I decided to go out of respect for the original philanthropist owner Clifford Clinton, who had done so much for Angelenos in the 1930s and '40s.

The small group of us met outside at noon, introduced ourselves, then went inside to pick from hundreds of cafeteria "choices." Out of homage to the establishment, I went with the blue-plate special—traditional turkey, mashed potatoes, and gravy, which Clifton's sold during the Depression to the needy for a penny.

The brainchild for the luncheon was Steve Lamb, a residential architect from Altadena, California. Steve and I got to talking and it turned out that he had read my books. He then went on to tell me a most remarkable story that he said he had been relating to his friends for over thirty years. After hearing the story, I asked him if he could "write it up" and send it to me. He did, and here is a scan of his letter, which I received on September 28, 2011:

STEVEN S. LAMB

P.O. BOX 333, ALTADENA CA. 91001

28 Sept. 2011

MEETING ED TESKE

Back in the late 1970's I used to volunteer at a Christian ministry to street people in Hollywood called CENTRUM OF HOLLYWOOD. Often I volunteered on our suicide prevention hot line called the Hollywood Lifeline. Before I would do my shift on the lifeline, I would go over to the Sowden house on Franklin and park my Triumph T.R. 3 in front. I'd try to park about half an hour before sunset. As the sun would set the colors and shapes of the textile blocks on the house would seem to change and I would take those wonderful moments of beauty with me as I volunteered.

One cold fall evening in 1978 I was leaning against my Triumph with my deerstalker on lighting my calabash pipe. I was looking east and I saw a tall thin man with a purple coat and a limp walking towards me. He looked like an old wino. The man came up to me and stood very close leaning over me and with a expressive voice said

"DO you like the House?"

"Why yes, Sir, it's a very important and early Lloyd Wrigh.."

"It's an E V I L place! Artist's Philosophers, accountants and politicians we all played and paid there. Women were tortured for sport there. Murders happened there. It's an E V I L place."

He walked down about half a block, spun on his heels and pointed at me like an Old Testament movie prophet and again said

"It's an E V I L place."

I thought he was just some old wino. All the street people said the Sowden house was evil. I assumed it was because the roof and balcony configuration were different, and it was kind of run down in those days, so there had to be a Hollywood legend about it. I figured this guy was just another half crazed old street person and that in any case his facts were all wrong, he was confusing this house with Fatty Arbuckle's house down the street, and whatever happened there, happened in San Francisco, anyway.

About a decade later, I was a member of both the Taliesin Fellows and the Wrightian Association. Those groups were having a combined event at the Pacific Design Center, on photographing Frank Lloyd Wright. We were doing so in part to honor a new book by Pedro Guerrero, who had been Frank Lloyd Wright's personal photographer in the late 1930's, 1940's and 1950's.

In the lobby of the Auditorium there was a large U made up of several tables selling various books, ties, T shirts and photographs related to Frank Lloyd Wright. I bought a copy of Pedro's book and got it autographed and looked over the stuff for sale, most of it I had already.

At the end of the U, as far away from the entry as possible, were a collection of large sepia toned photographs, each about 16" wide and 24" long. The Photographs were mounted on brown construction paper and there were geometric Wrightian designs drawn sometimes at a corner, sometimes at a side. They were in the new gold ink paint pens that had just come out and were each signed in gold "Edmund Teske". I thought this was strange, the signature looked right, but I had assumed Teske to be long dead, since I had seen no new photographs of his in some twenty years.

As I was looking through the pile of sepia prints of Hollyhock house, a tall thin man entered the room and was warmly greeted by Paul Bogart, Eric Lloyd Wright and Pedro Guerrero. This I thought was strange, as I recognized the man as the wino who told me the Sowden house was a evil place a decade before.

The tall man walked over to where I was looking through the Sepia Prints. He stood in front of me, leaned in towards me and said

"Do You like the photographs?"

"Yes, Sir. I like them very much. They are the most beautiful photographs of any Frank Lloyd Wright building I have seen, they have captured the buildings the way Architects see them before they are built."

(He had, too. His photos were much more evocative of the spirit of the Architecture within it than any Pedro or anyone else I have ever seen has done.)

The man smiled at me and held my gaze for a very long time. He had a pride in his eyes. Incredulous, I asked him-

"Sir, are YOU Edmund Teske?"

"Well I'm Ed Teske, or what's left of him."

He said roaring as he laughed with an open mouth devoid of many teeth.

"Would you like to B U Y a photograph?"

"Sir, I would very much, but they are \$300.00 and I only have \$280.00 in the bank. May I come see you when I have some money and buy one?"

"Certainly."

He wrote his name and address down for me on a scrap of paper. I still keep it at the front of my address book, and like a fool, I never did go back and buy one of Ed Teske's prints. Now they are worth a cool \$30,000 or so each...

This apparent chance meeting with Steve, his wife Jeanette, and a handful of his friends at Clifton's is another remarkable example of how the facts and corroborations just keep coming. All I can say is ... synchronicity happens.

SOME TESKE AFTERTHOUGHTS



Edmund Teske in scene clip from MGM's Lust for Life [1956]

In this scene with Kirk Douglas [Vincent Van Gogh] and Anthony Quinn [Paul Gauguin] Edmund Teske, a fellow artist, is questioning Van Gogh's skill as an artist. Teske was forty-five years-old when the film was released. Quinn won an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor.

For those who would categorize this chance conversation between Steve Lamb and Edmund Teske as nothing more than the rantings of a “mad artist,” a lost and delusional soul whose words were not to be trusted, consider the following—his well-documented biography.

I will pick up his bio just from 1978 forward. The conversation in front of the Franklin house occurred when Teske was sixty-six. Here are some of the highlights of his life and some remarkable personal accomplishments after that conversation:

My biographical source came from: *Edmund Teske: A Chronology* compiled by Michael Hargraves, as found in *Spirit into Matter: the Photographs of Edmund Teske* by Julian Cox, Edmund Teske, J. Paul Getty Museum. What follows is only a partial summary from Hargraves' chronology:

...

1978: Conducted workshop for the Friends of Photography and Lectures at the Society for Photographic Education National Conference, Pacific Grove, California

1979: Invited and became visiting professor of the Photography Department at California State University, Los Angeles.

1980: Led a workshop at the Victor School, Victor, Colorado. Guest speaker at Camera vision's Artist's Hot seat series, Los Angeles.

1981: One group show. Photographer or Priest maker, Ferens Art Gallery, Hull, England (followed by several other British venues).

1982: Presented slide lecture at the University of Colorado at Boulder; conducted a one-week workshop at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

1983: Taught a photography workshop at Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design, Los Angeles.

1986: Gave a workshop and seminar at the Victor School, Victor, Colorado.

1987: One group show, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

1988: Was the subject of a two-part television film produced by Light-borne Communications, Cincinnati, Ohio.

1989: Lectured at the Santa Monica Public Library on Photographers and their Art.

1990: Teske was shot by an unknown assailant in the doorway of his Hollywood studio on Harvard Boulevard; suffered debilitating injuries to his jaw and the left side of his face.

1991: Participated in a symposium at the J. Paul Getty Museum, The Relevance of History and Theory to the Creative Process, moderated by Weston Naef, with Ralph Gibson, Jo Ann Callis, David Hockney, Gay Block, and Richard Misrach.

1993: One-man exhibition at J. Paul Getty Museum

1995: Gave a talk at UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art.

1996: Died at his downtown Los Angeles studio on November 22 of a heart attack. Memorial service was held at Hollyhock House on December 14.

These active and very dynamic eighteen years after Lamb's encounter demonstrate Teske to be a lecturing professor and world traveler, with all of his faculties completely intact.

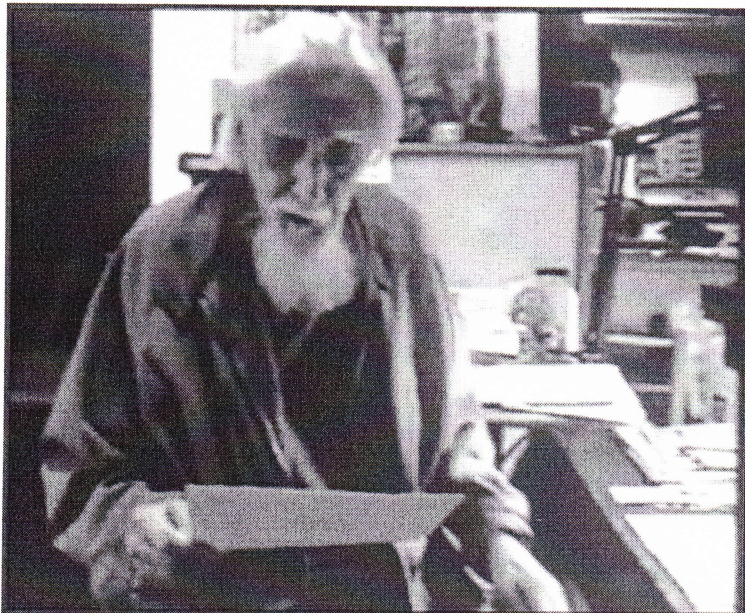
With the further understanding that Edmund Teske was clear-headed and of sound mind in 1978, some twenty years before I even began my investigation, let us re-examine his disclosure to Steve Lamb in front of the Hodel Franklin house. Also, let's keep in mind that Teske was a close friend of both Man Ray and George Hodel, and obviously a regular visitor to the house, as well as (at least on one occasion) being our "family photographer."

"It's an evil place! Artists, philosophers, accountants and politicians *we all played and paid there*. Women were tortured for sport there. Murders happened there. It's an EVIL place."

I have no reason to doubt or question Steve Lamb's specific quoting of Teske's words.

What Teske told Lamb some thirty-three years ago independently supports what the "bag lady" [probably our maid, Ellen Taylor] had said, as well as the words spoken by fellow insiders, Joe Barrett and Lillian Lenorak, and certainly underscore Mattie Comfort's 2003 declaration that, "We all knew George Hodel did it. There was no doubt."

For Teske to disclose these secrets to a complete stranger begs the question: who else did he tell and in what detail? Certainly, he would have shared this knowledge with at least some of his own close personal friends and confidants.



Edmund Teske, July 1996

Screen capture from YouTube video interview in tribute to Global Liberty Exhibition by Jean Ferro. Teske died just four months later in November 1996.