

FULLERTON HERITAGE

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Who's (or What's) Dewella?

The Dewella Apartments: The Next Goal for National Register Status

by *Debora Richey*

Board Members of Fullerton Heritage have selected the Dewella Apartments as the next city property to be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. The Spanish Colonial Revival complex, located at 232-234 East Wilshire, is one of the oldest apartments in Fullerton and the only apartment court ever built in the city. Previous to World War II, Fullerton residents preferred single family residences and bungalow courts, and relative to other nearby cities, such as Santa Ana and Anaheim, which housed dozens of apartments, Fullerton had only a handful of apartment buildings. The Dewella Apartments are unique for their lovely combination of sweeping staircases, symmetrically balanced wings, and formal layout of the garden area in front. The Dewella was designated a Fullerton Historical Landmark (No. 70) in 1998.

The Dewella Apartments were constructed in 1929 by Herman Henry (1874-1966) and Edna H. Bruns (1888-1975) from Anaheim. Herman Bruns, an engineer with the Southern Pacific Railroad, had moved out

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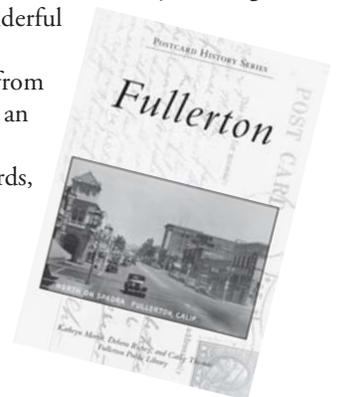


The Dewella Apartments on opening (inspection) day, December 15, 1929.

New Fullerton Postcard Book Available

A new postcard book—Postcard History Series: Fullerton written by FH Board members Deb Richey and Cathy Thomas, with co-author Kathryn Morris—has just been published and is available at sites around town. While they last, the Fullerton Public Library is selling signed copies. The book sells for \$19.99 and would make a wonderful Christmas or holiday gift for any history buff.

The book, which contains over 200 vintage postcards dating from 1891, visually documents the history of Fullerton's growth from an agricultural settlement to an urbanized area. This remarkable collection of postcards includes advertising cards, German postcards, greeting cards, real photograph postcards, and some unusual and unique cards, such as leather and QSL postcards. (See page 4 for an interview with Tom Pulley, who shared some of his collection to make this book possible.) Proceeds from the book go to support the Launer Local History Room of the Fullerton Public Library, the archive for the city's historical treasures.



Advocacy Issues

by Katie Dalton

It has been a busy, sometimes frustrating, but ultimately rewarding few months on the advocacy front since we last reported. The Redevelopment Design Review Committee (RDRC) and Community Development Department staff continue to perform commendably in the review of proposed development in the preservation zones. Staff is generally doing a thorough job and the RDRC truly seems to understand the need for sensitive and sometimes extensive review of the projects that come before them. They are following the design guidelines and in some cases have requested consideration of even stricter application when it will enhance the design and quality of the finished project. Occasionally this careful consideration requires projects to be reviewed by the committee more than once, which always yields a better design and they do not seem to mind the extra time involved. In the past several months they have reviewed and approved, with conditions, five projects in the Jacaranda/Malvern Zone (125 W. Malvern, 300, 338, and 505 W. Jacaranda Pl. and 119 W. Brookdale Pl.). They have also reviewed and approved 3 projects in the College Park Zone at 151 N. Cornell Ave., 423 E. Wilshire and 224 N. Yale Ave. The 224 N. Yale project is the issue that we reported in our last newsletter involving the historic Laguna Beach cottage that was moved onto the property without city knowledge or proper permits and review. You might remember our pleasure with city staff's strict response in the form of a demolition mandate and a 60 day timeline to present site and architectural plans with strict adherence to all preservation ordinances and design guidelines. The owner did so, and the RDRC approved the project after extensive review and many revisions and conditions. The project is unusual and we will be watching as it is built to help ensure adherence to the approved plans.

Speaking of adherence to approved plans, the frustrating and yet ultimately rewarding efforts that I mentioned above involve two different incidences of builders not actually following the approved design elements of their projects and Fullerton Heritage having to request a halt to projects in process and seek resolution. How disappointing and tedious to have to spend endless hours reviewing and advocating for adequate preservation values on proposed projects as they wind their way through the process, and still have to drive by, notice deviations, alert the City and again advocate for preservation issues on the SAME PROJECT!! Both of these cases involved demolition of small, insignificant structures and the building of 2 new dwellings on lots in the College Park Preservation Zone which is zoned R2P, allowing for the two units on each lot. Both projects were quite time consuming initially on the part of staff, RDRC members,

Fullerton Heritage and the owners due to serious design issues and the need for extra consideration of compatibility of new buildings with the historic context of the existing neighborhood. Both projects required further review by the Landmarks Commission (Planning Commission) triggered by the request for demolition. Needless to say we were not pleased that these two builders/owners chose not to build the quality projects that they initially agreed to, but instead "cut corners", severely compromised the design elements and consequently the historic compatibility of their projects. Fullerton Heritage diligently reviewed the plans again and prepared and presented a strong case before the Landmarks Commission on August 22 for the 201 N. Lincoln Ave. project and on September 26 for 218 N. Lincoln Ave. Thankfully in both cases the members of the Landmarks Commission unanimously supported Fullerton Heritage and RDRC and staff recommendations to require that these homes be built according to agreed upon plans. We consider this a huge victory and a significant step forward in the level of support for both the value of the preservation zones in general and the specific design guidelines that ensure historic compatibility. We learned that our advocacy efforts are more necessary than ever and are well worth pursuing. We also learned that we have some work to do in the near future to refine the design guidelines and help with the development of new procedural safeguards that might prevent deviations from approved projects and ensure compliance at the earliest possible stage in development.

We have a new Director of Community Development, John Godlewski, who started with the City on September 4, 2007. We look forward to getting to know John and working with him on preservation issues throughout the City. John reportedly has a strong planning background, having worked in Fullerton previously, as well as in Orange, which as you know has many historic properties. We will work hard on behalf of you, our members, to build a strong rapport with John to advance Fullerton Heritage's mission and goals.

Walking Tour Set for Nov. 17

Autumn is here and it's time for another downtown historic tour for a look at local history dating back to 1904. We will meet at the flagpole by the Fullerton Museum Center at 9:am; the tour will end at approximately 12:15pm. The informally narrated tour will offer a close-up look at downtown Fullerton sites and allow time for questions and input from walkers. It is either nostalgia or discovery or both! Handicap access is o.k. except for a couple of brief stops. Street parking on Saturday is usually available, or use the E. Wilshire parking structure (free). The tour is free to Fullerton Heritage members; it's only \$5.00 for others and children are free with adults. One may join FH at the beginning of the tour. Bring a friend or a new member and come!

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Dewella

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from the Midwest to Orange County around 1910. The couple built the Apartments as a business investment. During the 1920s, Fullerton had a serious “housing accommodation” problem, and the city was seen as an ideal location for attracting renters. When completed, the Dewella Apartments cost the couple \$36,400: \$11,000 for the complex, \$24,000 for four lots, and \$1400 for the furniture and other furnishings. The Apartments all had matching furniture and

rugs purchased from the Clausen Furniture Company in Santa Ana. The Apartments were named for Dewella Bruns Seaburg (1898-1921), the daughter of Herman Bruns and his first wife Edna Quelle Bruns (1878-1942). Dewella Seaburg had passed away during childbirth eight years before the Apartments were built. Dewella had a brother, Curtiss Bruns (1913-1970), who named his daughter Dewella in honor of his sister. That daughter, Dewella Chism, now lives in Arizona, and the photographs in this issue of the Fullerton Heritage Newsletter are from her private family collection.

Although Mr. Bruns provided funds for the construction of the Dewella Apartments, the project really belonged to Mrs. Bruns. She selected and worked with the building’s designer, contacted the local press, decorated each of the units, and even sewed the draperies that hung in the windows of each apartment. The Dewella opened for public viewing on Sunday December 15, 1929 from 2:00 to 8:00 p.m., and the eight four-room units were completely rented out in twenty-four hours. The Fullerton News Tribune called the



Dewella A. Bruns (1898-1921) the daughter of Herman Bruns and his first wife, Edna Quelle Bruns (1878-1942).



Herman Henry Bruns (1874-1966) and Edna H. Bruns (1888-1975), Herman’s second wife. The couple was the owner/builder of the Dewella Apartments.

Dewella “One of the most artistic apartment houses in Orange County, yes, in Southern California.” The Apartments were advertised as having all modern conveniences, including “General Electric refrigerators, electric stoves, electric and gas heat, built-in cabinets and service porches.” When the Apartments opened in December of 1929, the fountain and cement walkways were in place, but formal landscaping was not added until the Spring of 1930.

Mrs. Bruns had made plans to erect two more identical units north along Wilshire Avenue, but, unfortunately, the Dewella Apartments opened nine days before Black Thursday, October 24, 1929, the day of the stock market crash, and construction of the additional wings was abandoned. The

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An Interview with Tom Pulley, OC Postcard Collector

by Cathy Thomas

“Fullerton”—the latest in Arcadia Publishing’s Postcard History Series—is on sale now at the Main Branch and the Hunt Branch of the Fullerton Public Library. The postcard book was made possible through local collector and Orange County resident Tom Pulley, who was kind enough to loan the Library his extensive collection of Fullerton postcards. Over the years, Tom Pulley has painstakingly collected the largest known personal collection of Fullerton postcards. Tom was raised on a citrus ranch in Orange County and has been collecting and documenting various areas of our history for many years. If you have seen the Orange County postcard book, then you have

already seen examples from his amazing collection. Tom is one of those remarkable citizens who take it upon themselves to safeguard our heritage. But in addition to saving and documenting, Tom is always willing to share his knowledge and collection.

To make Fullerton residents more aware of Mr. Pulley and his postcard collection and other research, some questions were posed to him:

CT: Why did you start collecting postcards, and when?

TP: I started collecting postcards back in 1968 pretty much by accident. I was collecting U.S. Stamps at the time and a stamp shop I was visiting had a box of old

postcards at fifty cents each. I picked out about fifty cards, mostly real photos, and that started my love affair with postcards.

CT: How do you find your cards?

TP: When I first started collecting back in the 1960s and early 1970s I found most of my cards in antique shops and at antique shows. At one of the antique shows I attended in the mid 70s I came across a dealer specializing in postcards. This dealer gave me a flier about a postcard show with 15 or so dealers all dealing exclusively in postcards. I immediately started attending all the postcard shows I could find and from 1975 until

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Dewella

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economic downturn allowed the front area to be turned into a lovely garden spot, and the complex’s large setback made the Dewella even more striking from the street. The Bruns family held on to the Dewella until July 1947 when it was sold to Mable (1890-1982) and John Neuschafer (1889-1968), who also resided in Apartment #1.

The Dewella was designed and constructed by Ora Vinton Noble (1882-1942), who like the Bruns family, was from Iowa. Vinton began working as a contractor in the Los Angeles-Long Beach area, but had moved to Santa Ana when he married

Agnes McNeal (1884-1960), a member of the well-to-do pioneer McNeal and Ross families. Agnes was the granddaughter of Jacob Ross (1813-1870), the original owner of the property on which Santa Ana now stands. At the time of the construction of the Dewella, Vinton was specializing in apartment complexes, and was soon to leave to construct another in Santa Barbara. Vinton and his wife are both buried in the Ross section of the Santa Ana Cemetery.

Dewella A. Bruns as an adult. She was the namesake of the Dewella Apartment complex. She died in childbirth in Iowa. (Her son Earl Seaburg, Jr. survived.) Her family wanted to remember her by naming the apartments after her.



President's Corner

by Tom Dalton

You may have heard by now that the City Council voted to approve the Preservation Zone Overlay for the 300 and 400 blocks of W. Brookdale Place. Even though this is great news for us preservationists and the lucky homeowners on that wonderful street, all of the news is not good. You would think that since the majority of the homeowners had requested the Preservation Zone, the city's General Plan specifically encourages it, the Planning Commission had approved it, Fullerton Heritage had endorsed it and city staff had recommended it, the process would have been an easy one. It wasn't. As it turns out, developers have a much louder voice in our city than many of us had thought, including me, and this issue brought them out. While several property owners in the proposed area were opposed to the change because of property rights issues, it was primarily small developers who were extremely vocal. They did everything they could to defeat the proposal, from disrupting community information meetings and intimidating neighbors to lobbying Planning Commissioners and City Council Members. It is interesting to note that even though our historic neighborhoods represent a small percentage of our city's overall housing stock, those areas are being targeted by these developers because they have discovered there is profit to be made by destroying the vintage homes

and building starter castles. Sadly, we have two City Council members who feel this is just fine. There was much more debate about the relative merits of Preservation Zones than we would have expected. Our Mayor believes that "spot zoning" is appropriate for these areas, meaning that it would be acceptable to provide Preservation Zone status to only those houses in the neighborhood whose owners want it, but allow the other owners to do whatever they like. In reality, you don't have a Preservation Zone if you allow vintage homes to be torn down and huge new houses built that dwarf their neighbors, even if it is only one or two per block. If you'd like to see what that looks like, go look at 337 W. Brookdale. The Preservation Zone Overlay the neighborhood enjoys today would have prevented that from happening.

We have a limited number of vintage homes in our city and they need to be protected by the people we have elected to represent our interests. This is particularly important now because we have homeowners in two additional historic neighborhoods that are seriously considering pursuing Preservation Zone status and they deserve to be heard by an unbiased City Council. Our sincere thanks are extended to City Council Members Keller, Jones and Quirk who voted with the residents and to Ernie Kelsey, Brookdale Heights homeowner, Fullerton Heritage member and Preservationist of the Year, for all of his hard work on the Preservation Zone effort.

Pulley

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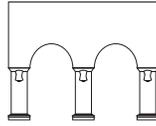
1995 almost all my cards came from the postcard shows. I got on the Internet in 1995 and started buying cards on Ebay. Now about half my new cards come from Ebay and half from postcard shows. You didn't ask but at last count I have accumulated just over 11,000 Orange County postcards.

CT: I know you also collect orange crate labels. Do you collect anything else?

TP: I have a collection of Orange County bottles and other glass but the collection is inactive at the present time. I still collect stamps; I have specialized collections of U.S. and Hawaiian Islands plus a general collection of world wide stamps.



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Pulley

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CT: Can you tell us a little bit about the citrus ranch you were raised on?

TP: I certainly wouldn't call it a ranch. It was a ten-acre grove on the east side of Santa Ana at the corner of Santa Clara Ave. and Yorba Street. The grove did not generate enough income to support the family and my dad worked full time as a weed oil salesman. The work kept him on the road for about nine months of the year and from the time I was eleven years old I did all the cultural work on the grove including the tractoring, irrigating, pruning, weed control, catching gophers, etc. During the winter time when the grove needed to be heated during freezing weather my dad managed to work around Orange County. My dad and I did the smudging. Several times each winter we worked all night keeping the smudge pots going. This was OK with me since I got to skip school the next day.

I know you are working on a history of the citrus industry in Orange County. Can you tell us how that is coming?

TP: All the research for the book is complete. The text is about eighty percent done. The main thing holding up the book right now is raising enough funds to cover the cost of publication. Hopefully it will be published sometime in 2008.

Consider giving a friend a gift membership in Fullerton Heritage

Join Fullerton Heritage

Yes, I want to support Fullerton Heritage in preserving Fullerton's historic cultural and architectural resources. Please check one:

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I would like to be active in Fullerton Heritage, and am interested in the following activities:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Other interests (please list): | <input type="checkbox"/> Landmark Nominations |
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