

The Cleavers Strike Liquid Gold

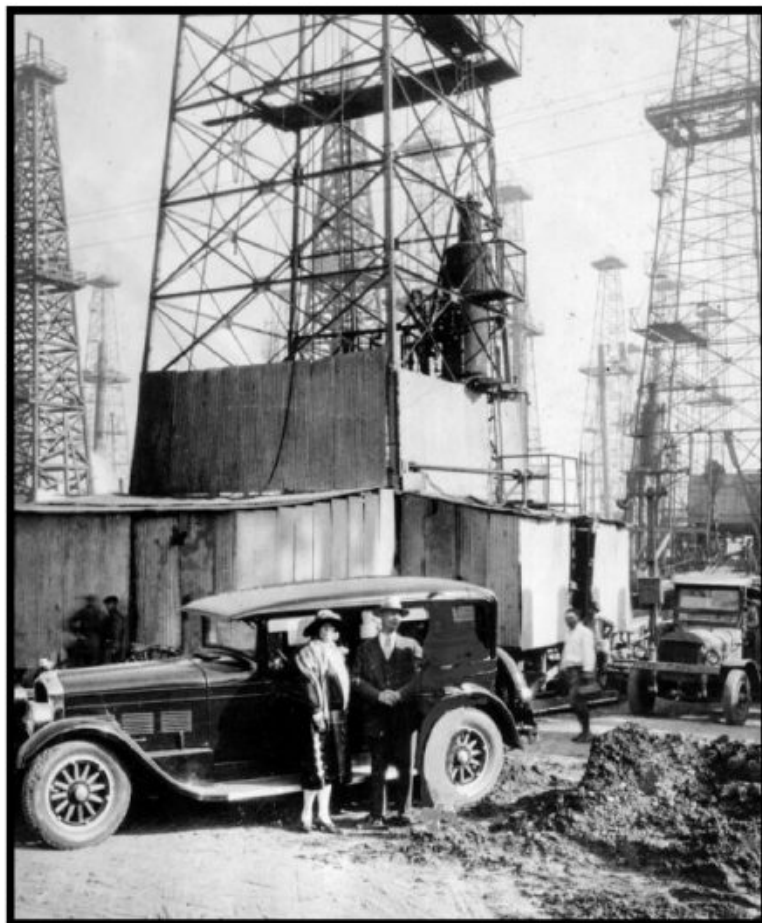
by Debora Richey

When Arthur Wedell Cleaver, Sr. (1860-1943) settled in Fullerton in 1920 with his much younger fourth wife, Kathryn, known as Teenie, it was supposed to be a new start for the couple. The two would become fabulously wealthy when their Long Beach oil leases struck gold in 1927, making them the talk of the town, only to later have Arthur's reputation torn to shreds with a sordid paternity suit in 1934. Arthur and Kathryn would live in Fullerton for twenty-three years, leaving behind two striking buildings – the Sanitary Laundry at 225 West Santa Fe Avenue and the spectacular Cleaver House at 519 West Fern Drive – that are now Fullerton Local Landmarks.

Arthur was the son of William Cleaver (1815-1896), an English soap and perfume manufacturer who emigrated to the Chicago area after selling his company to William Yardley in 1824, whose company Yardley of London still produces the original toiletry products. William joined his brother, Charles Cleaver (1814-1893), and the two men

established a successful soap and rendering works, then moved into the laundry and real estate trades. One of Chicago's earliest settlers, Charles bought 22 acres of land in 1851 and began building his own company town, Cleaverville. He paid the Illinois Central Railroad \$3,800 a year to provide train service to his community, transforming Cleaverville into one of Chicago's first commuter suburbs. (Annexed to Chicago in 1899, Cleaverville now forms part of the Oakland neighborhood north of Hyde Park on the lake front.)

Born in Cleaverville on March 31, 1860, Arthur W. Cleaver attended local public schools in Chicago and the old University of Chicago, before joining the family laundry business in 1878. Ten years later, he and his father built the largest laundry in Chicago, with numerous branches in all parts of the city. For a time, the company tried opening laundry facilities where the public, for a nominal fee, could wash their own clothes and linens, but the enterprise was a failure. Keenly interested in cycling, Arthur became one of the fastest



The Cleavers with their new car in front of their gushers.



Fullerton Local Landmark No. 18 ELEPHANT PACKING HOUSE

by Terry Galvin

Constructed by the Union Pacific Railroad in 1924, this Mission Revival building is one of the last remaining packing houses in Fullerton, where at one time dozens of such plants lined the railroad tracks. The citrus industry in Fullerton was instrumental in the city's development and prosperity during the first half of the 20th century.



The building was initially leased by Elephant Orchards of Redlands, which then entered into an agreement with the Fullerton Mutual Orange Association to pick their Valencia oranges under the Elephant brand. In 1932, orange czar Charles C. Chapman subleased the Elephant packing plant, located at 201 West Truslow Avenue, and for twenty years the Old Mission Brand Valencia oranges were packed here. Chapman used the Old Mission Brand to identify his quality oranges, which always brought the highest prices in New York. Chapman also packed other citrus fruits, including lemons and grapefruit, at the packing plant. This building is the only remaining structure directly connected with the business that made Chapman so well known. His home, ranch, and first packing plant have long been destroyed. Starting in 1957, the building has been used by a number of businesses for warehousing and manufacturing activities. In 1991 the building was used for the first meeting places and beginning origins of Fullerton Heritage.

The exterior design of the building reflects the Mission Revival style that was very popular for nonresidential buildings during the 1910s and 1920s. The most detailed design feature on the exterior of the one-story building – which features 23,500-square feet of floor area – is the main entrance located near the southwest corner of the packing plant. Inside the structure wooden post and trust construction supports a sawtooth roof design with skylights and ventilation on the north side, the most identifying feature of the building. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983.



bicycle riders in America. He played the violin in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and was one of the musicians in both the First and Second Regiment Bands of the Illinois National Guard. He also began his life-long fascination with his family's genealogy, tracing his ancestry back to William of the Cleavers, commander with William the Conqueror. Later in life, he often posed with his coat of arms and other regalia.



After divorcing his first wife, Arthur moved to Los Angeles in 1894, where he established Cleaver's Laundry, which he sold, and then started the Los Angeles Laundry Company, as well as the Excelsior Laundry Company in San Diego in 1910. He also owned and operated the Jack O'Lantern restaurant on West Fifth Street off Broadway, and became a member of the Los Angeles Realty Board, selling homes and lots. He joined the Thistle Cycle Club, named for the Thistle Bicycle, considered one of the speediest two-wheelers at the time, and continued to enter races throughout Southern California. In 1895, Arthur, then 35, married 18-year-old Helene Edith Shaw (1876-1912), the daughter of the vice-president of the National Bank of Long Beach. Arthur's only child, Arthur Wedell Cleaver, Jr., would live only one day, passing away on February 14, 1898. After years of ill health, and convinced that that she would never recover, Helene Cleaver shot and killed herself, using her husband's revolver, on June 9, 1912, at the age of 35. Distraught, Arthur sold his businesses, travelled extensively throughout Europe, then returned and married for a third time in 1913, and divorced again.

During World War I, Arthur served as a laundry expert in the Quartermasters Corps at Washington, D.C. and supervised the construction of laundries at training camps. On his 57th birthday in 1917, he married divorcee Kathryn Carls (1878-1942), 38, who encouraged him to get back into the laundry business. After considerable research, Arthur purchased the Fullerton Laundry in December 1919, quickly renaming it the Sanitary Laundry. Using local contractor Edward G. Schenck, Arthur remodeled and expanded the building several times until finally building a new Sanitary Laundry facility, a model of its kind, in 1928. The laundry employed fifty people, along with a fleet of drivers, making it one of the largest employers in North Orange County. At its peak, the facility was using 25,000 gallons of "zero soft water" a day to rinse washes sudsed up with "pure" Ivory soap. Customers were charged 60 cents for twelve pounds of wash, with orders picked up and delivered the same day.

Oil Bonanza

In 1904, Arthur had formed the Long Beach and Alamitos Improvement Company to subdivide a tract (Alamitos Heights) of low land just east of Long Beach. The lots, ranging between \$100 and \$350, moved slowly, and he sold off the five-acre block where the Pan American Petroleum Company developed several successful wells. All that was left was a long, narrow strip, hardly fifteen feet wide in places. Cleaver wanted to sell the two-acre subdivision remnant, but no one wanted it, and Kathryn suggested just keeping it. When oil was found at Seal Beach, J. Paul Getty leased the shoestring lot from Arthur and drilled four or five wells at the largest portion of it. The big oil companies had turned their noses up at the strip, believing it too narrow to accommodate standard rigs, but Getty put up stub derricks. The first well came in on Arthur's 67th birthday in 1927, pumping out 12,000 barrels a day. Other gushers quickly followed. News of the Cleavers' good fortune quickly spread, and Kathryn was besieged day and night by telephone calls and visitors at her front door encouraging the couple to invest in various business

ventures. The Cleavers celebrated by buying a new car, taking a cruise around the world, and building a new Sanitary Laundry building upon their return. The couple remained tight-lipped about how much money was coming in, but it was estimated that initially they received \$40,000 to \$60,000 per month, with the amount decreasing to about \$25,000 a month by 1929.

The Cleavers, who were living in a lovely but modest home at 140 North Berkeley Avenue (1925), hired local contractor Philip N. Schmocker (1893-1975) to build them a spectacular \$25,000 home on West Fern Drive in 1928. A deeply religious man, Schmocker specialized in Spanish Colonial Revivals, and he had just completed an imposing Spanish Colonial Revival mansion for Alex Glen and Alma Wright at 401 Cannon Lane. The Cleavers told Schmocker they wanted an even more impressive home befitting their newfound wealth. Now a visual landmark in the Upper Golden Hill neighborhood, the 4,200-square-foot Cleaver House featured a circular reception hall, stained glass, ornate ceramic tiles, maid's quarters, dressing rooms, and a ballroom in the basement. Arthur's initials are still in the concrete pavement at the bottom of the front steps. Completed just after the 1929 Stock Market Crash, the home would be Schmocker's last major commission before he permanently closed his Fullerton business.



Paternity Lawsuit

When the Cleavers moved to Fullerton in 1920, they threw themselves into the town's conservative social world. An avid card player, Kathryn joined the Fleur-de-Lis Card Club, along with the Fullerton Ebell Club and the Eastern Star. Arthur joined the Fullerton Chamber of Commerce, the Fullerton Rotary Club, the Hacienda Country Club, the White Shrine, and the Fullerton Masonic Lodge. Still dismayed that his father had forced him to abandon his music career for the laundry trade, he also enjoyed playing the violin at various events. Arthur's one vice was speeding through town, and at one point, his license was revoked for a year.

In 1929, the Sanitary Laundry hired Oklahoma-native Esther Keller, then 20, as a checker and marker.



On June 10, 1932, she gave birth to a son, Arthur Richard Keller, out of wedlock. Obviously smitten with Esther, Arthur gave her small gifts and money, eventually doling out \$50 a week to her, which she used to rent an apartment in Hollywood. Arthur had his chauffeur periodically drive him to Hollywood for visits, and he and Esther would lunch at the Pig 'N Whistle Cafe on Hollywood Boulevard. Suspicious but aware of her husband's sympathy for Esther, Kathryn hired private detective Thomas R. Daniels, who hid several times under the floor of Esther's duplex Hollywood apartment with an ear glued to a ventilator grating in the floor. The

(continues on page 5)

detective reported that he heard Esther plotting with a friend to “shake down” Arthur for money needed for an operation. Furious, Kathryn made a scene on June 1, 1934 at the Pig ‘N Whistle, shouting that she knew all about Esther’s past. With her weekly allowance now cut off, Esther sued Arthur for \$45,000 in 1934, claiming that he was the father of her two-year old son. The sordid details of the lawsuit, which ran from 1935 to 1936, were reported in all the local newspapers, causing a stir around Fullerton. When the trial opened on March 25, 1935, Arthur, now 75, was grilled for hours. Esther’s lawyers flaunted photographs of Arthur holding the small boy and displayed gifts he had given Esther, including pajamas. At one point, Arthur was forced to sit the child on his knee while the judge compared their profiles for a possible family resemblance. Arthur’s doctors, however, testified that he had undergone medical procedures in 1927 and 1928 that made him physically incapable of fatherhood. On April 5, 1935, Judge Homer Ames, while noting that Arthur was not blameless, denied the paternity suit. After hearing the verdict, Arthur collapsed in his wife’s arms. Esther’s lawyers appealed, and a new trial was granted in July, but later denied upon appeal on March 19, 1936.



Arthur Cleaver



Kathryn Cleaver

Many of the Cleavers’ friends stood by the couple during the trial, but Arthur’s reputation was greatly diminished. In 1938, he sold his laundry business and equipment to Frederick L. Larsen of Anaheim but retained ownership of the property and building on West Santa Fe Avenue. Kathryn died in her sleep at her home in 1942, at the age of 63; Arthur passed away the following year, also in his home, at the age of 83.

**Earn cash, Gain Experience,
Support the Library!**



The Local History Room is starting to digitize the Fullerton News Tribune! Student interns needed.

**Basic computer skills a must. \$16 an hour.
Up to 10 hours a week.**

**For more information about our paid internship contact... Cheri Pape Local History Room
Fullerton Public Library 714-738-6342
Cheri.pape@cityoffullerton.com**

**HOLIDAY
DECORATING
CONTEST**

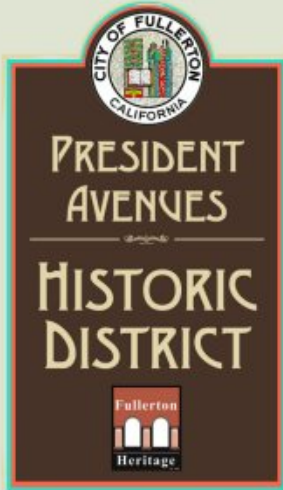
This holiday season Fullerton Heritage will once again be holding a Preservation Zone home decorating contest. So, start planning now and see if you can be one of this year’s winners.

Watch your mail for a post announcing the contest in the Fall of 2024.

MORE PRESERVATION ZONES

Coming Soon

by Ernie Kelsey



With the final passage and declaration of the President Avenues Preservation Zone back in October 2023, more neighborhoods are becoming interested in getting their neighborhood preserved and classified as a residential preservation zone.

Currently the Woods-Wilshire-Wicket Square (Marwood) neighborhood team is out collecting signatures in preparation of a Planning Commission meeting. The Upper Golden Hill neighborhood had their Community Informational Meeting in late June and have submitted their petition to the City. We also have Oceanview Drive, Amerige Avenue, Skyline Park and Lower Golden Hill in line and ready to get started. Getting these Zones officially declared takes a lot of work but it's well worth all the effort.

Welcome

New Fullerton Heritage Board Members

by Ernie Kelsey



Fullerton Heritage is very excited to announce that we've added two new board members, bringing your board up to eleven members. We are fortunate to have two new people that love Fullerton and love our history. We welcome Debbie DeSpain and Nick Nicholas to the Fullerton Heritage Board of Directors.

Debbie has been a Fullerton resident for over 50 years. She has been involved with Neighborhood Watch and is currently a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) member. She led the effort to create a new Preservation Zone in her neighborhood. Debbie's favorite Fullerton buildings are Rutabegorz and the Police Station.

Nick has been a Fullerton resident for almost 20 years and is another great addition to our board. He lives in a 1923 bungalow and loves all things vintage. Nick also donates his time to other organizations like Canine Companions for Independence and is on the Board of the Southwest Parking and Transportation Association. Nick's favorite buildings in Fullerton are the Dewella Apartments and the Elephant Packing House.

Welcome Debbie and Nick! We're lucky to have you.

2024 Annual Meeting Recap

by Ernie Kelsey

This year Fullerton Heritage held its Annual Meeting on June 23, 2024. We were back at Rutabegorz where Paul Berkman and Dane Henderson opened on Sunday and hosted us once again. Not only do we get to hold our meeting in a beautiful location, we had delicious refreshments too! Members also got to see the Fullerton Heritage display inside the restaurant. If you haven't seen it, you should go check it out.

We reviewed Fullerton Heritage's progress over the last year and had a nice re-cap of our communication efforts and successes.

This year we handed out three awards, including the Community Education Award going to Emerson Little, the Good Neighbor Award going to Radiant Futures (formerly the Women's Transitional Living Center) and Preservationist of the Year Award going to Debbie DeSpain for her efforts to have the President Avenues neighborhood declared a Preservation Zone. That's a lot of hard work! Debbie is currently on the Fullerton Heritage Board but did all the hard work before she joined so we thought it appropriate to award her for her efforts.

Our guest speaker was author and Fullerton Heritage member, Debra Brunner, author of *Felony in Fullerton*.

Ms. Brunner was an excellent speaker, and it was fun to hear how she goes about the process of writing a book. She had books for sale after the meeting. Her book is also available at the Fullerton Public Library or for purchase on Amazon.

For more details on the 2024 Fullerton Heritage Annual Meeting, you can find the meeting presentation on our website (fullertonheritage.org) under News.



**Thank you for your
membership, Renew today!**

Newsletter design, layout and editing:
Ernie Kelsey, Jennifer Harris, Deb Richey

PRESIDENT'S CORNER SUMMER 2024



Happy Summer everyone! Hope this newsletter finds you well.

We started off the year with a private historic downtown walking tour with **Dr. Robert Pletka**, Superintendent of the Fullerton School District and some of his team. He's interested in including a tour as part of the elementary local history curriculum. This has been an ongoing discussion so hopefully some headway can be made soon.

On February 15, 2024, the City of Fullerton celebrated the **120-year anniversary** of our incorporation as a city. There's a plaque in the downtown plaza area commemorating our city's 100-year incorporation, it's hard to believe 20 years have already passed since that was installed!

In February we also learned that the potentially significant property located at **801 S. Acacia Avenue** (PlastiColor, formerly Arcadia Metal Products) was going to be demolished. We spoke at the Planning Commission meeting and even appealed the Planning Commission decision to approve the demolition to the City Council. We ultimately lost our appeal. From this whole process we increased our knowledge about Arcadia Metal Products which led us to information about the Mississippi Glass Company that supplied glass to Arcadia Metal Products for sliding glass doors. This then led us to the Ador Corporation at **2345 W.**

Commonwealth Avenue, the premier maker of sliding glass doors and another user of Mississippi Glass. The first manager of Mississippi Glass was named **William Rollo** and he had one house built at **538 W. Whiting Avenue**, which is currently in process of becoming a Local Landmark.

We've been helping Linda Shay from the **Brea Museum** get a local historic district application completed. It will be Brea's first historic district when Linda gets it all approved. This proposed district includes Union Oil housing from the 1920s.

The team had some good meetings with Mayor **Nick Dunlap** to discuss preservation, Fullerton Planning Manager **Chris Schafer** to meet some new Planning team members and Police Chief **Jon Radus** to discuss the historic Fullerton Police Department building. We also met with Fullerton College President **Dr. Cynthia Olivo's** staff regarding the restoration of the historic Building 300 on the Fullerton College campus. We met and discussed Hunt Furniture again, this time with the librarian from **Fullerton Union High School (FUHS)** and they may take some furniture pieces to help start the FUHS history section of their library. This is great news and hopefully it all comes together.

I was saddened to read about the passing of **Craig Hostert** with Park West Development. He was the lead developer for the proposed downtown transit center hotel and apartments. He was an extremely nice and patient man along with being a great person. He was a local Fullertonian and loved the city! He will be sorely missed.

We met with **Janet Brown** from Congressman **Lou Correa's** office about potential names for some of the Fullerton Post Offices. We gave her a comprehensive list and look forward to seeing what is ultimately chosen.

Our members only event to celebrate the re-opening of the **Hunt Library** in April was a big success! **Judy Booth** and **Aimee Aul** with the City were on hand with the latest information about the Hunt. It was very nice to be back in that building and seeing it pretty much all finished. There's some landscaping that can be done and as stewards of the assets from Fullerton Beautiful, we will work with the City to continue to spruce up the iconic Hunt Library.

Bob, Jennifer, Deb and I attended a very interesting **Preserve Orange County** Roundtable in Santa Ana which was very interesting. The topic was listing multiple properties and we all learned something.

Fullerton Heritage is very thankful to the **Fullerton Rotary** for awarding us with the **2024 Community Investment Award**. We're a multi-year winner and will use the \$500 to buy plaques for the Hunt Library. **Thank you, Fullerton Rotary!**

May was **National Preservation Month** and we celebrated with free walking tours of Historic Downtown and Historic Hillcrest Park. **Jennifer Harris**, Fullerton Heritage Vice President and I also made some videos with the city to promote and celebrate the month. It was also **Small Business Month**, so it was fun combining our history with current small businesses.

Thank you to all our members for all you do for Fullerton! Your support of Fullerton Heritage helps us keep going on our mission to preserve our past so the generations to come enjoy it like we do today.

With warm regards,
Ernie