



Fullerton Heritage

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Ernest S. Gregory

Fullerton's Most Prolific Early Builder

by Debora Richey

Prior to World War II, Ernest Shaw Gregory (1881-1933) was the most prolific builder of housing in Fullerton. Starting in 1916, no fewer than 500 residences were constructed by Gregory in the city, many of which are still standing. When Gregory died in 1933, by his own hand, it was estimated out of the 10,860 inhabitants in Fullerton, over 2,000 were living in a Gregory-built home. Local historians believe that aside from town founder George Amerige, Gregory was the most responsible for Fullerton's substantial growth in the 1920s. A generous and courtly gentleman, Gregory's death was a deep personal loss to the community as well as to Fullerton's housing industry. Far-sighted, he had implemented many housing elements – tract development, affordable housing, attached garages, cutting-edge technology – that other building contractors quickly adopted. He built almost exclusively single-family residences designed in a variety of styles. Incredibly, it appears that no two residences are identical in their design features.



Ernest S. and Laura Gregory, photo taken around 1910

Early Years

Ernest Shaw Gregory was born March 3, 1881, in Chesterfield County, Virginia. He was one of ten children born to Edwin Spencer Gregory (1840-1912) and Rosina Harriet Gill (1841-1914). Reared on a farm, he attended country schools. At the age of 19, he moved to Fullerton, joining his sister, Estelle Rosina Gregory Welton, and brother, Richard Spencer Gregory (1876-1958), who would serve as Fullerton Mayor from 1914 to 1916. He learned the carpentry trade with Clinton H. Smith, Fullerton's first significant contractor/builder, and supplemented that training with a course at the Throop Polytechnic Institute (later the California Institute of Technology) in Pasadena. He also received a mathematics and drafting diploma from the International Correspondence School in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Around 1902, Gregory moved to Los Angeles, where he worked as a foreman of a large building concern, overseeing the construction of 3,000 homes. During these early years, he would often make short trips back to Fullerton to assist in the construction of homes. On one of these visits, Gregory met Laura Esther Gage (1884-1982), a Kansas native. Gregory, then 22, and Laura, 19, were married on July 26, 1903, in Los Angeles, then moved into Gregory's home at 642 West 37th Street.

300 BUILDING



FULLERTON COLLEGE RENOVATION UPDATE

by Terry Galvin

At this time, the building exterior retains its original designation as “Business”, following the historic designation system on educational campuses of naming buildings based on their function. As explained in the January newsletter, the project was successfully started in late 2023. The building will continue to be occupied by the Business Department and will include Computer Science instruction.

After the necessary demolition and removal of interior partitions of the heating and air conditioning system (HVAC) and electrical equipment, the chosen contractor, ICON WEST, was able to prepare for new construction. Seismic requirements included installation of about 40 pilings around the exterior of the building plus additional pilings in the basement. A material called fiber reinforced polymer, a fabric soaked in a liquid asphalt was applied to some interior floor and wall areas for additional seismic strengthening. Use of this material and the pilings saved much of the original building structure from demolition.

The building is a concrete structure, so most exterior features will remain, including the tile roof. The exterior stairs were required by the State to be reconstructed, to meet current tread spacing requirements, but all original materials will be reused where possible. Work on the stairs has begun.



The original windows will be retained with removal of the lead-based paint. Window frames are being repainted in place. Lighting fixtures and stair railings were taken to an off-site location for restoration.

Construction of 1st and 2nd floor classrooms and bathrooms is in process, including metal studs, insulation, electrical lines, heating and air conditioning ducts, and drywall. A New HVAC system, electrical equipment, and water lines are being installed in the basement. Completion and occupancy are scheduled for summer 2026.

The couple would live at different locations around Los Angeles, then settle into the Belvedere Heights area (now East Los Angeles), and produce two children: Ernestine Esther (1908-1992) and Ellsworth Sheldon (1911-1997). Both children would graduate from Fullerton Union High School, and Ellsworth would graduate from Fullerton College in 1933.

In 1916, after returning from serving in the National Guard, Gregory began to develop an erratic boom and bust financial pattern that would be repeated on several occasions. Gregory's grandnephew noted that his uncle was said to be "a millionaire 3 times and broke 4" as the housing market fluctuated up and down. Starting in 1916, Gregory began purchasing and erecting modest dwellings in Fullerton. With limited capital, he bought two lots on Malvern Avenue and began construction of a home which sold before it was completed. He immediately began building on the adjacent lot, and on borrowed money, continued to construct homes around the city.

Move to Fullerton

In 1919, he was persuaded by his brother, Richard S. Gregory, to permanently move from Los Angeles to Fullerton, and the two brothers began a building partnership that would last for the next six years. Richard Gregory would locate and purchase tracts of land that he would divide into lots. Ernest Gregory would then design and construct homes in the tract that his brother would, in turn, sell through his real estate business. The Gregory brothers would become early significant developers in Fullerton, building hundreds of homes for new residents at a time when the city was suffering from a severe housing shortage. The two men bought lots and built houses in several subdivisions throughout Fullerton in the early 1920s, including Hermosa, Jacaranda, Ramona, and Victoria Square. During this time, Gregory was completing a home a month in Fullerton. In 1922 alone, he constructed and sold over 100 Fullerton homes, making him the largest builder in the city.



Ernest S. Gregory (l) with sister Estelle and brother Richard S. Gregory (Fullerton Public Library)



Gregory Advertisement, Fullerton News Tribune, 1929

In the early 1920s, Ernest Gregory was particularly concerned with developing moderate cost housing. One of the best examples of his efforts to provide affordable housing is found on the south side of the 600 block of West Wilshire Avenue. Constructed in 1922, these small houses were on postage-stamp lots, around 2,250 square-feet in area. The modest houses were no more than 1,000 square feet and sold for around \$2,000. This small subdivision is the first documented example in Fullerton of an entire tract of houses being built at one time and in accordance with a few basic designs. Gregory used a simple cubical shape for these houses, alternating between a California bungalow and a Spanish Colonial Revival style. In the mid and late 1920s, Gregory began building up-scale residences for wealthier households, reflecting the prosperous times before the stock market crash of 1929. The best examples of his efforts to provide affordable housing are located on the south side of the 600 block of West Wilshire Avenue.

Over the years, Gregory varied the architectural styles of the buildings he constructed. Starting in 1919 through 1920, Gregory's first residences in Fullerton were two-bedroom, one-bathroom wood-framed California bungalows with few architectural details (e.g., 429 E. Amerige Avenue; 119 N. Lawrence Avenue; 314 W. Jacaranda Place; 605 N. Pomona Avenue; 211 W. Whiting Avenue).



605 N. Pomona Avenue (1919)



428 Jacaranda Place (1921)



630 W. Wilshire Avenue (1922)



313 N. Woods Avenue (1924)

The simplicity of these early California bungalows would greatly contrast with the more architecturally elaborate homes he constructed at the end of his career. In July 1919, when the Fullerton Chamber of Commerce, and other organizations, adopted a resolution to make the Spanish Colonial Revival the preferred architectural style in Fullerton, Gregory joined other developers in constructing Spanish-style homes. His Spanish Colonial Revival dwellings built in 1921 and 1922 were initially quite small and relatively simple in style (e.g., 714, 716, and 922 E. Chapman Avenue; 1000, 1006 and 1010 E. Commonwealth Avenue; 620 and 630 W. Wilshire Avenue), reflecting Gregory's concern to provide moderate cost housing for the community. Gregory started building more elaborate Spanish style housing beginning in 1924 (e.g., 719 W. Wilshire Avenue; 1112, 1116, and 1124 E. Whiting Avenue; 219, 309 and 313 N. Woods Avenue), and over the next several years through 1931, the stucco-covered residences included more striking and sophisticated Spanish-styled architectural elements, such as detailed wrought iron, colorful terracotta and ceramic tiles, and more dramatic entrances (e.g., 613 W. Fern Drive; 853 Lois Lane; 304 N. Marwood Avenue; 113 Rose Drive).

In the mid to late 1920s, to distinguish himself from other builders, Gregory began designing and constructing homes in a fashion and manner he labeled the "English Style". The whimsical, picturesque dwellings-unique to Fullerton-are technically classified as Storybook Styled homes, but Gregory freely borrowed fanciful architectural details from other period revival styles, including Tudor Revival, Normandy Revival, and English peasant cottages. Gregory no doubt borrowed elements from Storybook Styled homes he saw in Los Angeles and Hollywood, the epicenter for this short-lived architectural style. Like other Southern California building designers and architects of the 1920s – Everett Babcock, Harry Oliver, Robert Sherwood – Gregory developed a personal, but easily recognizable, Storybook style. One of the best examples of Gregory's transformation from Spanish Colonial to "English" style architecture may be viewed on the 1100 block of East Whiting Avenue, one of the city's first planned tracts. In the first phase of development in 1925, the houses built by Gregory on the south side of this block are of a Spanish Colonial Revival style; the second phase, the construction of the houses on the north side of the block in 1928, consists largely of the "English" style architecture developed by Gregory.

Gregory's Storybook Styled homes evoked fairy tales and medieval Europe, with turrets, rounded and pointed arched doors, leaded glass windows, quoins, catslip roofs, rolled eaves, and shingle roofs meant to emulate thatched roofs. Others resembled miniature castles (e.g., 656 Golden Avenue; 171 Hillcrest Lane; 312 and 328 N. Marwood; 109 and 117 Rose Drive; 129 and 140 W. Rosslynn Avenue; 1101, 1115, 1121

and 1131 E. Whiting Avenue). Gregory prided himself on constructing no two homes that were alike, so rooflines, entryways, chimneys, doors, hardware, decorative elements, and other creative embellishments were cleverly arranged in different formats. A master carpenter, Gregory was both highly skilled and artistic in this approach to building, reflected in the detailing of his Storybook homes, which relied on simple materials lovingly detailed. Typically executed in stucco, the Storybook style was perfectly suited to the compact and modest two-bedroom, one-bathroom homes Gregory was building in the late 1920s. The friendly and inviting Old World charm of the homes

invariably brought smiles to homebuyers, and the style became quite popular in Fullerton. Despite the relatively short time Gregory designed and constructed his Storybook homes – from 1927 to 1929 – his architectural treatments greatly influenced other local builders and architects. Depending upon the size or location of the residences, the homes generally sold for \$5,500 to \$8,500.

The mid to late 1920s was a time of great technical innovation in architecture, and new homes in the era contained for the first time built-in ironing boards, telephones, speaking tubes, built-in refrigeration, push-button switches, electric wall sconces, built-in aerials that served console radios, automatic heaters, and mailboxes which funneled mail to a home's interior via a chute concealed in the wall. Ernest Gregory prided himself on providing all these new technological innovations in even his modest five- and six-room homes, forcing other local builders to follow suit. His inclusion of so many home telephone connections led to the insertion of a tiny bell symbol in the Fullerton City Directories next to the names of homeowners who owned telephones in the 1920s. Unlike other builders, Gregory also decorated the interiors of his homes with stylish drapes, wallpaper, linoleum, and paint color schemes that matched the exteriors of his homes. In October 1928, Gregory constructed the first homes in Fullerton – and some of the first in Orange County – with attached garages large enough for two cars (e.g., 105, 142, 148 and 150 Rose Drive; 328 W. Brookdale Place). As part of a residence for the first time, the attached garage with direct access to the house was promoted as the “coming thing” in new modern housing. At the time, grease fires often destroyed garages, but Gregory added fire-prevention features that made the new attached garages safer.

Final Years

During this time, Gregory's business method would be to buy a cluster of lots on the same block or area and construct new homes on them in a matter of months. He also offered homeowners the opportunity to design and then purchase custom-built homes, and he had an extensive in-house catalog of home plans he would often show his clientele. A tall, handsome man with courtly manners, Gregory quickly sold his residences on “easy terms” installment plans. The stock market crash of 1929 put Gregory's home building business on a path of slow destruction over the next few years. Depressed and beset by ill-health and financial distress from defaulted real estate contracts – and aware that an insurance policy would provide for his family upon his death-Gregory telephoned his friend, Angus McAulay, a Fullerton undertaker, on April 9, 1933, requesting him to come get his body before his family returned home from church. Before McAulay could arrive at Gregory's home at 600 North Harbor Blvd., Gregory shot himself through the heart with a 12-gauge shotgun while sitting in the back of his



1101 E. Whiting Avenue (1928)



113 Rose Drive (1928)



304 Marwood Avenue (1927)



656 N. Golden Avenue (1927)

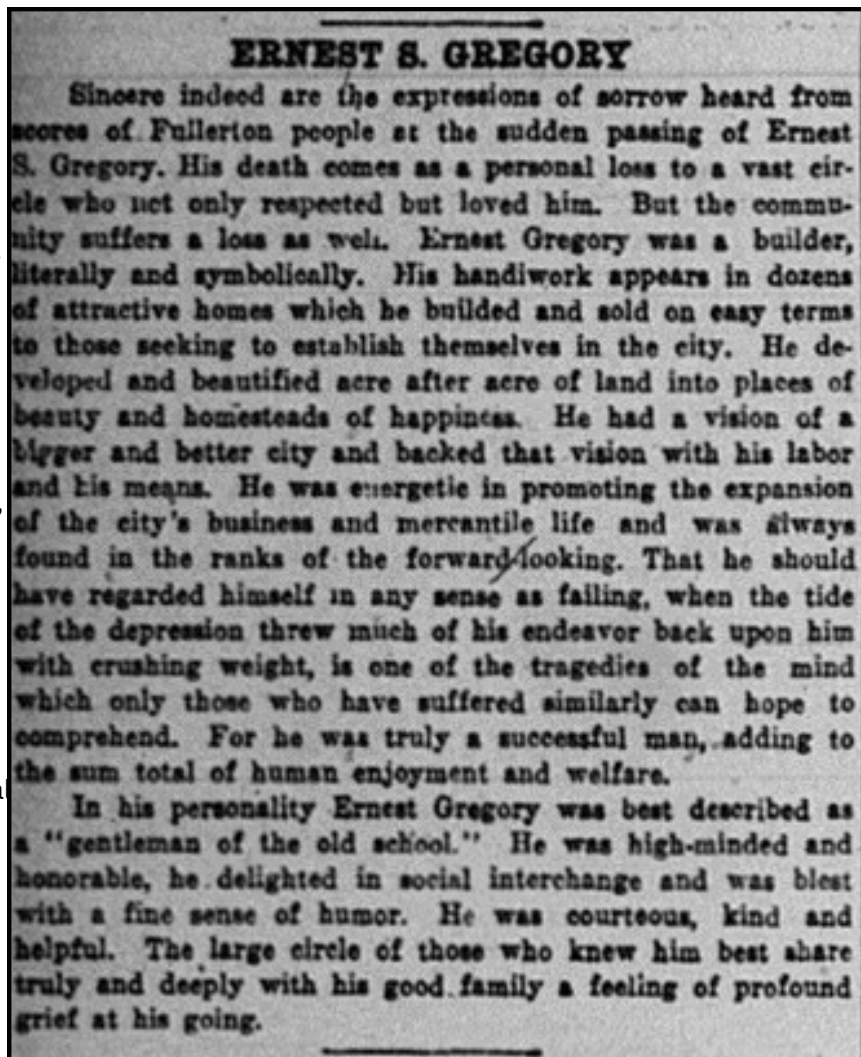
Hudson automobile. He was 52 years of age. Both well-liked and respected, Gregory's death was a great shock and loss to the community. His sudden death was so deeply felt that the local newspaper, the Fullerton News Tribune, in an unusual move, published a tribute to the builder in the editorial section on April 11, 1933. After her husband's death, Laura Gregory collected the second largest life insurance death payment in the nation, \$287,800, in 1933 (about \$6 million today). The family moved to Balboa Island and then back to the Golden Hill area of Fullerton, where they lived in homes adjacent to each other. Ellsworth, a bookkeeper, would marry Mary Elizabeth Haun, and the couple had two children, Sherill and Sheldon. Esther Gregory worked as a sales lady at the Chapman-Wickett Company, then married Robert Hatfield, secretary/ manager of the Orange County Builders Exchange in Santa Ana. The couple had one son, Roy. The Gregory family is buried together in Loma Vista Memorial Park.

Gregory-Built Residences

Ernest Gregory's wide breadth of housing in Fullerton was constructed in a 12-year period from 1919 to 1931, and will be found on a multitude of avenues and streets in Fullerton:

Amerige, Ash, Brookdale Place, Buena Vista, Chapman, Commonwealth, Cornell, Fern Drive,

Golden, Grandview, Jacaranda Place, Lawrence, Lois Lane, Malvern, Marwood, Pomona, Rose Drive, Rosslynn, Stanford, Whiting, Wilshire, Woods, and Yale. Fullerton Heritage has compiled a list of homes constructed by Gregory, accompanied by photographs, which can be found in the Local History Room at the Fullerton Public Library.



Fullerton News Tribune, April 11, 1933

Mills Act



Have you Restored a Historic Home in Fullerton? Let the Mills Act Reward You!

by Jennifer Harris

The Mills Act is one of California's most powerful tools for historic preservation, and here in Fullerton, it's making a big difference! Originally passed by the State of California in 1972, the City of Fullerton officially adopted the program in 2020 — and since then, six homeowners have secured contracts, with three more currently in the works!

So, what is it? The Mills Act offers significant property tax savings to owners of historic homes — but there's a catch (a good one!): your home must be designated a local landmark

or located within a preservation zone, it must be in good condition and maintain its original historic integrity.

Each year, the City of Fullerton approves just 10 contracts, awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. And due to its popularity, the waitlist is currently filling up! But great news — the City has just streamlined the application process with a new upload and dropbox link for easy submissions.

Interested in learning more or getting on the list for future openings? Reach out to info@fullertonheritage.org for details.

Annual MEETING

by Ernie Kelsey

Fullerton Heritage held its annual meeting on June 22, 2025, at Rutabegorz restaurant. Paul and Dane are always so thoughtful to open their doors on the day they're usually closed! We really can't thank them enough.

We had a great turnout this year with lots of people showing up and some great discussion. We reviewed what Fullerton Heritage was up to for the past year and gave out several awards, including:

Partner in Preservation going to Walter Clark for his support of digitizing historic resources. Preservationist of the Year was awarded to four people: Joe Marshall and Sharon Keyser for their work on the Upper Golden Hill preservation zone; Tim Johnson and Julie Rayburn for their work on the West Wilshire-Woods-Wickett Square preservation zone. Matthew Motameti from Classic Ceilings received the Outstanding Craftsmanship Award for his beautiful tin ceilings. Finally, Justin and Becky Guerrero were awarded the Golden Hammer award for the sweat equity they've invested in their beautiful Fullerton local landmark.

Aimee Aul, City associate and Fullertonian extraordinaire, delivered a great presentation on Florence "Flossie" Arnold, a local Fullerton artist. The group also enjoyed some great Rutabegorz sandwiches, sweets and refreshments.

A good time was had by all!!



New Local Landmarks

by Ernie Kelsey

Fullerton has three new local landmarks! All were approved at the City Council Meeting on May 6, 2025.

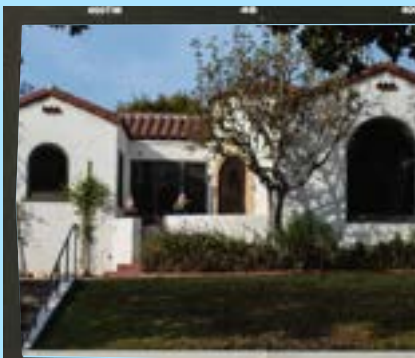
The three new additions include: The Harry Suters House, Local Landmark #109. Suters was a mortician that worked with and formed McAulay and Suters, now renamed and still a business in Fullerton. He was very active in local organizations and helped found Toastmasters International.

The William Ness Rollo House, Local Landmark #111. William Rollo was the general manager at the Western/Mississippi Glass Company, one of the only flat glass providers in the western

United States and located in Fullerton. Western/Mississippi Glass supplied the glass to Arcadia Metal Products for their sliding door business. *(There were some numbering issues at the city so there is a skip from #109 to #111. Local Landmark #110 was approved last year and is the Trook House.)*

The third addition is the Louis E. Plummer House, Local Landmark #112. Plummer was the "father" of Fullerton's education community and was responsible for both Fullerton Union High School and Fullerton College.

Fullerton Heritage is currently working on two new local landmark nominations.



Happy July everyone. Summer is well under way and Fullerton Heritage has had a busy first half of the year.

City Planning Staff is changing, and we've said goodbye to some planners and welcomed others including **Benjamin Koff** and **Yan Gao**. Ben has taken on all Mills Act duties and Yan brings a lot of experience to her role.

We're close to seeing the **President Avenues Historic District** marker signs installed in their neighborhood. After several meetings with **Tony Reynoso** and **Rigoberto "Rigo" Aceves**, the locations are approved, the posts are ready (black powered coated to add some style) and they should be up soon. We'll post on our social channels when they're installed.

Sadly, the **Arcadia Metal Products** building (Plasticolor) located at 801 S. Acacia Avenue, designed by the renowned team of mid-century designers, **Jones and Emmons**, was demolished in March. We had attempted to get the structure listed on the National Register of Historic Places, but time ran out and the building was demolished just several days before the listing hearing in Sacramento. Sad news, but we did learn a lot about how impactful Arcadia Metal Products was for the City of Fullerton.

We conducted eight walking tours of historic downtown and Hillcrest Park since our last newsletter. In the Fall of 2025, we will be introducing the **East Township Tour**. This tour will follow some of the same route but will go west on Commonwealth and include the **Amerige Brothers Building**, **Amerige Park** and the **Fullerton Police Station** (formerly City Hall). Check out our social channels or webpage for updated tour dates and information.

Fresh off from adding two new preservation zones last year, we continue our support of the **Skyline Park**, **Oceanview** and **Lower Golden Hill** preservation zone efforts. The neighbors are motivated and we're getting close the Planning Commission hearing for all three zones. There will be more to follow on these efforts.

Our **Members-Only** event at Fullerton Local Landmark #85, the **Carrie Earl McFadden Ford House** was a big success. The Guerrero Family graciously opened their door to Fullerton Heritage members, and everyone who came got to see what a great job they've done to their beautiful home – and have some delicious tacos! There's even a secret "speakeasy" room upstairs that involves going through a bookcase to enter! Thank you Guerrero Family for a great afternoon!

Watch your mail in early October for the announcement of the **Fullerton Heritage 2025 Halloween Preservation Zone decorating contest**. It's always fun to see what the preservation zones can do to their fun houses!

If you haven't, **please renew your membership today**. It's easy to renew online or just fill out the insert in this newsletter and mail it back. It's that easy!

The Fullerton Heritage Board thanks you all for your continued support.
Enjoy your summer!
With warm regards,
Ernie

welcome
NEW MEMBERS

BARBARA HARDY
SHARON KEYSER
SINDY ROMISH

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