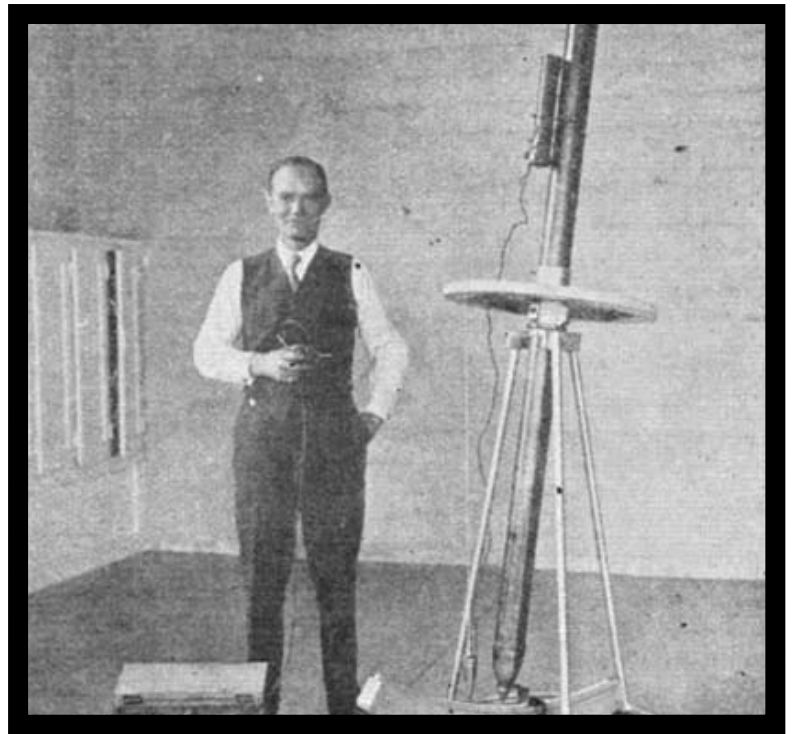


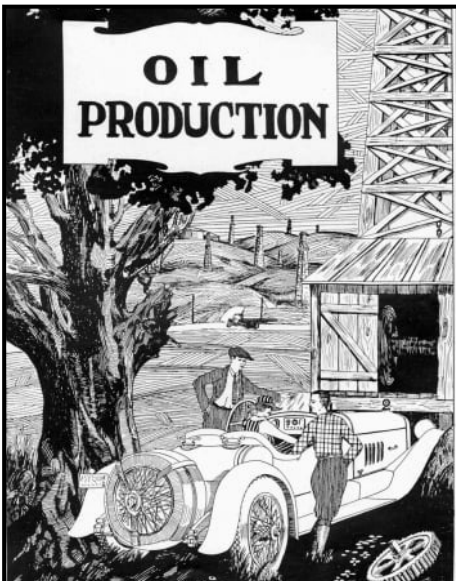
Alexander Anderson: Revolutionary Oil Surveyor & Inventor

by Debora Richey

In the summer of 1927, Fullerton residents began seeing multiple magazine articles on local inventor Alexander Anderson (1879-1966). The articles in the *Standard Oil Bulletin*, *Scientific American*, and *Literary Digest*, a weekly general interest magazine, were surprising because Anderson had remained largely unknown. Particularly intriguing was an article in the July 1927, issue of *Scientific American* – “The Wanderings of an Oil Well” – showing the former college professor standing next to an odd-looking device. Curious, subscribers of the *Fullerton News Tribune* asked editor Edgar Johnson to interview the unknown inventor. Anderson, unfortunately, was on a six-month business trip abroad, soliciting business for his new company, Alexander Anderson, Inc., but the first of many articles on him did finally appear in the November 19, 1927, issue of the local newspaper.



Scientific American, Alexander Anderson with his invention, July 1927



Advertising Drawing for new Oil Production Program, Fullerton College, 1922

Unbeknownst to most Fullertonians, Anderson, a pioneer underground oil well surveyor, had designed and patented an automatic, or “robotic”, photographic device in 1924 that allowed oil companies to determine in advance where to drill for oil. The simple looking, but innovative apparatus, allowed drillers to pinpoint the location of an underground oil reservoir, avoiding dry holes and costly drilling. His development of the first underground oil well survey system revolutionized the petroleum industry in the 1920s.

Born in Dale, Indiana, Alexander Anderson was the eldest of three children born to two Scottish immigrants. His father, John Anderson (1840-1909), a tobacco trader, made the decision to return to his native land, and at the age of 12, Alexander moved across the world to St. Andrews, a town on the east coast of Fife. His aptitude for mathematics was apparent at an early age. He graduated from the Universities of Edinburgh and Aberdeen in Scotland, then was awarded an Associateship from the Royal School of Mines (ARSM) in London. During the Second Boer War (1899-1902) in South Africa, he joined Company L of the First Battalion, one of several Scottish regiments fighting for the British Empire. He

300building

A Light Shines on the 300 Building *by Terry Galvin*

Emerging from months turning into years of construction, building 300 at Fullerton College has returned to the spotlight looking like new. In spite of the remaining construction fencing, the heavy equipment is gone and the exterior work left to be completed primarily involves planters and landscaping.

The furniture, supplies, and equipment required for instructional use for the building will be installed during spring and summer 2026. With computer classes comes the requirement for state-of-the-art computer labs. Classrooms, staff, and instructor offices are being carpeted. Classes are scheduled to begin with Fall Semester 2026.

Fortunately, the budget was sufficient to include preliminary conduits, wiring, and space to accommodate future planned campus-wide security capabilities without having to do more construction at the building.

The architect for the restoration plans had to leave the project during the period when the College District had to refund the project and add additional seismic measures required by the State. No major changes were required to the original plans and a replacement architectural firm was appointed to make the required changes and oversee the construction.

The City of Fullerton has recently approved this same firm for the pending project on the City's historic Police Department building.

HALLOWEEN CONTEST



Winner for the
Most Classic Decorations
goes to Natalie & Jason at
316 W. Brookdale Place



Winner for the
Most Scary Decorations
goes to Richard at
309 Jacaranda Place



Winner for the
Most Creative Decorations
goes to Star at
235 Malvern Avenue

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO PARTICIPATED.

SEE YOU NEXT YEAR FOR OUR CHRISTMAS DECORATING CONTEST 🎄



remained close to the men in his unit, periodically joining them for postwar reunions at the Royal Scots Club in Edinburgh. During this early period in Scotland, Anderson acquired British citizenship.

After his war service, Anderson gained extensive petroleum engineering experience working in different countries. While employed by a mining company with headquarters in Shanghai, he was sent to California to study production and drilling techniques. In 1920, Superintendent Louis Plummer and the Fullerton Union High School/Fullerton College Board of Trustees asked him to establish and run a new Oil Production Program, the first of its kind in Southern California. Free to all oil workers regardless of their previous education, the college-level courses were deliberately designed to help young men jump-start their careers in the booming oil business. Those already employed as oil workers – drillers, pumpers, gaugers, tool dressers, etc. – could advance by gaining new knowledge and skills.



Advertisement for new Oil Production Program, 1921

Oil Courses

When practical courses for the new oil program started on September 12, 1921, California led the world in petroleum production. Fullerton College was also drawing most of its income from the assessment on oil land within the district, and the future of oil production seemed endless. Fullerton College, which had only been established in 1913, saw the new program as a natural extension of its vocational offerings. Anderson designed an intense nine-month series of courses – covering geology, mineralogy, surveying, and the underground conditions of oil fields – with students taking classes in the morning, followed by field work in the afternoon. During school vacations,

they worked in the oil fields. Several of the men drove great distances to attend the morning classes. Employed oil workers took courses at night. Although Anderson had assistants during the field trips, he taught all the various classes. To promote the new oil courses, he drove around North Orange County, speaking at schools and organization meetings, even traveling to oil camps to recruit more students. Later, he would employ some of the students in his new company.



Fullerton College Oil Class, 1922; Alexander Anderson seated, far left

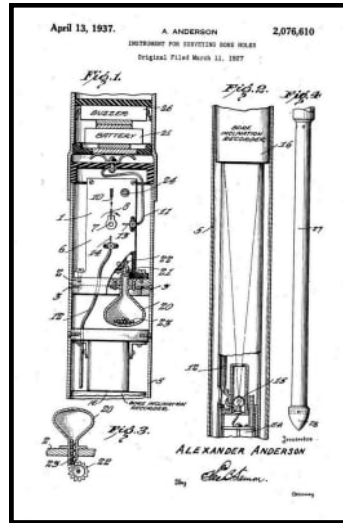
surrounding Fullerton, including Brea-Olinda and Coyote Hills, and it was during these outings that Anderson noticed the erratic and imprecise nature of drilling. When a new oil district was discovered, wildcatters would rush over, quickly erect an oil derrick, and begin to bore through sand, believing the drill was running straight down to the oil reservoir below. The drills, however, often slanted or deviated from the vertical. To fix the problem, Anderson designed a small and ingenious instrument that could survey the well hole. It was so small that it could be lowered into the drill hole, and so accurate that in its course down to the bottom of the well, it automatically recorded and photographed (on a film reel) its exact position at any desired depth. In an amazing demonstration of his new invention, Anderson was able to entirely survey the famous Olinda Well 96, the world's deepest well at 8,000 feet, noted for its crookedness.

The field trips took students to a variety of oil fields

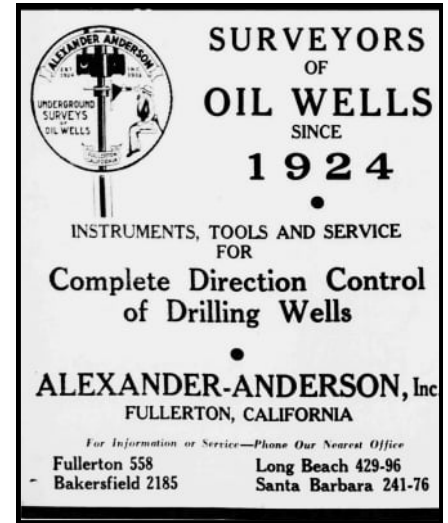


Fleet of Eight Work Cars
Alexander Anderson, Fullerton, Calif.

Anderson fleet of eight cars in oil field
(CSUF Archives)



Anderson's patent



Advertisement for company, *Santa Ana Register*, November 27, 1935

Alexander Anderson, Inc.

Realizing the profit-making potential of his bore hole survey instrument, Anderson resigned from Fullerton College in 1924 and started his own company, Alexander Anderson, Inc., incorporating in 1933. He converted his small laboratory into a modern headquarters (243-247 East Whiting, razed), later adding offices in Bakersfield, Long Beach, and Santa Barbara. He manufactured his own instruments, which he leased to other companies, but made a small fortune introducing the concept of an underground oil survey tool to the petroleum industry.

His most publicized project came in 1934, when he was hired as the official surveyor for the State of California in its litigation against petroleum companies that were illegally tapping into and draining the Huntington Beach tideland oil pool. Anderson was able to identify all the locations where the oil firms, tacitly supported by Huntington Beach officials, had secretly penetrated the State-owned tideland.

In 1937, at the age of 57, Anderson retired and sold his entire business, including survey equipment, patents, machinery, and contracts to the Lane-Wells Company of Los Angeles for an undisclosed amount. By that time, company workers had surveyed over 14 million feet of underground wells, and eleven foreign countries were using the firm's instruments. After the sale, Anderson and his wife, Ida (1882-1969), took a lengthy pleasure



Six Oil Well Survey Crews With Work Cars.
Alexander Anderson, Fullerton, California.

Alexander cars, workers in front of E. Whiting Fullerton headquarters; Anderson is third from left (CSUF Archives)



Anaheim Gazette, April 8, 1937, announcing sale of company

items to California State University, Fullerton. Ida passed away in 1969, in London, leaving a \$25,000 bequest to provide scholarships for Fullerton College engineering students.

cruise around the world. They settled in London, where they remained during World War II, sending photographs to their Fullerton friends of themselves in an underground shelter during an air raid. The Anderson's home escaped destruction when a bomb landed in the backyard, but failed to explode.

Life in Fullerton

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Andersons rented homes around Fullerton (1015 North Lemon Avenue, 225 East Wilshire Avenue, 601 North Richman Avenue), but when they returned after the war, they purchased 763 North Euclid Avenue. A noted linguist and musician, Ida was an active member of the Fullerton Ebell Club, devoting much of her time to raising funds for a new clubhouse, and later joined the Fullerton Women's Club. Alexander's main avocation outside of work was horseback riding. He was elected secretary of the El Rodeo Riding Club – California's oldest riding club – in 1929.

The Andersons travelled extensively, and while in Cape Town, South Africa, Alexander passed away in 1966 at the age of 87. In his will, he left his papers, articles, maps, photographs, and other

Thank You Fullerton Rotary



A HUGE thank you to the Fullerton Rotary and their Community Investment Award. Fullerton Heritage was a 2025 recipient of \$750. We put the money to good use with a plaque commemorating the restoration of the Fullerton Police Department's historic neon sign.

Happy New Year everyone!

I hope this newsletter finds you well and ready for the new year ahead. Fullerton Heritage sure is!

Since our Annual Meeting in late June, Fullerton Heritage has been busy working to keep Fullerton's preservation efforts moving along. We've had many meetings regarding the Skyline Park and Lower Golden Hill preservation zones. We're hoping to be on the Planning Commission's calendar soon for both of these neighborhood-driven efforts.

Several FH Board members attended the "ribbon cutting" on the improvements at the Santa Fe Depot. If you haven't been to the train station lately, you should go and take a look at the new signage, plantings, lighting and paint on Fullerton's historic train depot. It's nice to see our public buildings all freshened up.

2025 brought us all a myriad of new state housing laws. So many, it's hard to keep up! We'll be watching Senate Bill 79 (SB79) that will allow 5-7 story buildings within a certain distance of a transit stop – be it a station or bus stop. Assembly Bill 130 (AB130) specifies that any housing development (under 20 acres) that follows the city's existing zoning designation or specific plan is exempt from a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review. Both of these laws are concerning, and Fullerton Heritage has lobbied against them and will work with the City as we encounter any of these situations.

More district markers are going up in the new preservation zones. The Wilshire-Woods-Wickett Square markers are going up now with Upper Golden Hill to follow soon. We have our 100-Year-Old birthday signs back in stock. If you're a member in good standing, live in a preservation zone and your house is turning 100 this year, email us at info@fullertonheritage.org and we'll deliver a birthday sign to your yard.

FH Board member Ray Sly has been around town cleaning up Local Landmark and National Register plaques. Sometimes it involves removal of the plaque, and some can be done in place. We're also replacing the screws and trying to ensure that all plaques are affixed as best as they can be. Fullerton has seen a rash of brass plaque/fixture thefts throughout town. This is sad news and FH is exploring new materials for future plaques.

As of today, Fullerton has nine approved Mills Act contracts, with four additional applications expected to go before City Council in the beginning of the new year. Looking ahead to 2026, Fullerton Heritage is actively working to make the program more inclusive, accessible, and user-friendly.

It's the time of year to renew your membership. Your membership helps keep Fullerton Heritage moving forward with all our preservation efforts. Please renew today – there's a fun gift with purchase this year too. It's easy to renew online or just fill out the insert with this newsletter and mail it back. It's that easy!

Thank you all for your continued support. The Fullerton Heritage Board of Directors wish you and yours a healthy, happy and prosperous New Year!

With warm regards,
Ernie



Historic District Marker



Ray Sly at work

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welcome
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Daniel Gaskell, Theresa Harvey,
May Kerrigan, Mike & Melissa Luhm,
David & Kim Mota, Sanay Panchal