

## INTRODUCTION

*A Current Survey of Fullerton's Heritage* uses as its base the contents of a 2002-written research document from the city's Community and Economic Development Department called *Fullerton Through the Years*. This survey completely updates and adds information from that dated research.

It is important to note that this document is not an official survey, adopted by the city of Fullerton. The contents of this document are being continuously updated, and new information has been added without the knowledge and consent of the city of Fullerton. The document is meant to be a resource for the public's use, including the city of Fullerton if it so chooses.

This survey catalogs the city of Fullerton's historic and cultural resources. This list is composed of:

- “Local Landmarks” or “Historical Landmarks”: officially designated buildings, sites, and/or natural or manmade features, recognized as conveying cultural, historical and/or architectural distinction. These properties are protected and subject to regulations under the city's adopted Historical Landmarks Ordinance, Chapter 15.48 of the Fullerton Municipal Code.
- “Significant Properties”: individual buildings, sites or features officially recognized by the city as conveying cultural, historical and/or architectural distinction and, therefore, may be designated a local “Historical Landmark” if the property owner so requests. These properties are protected and subject to regulations under the city's adopted Historical Landmarks Ordinance, Chapter 15.48 of the Fullerton Municipal Code.
- “Unrecognized Significant Properties”: individual building, sites or features, as yet to be officially recognized by the city, that have cultural, historical and/or architectural distinction and, therefore, are candidates for designation as a local “Historical Landmark” if the property owner so requests. These properties are not protected and not subject to regulations under the city's adopted Historical Landmarks Ordinance, Chapter 15.48 of the Fullerton Municipal Code.
- “Historic Districts”: a block or a group of blocks of notable housing that is primarily intact and retains an integrity to its original pattern of development. A number of historic districts have been given a “residential preservation zone” by the city of Fullerton, a zone classification where city-adopted residential design guidelines direct how new construction should be designed to be in keeping with the prevailing character of the district.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE SURVEY

The survey is composed of two sections.

**Section 1** describes the 200+ “Local Landmarks”, “Significant Properties”, and “Unrecognized Significant Properties”. They are presented within groups, based on periods of the city's growth and type of development. With this compilation, the following are worth noting:

- As of mid-2023 over 105 properties have been designated as a local Historical Landmark by the city of Fullerton. The owners of these properties requested this official designation.
- As of mid-2023, twenty-five properties have been placed on the National Register of Historic

Places – the nation’s official registry of cultural resources worthy of preservation, primarily based on its significance to the local community.

The last page of Section 1 identifies three landscape/hardscape features having local cultural significance; these are not designated landmarks, but each is situated on public property, so there is some degree of protection.

**Section 2** identifies nineteen neighborhoods that could be recognized as a “Historic District”. All of these districts comprise residential properties; each is defined by area and briefly described. Ten residential neighborhoods that may be recognized by the city as a Historic District and have been given a Residential Preservation Zone are also identified.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE CITY’S DEVELOPMENT**

While the settlement of the Fullerton area by pioneer families started in the 1860s, the actual founding of the Fullerton townsite by the Amerige Brothers was not until 1887, with the intersection of Spadra Road (now Harbor Boulevard) and Commonwealth Avenue as the townsite’s center. All of the very earliest commercial buildings, especially the wooden structures from the start of the community in the late 1880s until the early 1900s, have been replaced. However, an extensive amount of construction from incorporation to the 1940s is largely intact, well maintained, and a source of pride to the community.

The range of architectural styles in Fullerton reflects the city’s development. This variety is apparent in both the quality and the quantity of monuments in various forms. Pre-1900 Fullerton is represented by only a small number of Colonial Revival and late Victorian houses. While some of these are certainly of high quality, none of them is particularly large or flamboyant. There is also a very small group of houses of this time which are in what could be most aptly termed a vernacular, undistinguished style.

A second group of buildings constructed between the turn of the century and the end of World War I is more impressive and includes some of the most imaginative architectural buildings found in Fullerton. The Mission Revival style is used both for public buildings and for private homes, nearly always in a particularly noteworthy manner. There are the few Craftsman style houses, which are attractive but lack the devotion to detail so apparent in the best of the type.

The 1920s “boom” in growth and prosperity is well reflected in the city’s historic properties. The design of non-residential structures was greatly influenced by the unofficial but applied city policy, established in 1920, of encouraging a Spanish Colonial Revival architecture for all public and semi-public buildings. The many institutional buildings constructed from the 1920s to the 1950s adhere to this policy.

The rapid expansion of the City in two spurts during the 1920s can be seen in houses built for lower income groups as well as for the more affluent families of the population. The first phase, from 1918 to 1925, is typified by the California bungalow; a broad range of this style appears during this time. The few surviving large homes of this period are in the Spanish Colonial Revival mode. Fullerton’s only outstanding commercial structure – the Chapman Building – was built at this time, reflecting an architectural style used for major buildings in business districts of larger cities.

The second period of development was from 1926 through 1930, and it is represented by more varied architectural styles that, nevertheless, remain much less fanciful in practice here than is often the case in older cities like Long Beach and Los Angeles. Primarily evident are variations on the Spanish Colonial style and the Cottage style in residential construction. These houses tend to be somewhat more ambitious than the California bungalows.

Two other trends may be noted: in this period the first exclusive neighborhoods are developed and most of the characteristic brick commercial structures are constructed.

In the decade after the onset of the Depression starting in 1930, building activity was greatly reduced. Only in the late 1930s were houses constructed again in any quantity, and by this time the Minimal Traditional style was prevalent, and the California ranch house had been introduced. A few outstanding Streamline Moderne buildings and one Zigzag Moderne façade were constructed in Fullerton. Additionally, the 1930s provided a significant group of structures by the Works Project Administration (WPA). Most were designed with a Spanish Colonial architecture, which seems to have been the preferred style for public buildings.

Fullerton grew at a fast pace after World War II, with the development of many residential tracts and apartment complexes, as well as the construction of an array of educational, commercial, and industrial buildings. In the 30-year period ending in 1975, most tract housing was in the Ranch style, ranging from modest to luxurious in size and design. Several notable commercial and industrial buildings were constructed in this time frame, featuring Streamline Moderne, International, Mid-Century, and Googie architectural styles; in this document these buildings are being identified as a “Potential Significant Property” worthy of landmark designation. And, as buildings and developments constructed after 1975 reach 50 years of age – a normal threshold for consideration as an historic resource – those with social, historical and/or architectural distinction will be identified in this document as a “Potential Significant Property.”

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN FULLERTON**

Prior to the 1970s, activities directed at promoting and preserving the heritage of the community were virtually non-existent. Events in the 1970s brought more awareness of the city’s past and the real threat of losing landmark properties, particularly within the blocks of the original townsite. In 1977, the City Council adopted a Historical Landmarks Ordinance to establish the criteria for property being eligible as a local landmark and to specify a review procedure and restrictions for proposals affecting designated local landmarks.

### **1979 HISTORICAL BUILDING SURVEY**

A major survey to inventory and to assess the city’s past development – its buildings, sites and significant features as well as distinct neighborhoods – was undertaken in 1978. The survey was conducted under contract with the State Office of Historic Preservation, and the results of that effort were documented with the city of Fullerton 1979 Historical Building Survey.

This survey identified over 90 individual buildings or features and a dozen distinctive neighborhoods, which met criteria for designation as either a local landmark or a landmark district. As a result of these findings, in 1980, the city revised its Historical Landmarks Ordinance to recognize these identified buildings, sites and features as “Significant Properties,” which would be subject to adopted review procedures and restrictions to help ensure their preservation.

### **40+ YEARS OF PROGRESS**

With the completion of the 1979 Historical Building Survey – an effort that was conducted largely by volunteers from the community – interest in preservation issues became much more evident. The Survey laid a solid foundation on which the community would build a movement for historic

preservation. Measures to retain the historic resources of the city have been taken by both private and public actions over the last 35 to 40 years:

- The city of Fullerton made a conscious policy decision to revitalize its downtown by emphasizing the conservation of historic, in-place buildings rather than planning a complete reconstruction of the area. At the same time, millions of dollars were invested to upgrade public facilities to assure private property owners that the area would continue to be the commercial and social center of the community.
- The Fullerton Redevelopment Agency established a program to assist financially an owner of a downtown commercial property who proposed to rehabilitate and restore the building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. This program was used extensively, and virtually all owners of the many "Significant Properties" in the original townsite took advantage of this type of assistance.
- In 1991, a number of residents formed a non-profit organization called Fullerton Heritage, whose goal is to promote an awareness of the city's past as well as to help protect and preserve historic buildings and districts.
- At the request of Fullerton Heritage, the City Council adopted several residential preservation zones as part of the Zoning Ordinance and approved a set of design guidelines for these zones. Subsequently, residential preservation zones have been applied to a number of the city's defined older neighborhoods.
- *Fullerton, A Pictorial History* by Bob Ziebell was published in 1994, presenting a very readable and most complete historical account of the city's development. This 165-page book contains numerous photos and maps showing the progression of the community, and this documentation brought increased interest in preserving the important buildings and features that are part of the city's heritage.
- In 1996-97, the city worked with Fullerton Heritage, to establish a process that would recommend revisions and additions to the official list of potential historic properties and districts. (The initial survey, completed in 1979, was never considered a comprehensive inventory of the city's buildings and historic resources; time and manpower limitations had prevented a thorough assessment of all properties.) The culmination of that process was a document called *Fullerton Through the Years* in 2002; it identified and described local "Historical Landmarks", "Significant Properties", "Potential Significant Properties" and "Potential Landmark Districts" (now referred to as "Potential Historic Districts).
- In 2012, the city's official General Plan – called The Fullerton Plan – was adopted. The Fullerton Plan contains a Historic Preservation Element which outlines the goals and specific policies to ensure that historic buildings and neighborhoods are protected and maintained.
- In 2020, the Fullerton City Council unanimously approved the guidelines and procedure to approve Mills Act contracts for specified residential properties, including properties within identified Historic Districts with a residential preservation zone.