

FULLERTON HERITAGE

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Commonwealth Post Office Is Next Nat'l Register Nominee

by Debora Richey

Board Members of Fullerton Heritage have selected the Commonwealth Post Office (202 East Commonwealth) as the next property in the city to be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. Like the Fullerton City Hall, now the Police Station, the building will be nominated not only for its WPA architecture but for its lovely interior mural, one of three Depression-era murals in Fullerton. For more than fifty years, the post office was moved to various locations around downtown Fullerton, and it took a concerted effort by residents to actually obtain this formal post office building in 1939.

Ten months after town founders George (1855-1947) and Edward Amerige (1857-1915) laid out the townsite of Fullerton, the federal government approved a post office for the small town, appointing Edmond E. Beazley (1863-1947) as the first postmaster on April 13, 1888. For the next fifty years, the post office moved to seven different locations in the downtown area. On May 22, 1888, the first post office opened in the Ford Grocery Store and shortly thereafter moved to the well-known Sterns & Good-



*The Commonwealth Post Office in October 1939, one month before it opened.
Photo Courtesy of the Fullerton Public Library.*

man Grocery Store, both located in the Wilshire Building, situated on the corner of Spadra (now Harbor) Boulevard and Commonwealth Avenue. Total income for the first year was \$242.31, and the postmaster's salary was \$292.55. In 1892, William Starbuck (1864-1941), a druggist, took over as postmaster, and his store, the Gem Pharmacy, which moved three times during the next twenty-five years, became the new post office location.

In 1889, Starbuck drove his horse and

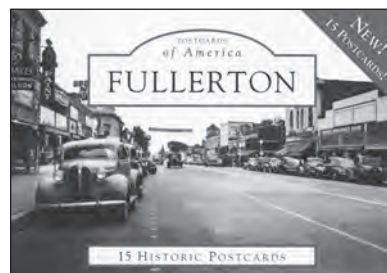
buggy to get the necessary 100 signatures needed to obtain free rural delivery of mail. Fullerton secured the first Rural Free Delivery (RFD) route in Orange County, and one of the first routes west of the Mississippi. By 1901, Fullerton's petroleum industry was booming, and a second RFD carrier, at \$500 per year, was hired to service a 23-mile oil well route. Eventually there were seven rural routes out of Fullerton. In 1913, hundreds of Fullerton residents put up mailboxes and free city delivery began with three deliveries daily in the business district and two in the residential district. Residents continued to receive mail twice a day until the 1980s. From 1917 to 1927, the post office was located in the Schumacher Building (212-216 N. Spadra), and from 1929 to 1939 on the first floor of the Fullerton Odd Fellows Temple (112 E. Commonwealth), now the Williams Building.

Fullerton's population grew from 4,415 in 1920 to 10,860 in 1930, and by the mid-1920s mail service and deliveries were

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Historic Postcards Available

The Fullerton Public Library is now selling a packet of fifteen black and white reproductions of historic postcards of Fullerton from the 1890s to the 1960s. All of the postcards are taken from the extensive collection housed in the Fullerton Public Library's Launer Room and feature such well-known sites as Hillcrest Park, Fullerton College, Bastanchury Ranch, downtown Fullerton, and the Fox Theatre. The sale price is \$7.99 plus tax. Royalties go to the Fullerton Public Library. For more information, call the Library at 714-738-6326.



Fullerton Named *Preserve America* Community

by *Kate Dalton*

On Thursday October 15, the City of Fullerton and Fullerton Heritage held a ceremony recognizing Fullerton as a Preserve America Community. The ceremony was held in historic downtown Fullerton's Plaza Park during the weekly Farmer's Market event and was attended by Mayor Don Bankhead, Mayor Pro Tem Pam Keller, City Manager Chris Meyer, Fullerton Heritage President Tom Dalton and numerous City staff, Fullerton Heritage members, and Fullerton Museum members. Kate Dalton, Fullerton Heritage Board member and Preserve America Committee chairwoman, gave a talk about the arduous, year-long process the committee went through and what being a Preserve America Community means to the city of Fullerton. Following her talk, Mayor Bankhead commended Fullerton Heritage for its leadership in pursuing designation as a Preserve America Community and for its many years of promoting preservation issues within the city. Mayor Pro Tem Keller spoke of the value that historic preservation adds to the richness of Fullerton community life and its benefits to future generations. Fullerton Planning Manager Al Zelinka addressed the importance of historic preservation as a planning tool in Fullerton and therefore its inclusion in



Council member Pam Keller (l-r) and Mayor Don Bankhead with Fullerton Heritage board members Kate and Tom Dalton

Fullerton's new General Plan. Senior Planner Jay Eastman, who has been working with Kate Dalton on the Preserve America sign placement, announced that several more signs would be installed within the next few weeks at key entrances to the city. The ceremony concluded with a ribbon cutting, unveiling Fullerton's first Preserve America Community sign facing Plaza Park.

Advocacy Issues

by *Kate Dalton*

Redevelopment Design Review Committee

On April 23, RDRC reviewed a proposed project to build two new homes on adjacent lots at 1213 and 1219 Frances Ave. in the Skyline Park neighborhood, which is a Potential Landmark District as identified in Fullerton's Historic Building Survey. In December 2008, the design of a previous project to build on these two lots was denied and the project was continued to allow the applicant the opportunity to redesign the project to increase the compatibility with the historic neighborhood.

The new project was scaled back in terms of size and mass with front setbacks equal to the average on the block and the floor area ratio only slightly above what would be allowed in a designated preservation zone or Landmark District. The RDRC approved the project with numerous conditions including additional review of the landscape design. The committee agreed that while the design of the homes was modern, there is already a mix of different periods of development in the Skyline Park neighborhood and the proposed dwellings convey the custom home design with exceptional detail and refinement unique to the neighborhood. They agreed with staff's finding that the quality of both the legacy homes and the new dwellings showcases the periods of construction in authentic designs which are complementary and compatible.

On May 14, RDRC reviewed the design of a new dwelling at

130 E. Brookdale Place in the Barranca Preservation Zone. Their review included the request by the property owner to demolish the existing home built in 1948. The Fullerton Planning Commission acting as the Landmarks Commission reviews the demolition of residential structures in preservation zones. If the existing dwelling is clearly dilapidated or deteriorated beyond rehabilitation, or if it does not contribute to or is not compatible with the established character of the neighborhood, the dwelling may be removed. The neighborhood retains most of its original housing (1910's and 20's) with some post World War II apartment development. The project required consideration of a variance to allow tandem parking as well as a reduction of one foot in the front setback and approval of a two story construction, all due to significant lot constraints as the result of its location along the flood control channel. After intensive review and discussion the RDRC approved the design of the proposed home and the site design subject to conditions, and offered the opinion to the Landmarks Commission that the existing home was not a contributing structure to the historic neighborhood. This issue was reviewed by the Landmarks Commission on June 24 and they approved the project and granted the requested demolition.

Amerige Brothers' Realty Office

As part of a proposed project to build a new community center on the Senior Center/ Boys and Girls Club property on West Commonwealth, the city has notified Fullerton Heritage that the historic

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President's Corner

by Tom Dalton

So far 2009 has been another very productive and rewarding year for Fullerton Heritage as described, in part, in articles about Preserve America and the Dewella Apartments also in this issue. Not to be overlooked, however, are several other accomplishments that merit mention from this year that we discussed at our annual meeting in June. We know it is difficult to get away on summer afternoons so, for the benefit of those of you who were unable to attend, following is a summary of our awards and accomplishments.

Our Preservationists of the Year were the Victorian Society of the Friends of the Fullerton Arboretum for their outstanding restoration and ongoing maintenance and stewardship of the historic Heritage House. About a dozen members of the Society came dressed in Victorian costumes which gave our meeting a festive feel. Our other preservation awards went to Christine Terry, Provost of the North Orange County Community College District School of Continuing

Education, and Lou Runge from R2A Architecture, for the sensitive restoration and compatible new construction of the Wilshire School buildings on the campus of Fullerton College. If you haven't yet seen this beautiful work you should visit the corner of Lemon and Wilshire to see for yourself how well old buildings can be restored and made useful again and how new buildings can compliment the old.

Among the Fullerton Heritage accomplishments we discussed were the updated downtown walking tour brochure by Jim and Michele Powell, Warren Bowen, Kate Dalton and Bob Linnell; the historic trolley tours put on by Ernie Kelsey, Tim Holmes, and Wendy and Joseph Castillo; the Crystal Cove program organized by Cathy Thomas and Deb Richey; the new postcard book available for sale (see page 4) at the library, also by Cathy and Deb; the driving tour created for the Shulman exhibit at the Museum Center by Jim Powell, Cathy Thomas, Deb Richey, Noelle Rossi and Bob Linnell; and the placing of five historic designation plaques on local landmarks in town thanks in part to generous financial help from the Rotary Club of Fullerton.

Dewella Apartments Dedication

by Kate Dalton

The Dewella Apartments at 234-236 E. Wilshire Ave. is Fullerton's latest addition to the National Register of Historic Places. A dedication ceremony was held on October 14 at the site. Fullerton Heritage President Tom Dalton conducted the brief ceremony and commended the owner for his exemplary stewardship of one of Fullerton's finest historic gems. On hand for the ceremony was Debora Richey, Fullerton Heritage board member and research librarian, who completed the extensive research and application, free of charge to the owner.

Dewella Apartments was built in 1929 in the Spanish Colonial Revival style and is one of the oldest apartments built in Fullerton and the only apartment court ever built in the city. Particularly noteworthy are the sweeping staircases, the symmetrically

disposed apartment wings and the stunning formal garden in front. Most in Fullerton also like it for its beautiful fountain and neon sign. Named for the daughter of the original owners/builders, Herman and Edna Quelle Bruns, Dewella was designated a Fullerton Local Landmark (No.70) in 1998.



The new National Register plaque has a place of honor in front of the Dewella Apartments.

Community Celebration

Historic Church Building to Mark 100th Anniversary

First Church of Religious Science will celebrate the 100th anniversary of its historic brick building (originally the First Methodist Episcopal Church) on Saturday, November 21, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the corner of Pomona and Amerige Avenue.

Festivities will include an outdoor barbecue, proclamations,

silent movies, antique cars, building tours, a pictorial history of the building, barbershop quartet music, and much more.

Bring your family and friends for an interesting and fun look at Fullerton as it was becoming the wonderful community that we all now share.

Advocacy

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Amerige Brothers' Realty Office, Fullerton Local Historic Landmark #4, will need to be moved. We will be working with the city in the next few months to identify possible locations for the building. If any of our members have ideas of appropriate locations, please contact the hotline at 714-740-3051. This modest simple frame structure is the oldest commercial building in Fullerton. Built in 1887 it was originally located at the southwest corner of Spadra Rd. (Harbor Blvd.) and Commonwealth Ave., but has been moved several times. Let's get creative and try to find the best (and hopefully final) resting place for this tiny, but important part of Fullerton's early history.

National Register Nominee

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increasing each year. From 1926 to 1929 alone, post office transactions had increased by twenty-seven percent, and it was obvious that the space in the Odd Fellows Temple was no longer adequate. When federal relief building funds became available in 1930-31, the post office, along with a city hall and library, were at the top of Fullerton's request list. Rather than dedicating space inside an existing building, Fullerton residents wanted a separate postal facility. United States Treasury officials granted building funds for the Fullerton post office in 1931, but the measure fell through in 1932 and again in 1933. Upset that the nearby cities of Anaheim and Orange had received post office appropriations, Fullerton residents began to agitate for a postal building. Galvanized by an editorial in the Fullerton Daily News Tribune ("Why Not Fullerton?") that noted "Fullerton is one of the few cities of its size in California that has no post office building," the Fullerton Chamber of Commerce ap-



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pealed to Republican Congressman Samuel L. Collins (1895-1965) to get Fullerton on the preferred list of federal post office projects, but that attempt failed in 1935. Collins, who served as Congressman from 1932 to 1936, was anti-New Deal and his Republican standing most likely worked against the appropriation requests. Undeterred, the Fullerton Chamber of Commerce spearheaded another post office drive in February 1936. Chamber head Harry F. Smith appointed a citizens' committee, chaired by Albert L. Foster (1898-1977), who again joined forces with Collins. On September 10, 1937, it was finally announced that Fullerton was approved for a new post office. Harry K. Vaughn (1882-1962), who was working on building plans for the new Fullerton Junior College campus, was selected as the architect.

Seeking a location adjacent to the train station, postal authorities authorized the purchase of two residences on the northwest corner of Pomona and Commonwealth Avenues for \$19,000 and demolition began in 1938. Bids went out in February 1938, and San Diego resident George Goedhart (1901-1980) was the successful bidder at \$54,950. The fixtures, furnishings and new equipment brought the total building costs to \$91,000. Goedhart specialized in federal building construction and had already completed post offices in Colusa and Susanville, California (1938) and Valentine, Nebraska (1936), and would go on to construct post offices in Buhl, Idaho (1939) and Lancaster, California (1941).

Forty Fullerton laborers were hired, including Albert L. Foster, who won the excavation and sand and gravel contract. Construction began on April 3, 1939, and was completed in seven months. In a pageant-filled ceremony on June 3, 1939, Fullerton Masonic orders laid the cornerstone for the new building, and an equally elaborate dedication ceremony took place on October 28, 1939. On Friday, November 19, 1939 at 1 p.m., postal workers closed their leased quarters in the nearby Odd Fellows Temple and moved into the new post office, half a block away, re-opening for business on Monday, November 20, 1939.

In 1942, an oil and canvas mural ("Orange Pickers") painted by Paul Julian (1914-1995) was added to the interior of the post office. Although the mural is often identified as a product of the WPA, the commission actually came from the Treasury Department Section of Fine Arts. Julian had already completed murals in Santa Barbara, his hometown, and Upland, and the Fullerton mural was his last federal commission. At the time he was painting the post office mural, Julian was also employed by Warner Bros. Pictures as a background artist for Merrie Melodies and Looney Tune cartoons. Julian would go on to become a seminal figure in the animation field.

When the post office was constructed in 1939, Fullerton residents believed it would be the only post office the city would ever need, but by the 1960s, it was apparent that a larger postal facility was needed. The Commonwealth station served as Fullerton's main post office until 1962 when a larger building was leased at 1350 East Chapman. The Commonwealth Station is now the smallest of Fullerton's four post offices and remains the only federal building ever constructed in Fullerton.