

Fullerton Improvement Company Building

221-225 N. Harbor Boulevard

1917

Brick Commercial

Status: Potential Significant Property



This building – actually, a block of several structures – is one of the best remaining examples of the work by the Fullerton Improvement Company, the most important building firm in the city’s early history. In 1904, Charles C. Chapman, Fullerton’s first mayor, established the Fullerton Improvement Company, a building/real estate firm dedicated to projects that other businessmen and government officials were unwilling or financially unable to tackle. While the firm hoped to break even, the Board of directors, which included some of the most important ranchers and businessmen in Fullerton, were more interested in constructing buildings that improved the social and economic conditions of the city.

In 1917, Frank Benchley was hired by the Fullerton Improvement Company to design and construct this two-story brick and concrete commercial block, one of several buildings Benchley would design for the company. The new complex included space for stores, medical offices, and a downtown market; it also featured the separate Rialto Theatre, a silent movie house which would later be converted into a bank building. Additionally, new quarters were provided for the Fullerton Club, including a billiards room and reading room. Other local groups and organizations would also use the Fullerton Club rooms for meetings, dances, and social activities. The Fullerton Improvement Company also leased building office space to a number of notable groups and companies, including the Fullerton Chamber of Commerce.

Surprisingly, the exterior façade of this building block has not been altered much over the years, even though there have been innumerable modifications to the interior to accommodate a host of commercial uses. In 1993, the building received structural improvements for seismic safety while retaining the original storefront design along Harbor Boulevard.