

# Hugh Edgar Johnson House

**444 W. Brookdale Place**

**1928**

**Spanish Colonial Revival**

**Status: Local Landmark;  
Listed on the National Register**



This house was built for Hugh Edgar Johnson, the first editor of the *Fullerton Tribune*. He started this newspaper in 1893, and sold it in 1929, soon after the construction of this house. After Johnson's wife, Mildred, died unexpectedly in 1931, he continued to live in the house until his death in 1935. As a very influential voice in civic affairs, Mr. Johnson was a strong proponent of city incorporation as well as the development of the Fullerton High School campus. Mr. Johnson also served as the justice of the peace.

Johnson established the *Fullerton Tribune* when the town was little more than a hard-packed plot of bare earth, and under his hand for nearly 40 years the newspaper flourished in parallel with the growth and prosperity of the city. In the early days of the newspaper, Johnson was the *Tribune* – gathering, writing, editing, and placing the news in various positions in the pages of the newspaper and writing all the editorial opinions. In an era known for fiery journalism, his hard-hitting reporting, vitriolic editorials, and caustic wit were legendary throughout Southern California. One of the few Democratic editors in Orange County, Johnson and his newspaper would provide the still-fledgling townsite with a cohesive identity while playing a major role in shaping the attitudes of his readers and the town. The *Tribune* remains the only day-to-day chronicle of early Fullerton, and Johnson remains the most significant and longest-serving editor and newspaper owner in the city's history.

Primarily Spanish Colonial in style with Mayan Revival touches, this one-story house is designed with an unusual massing of forms and features unlike any other residence of its vintage. The low-pitched, tiled gable roof with no eaves accentuates the simple, block-like structural form. There are dramatic floor-to-ceiling multi-paned windows facing the semi-defined entry area, and recessed casement windows are found on all sides. The Spanish Colonial Revival style is apparent in the low-pitched clay tile roof, smooth stucco walls, terracotta air vent tubes, and decorative iron work on window grilles, gates, lights, and front door speakeasy. There are a few exterior Mayan Revival elements seen on wood posts, window dividers on the front façade, and columns at the front entrance.

The interior layout of the home revolves around a voluminous living room featuring two dramatic large wrought iron chandeliers that drop from a barrel-shaped ceiling and a wood-burning fireplace surrounded by Aztec-themed tiles positioned on both sides of the fireplace box. The hearth of the fireplace is covered with teal, green, brown, and tan matte finished tiles in various geometric shapes. Created by noted tilest Rufus B. Keeler, the design is based upon Aztec tiles found in ancient Mexican ruins.

There are no building permits of record. The builder was Evan Herbert, a prominent local contractor who had a hand in building many residences in Fullerton during the 1920s through the 1940s.

The house is situated on a corner lot with an elevated building pad; the large setback from the two public streets, effectively landscaped with a tropical theme, contributes to the property's appearance. This house's unusual architecture and prominent location make the property a landmark within the Brookdale Heights district, a neighborhood of many outstanding residences.



**Fireplace hearth with Aztec-themed tiles in living room**