

# FULLERTON HERITAGE

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*The mission of Fullerton Heritage is to foster an appreciation of our city's cultural history and to ensure the preservation of our historic architectural resources and environments.*

## Dora May Sim: The Bing Bang Book Machine

by Cathy Thomas

The city lost a treasure with the passing of Dora May Sim, librarian and author of *Ostrich Eggs for Breakfast*, the Fullerton elementary school district's third grade supplemental history of the city. Dora May died peacefully Monday, June 6, 2016, at the Morningside retirement community at the age of 97.

Dora May came to Fullerton in 1951, and the following year began working in the Fullerton Public Library's children's room. A native Californian, she was born March 24, 1919, in Redlands. Heavily influenced by the children's librarian at the Redlands Public Library, Dora May knew she wanted to be a librarian by the time she entered junior high school. After completing undergraduate work in English and English history at the University of Redlands, she attended the Riverside Library Service School for her graduate degree.

When Dora May began her library career at the Fullerton Public Library, she found herself working for librarian Mary Camp-

bell, the city's first legendary children's librarian. Over the years, the children's librarians found themselves researching and answering Fullerton history questions for elementary school students. In the early 1970s, Dora May decided to compile the answers and many other interesting tidbits of local history into a reference source for children. Illustrations for the local history – the first children's history in Orange County - were provided by Wanda "Shanty" Collins, a colleague. In 1972, *Ostrich Eggs for Breakfast* was published through the Friends of the Fullerton Public Library and dedicated to "all the boys and girls in Fullerton, now and in years to come". The source of her book title refers to Atherton's 1880s Ostrich Farm, originally located at the corner of Dorothy Lane and



Acacia Avenue. Besides being a tourist attraction, the farm also provided stylish ostrich feathers highly desired for women's hats at the time.

The ostrich eggs also proved to be tasty, and one egg could feed six people. Dora May's book was full of fascinating historical facts that the Fullerton students loved. Eventually she took her show on the road, visiting every third grade class in Fullerton annually, and dispensing additional Fullerton history

along with "show and tell" artifacts, including one of the last Atherton ostrich eggs donated to the library by Fullerton pioneer Charles Knowleton. Dora May estimated when she retired in 1984, after 32 years of service, that 23,000 Fullerton students had seen the egg. Dora May's book and

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## Back to the Amerige Brothers Real Estate Office

by Terry Galvin

Fullerton Heritage continues its mission to help recognize and preserve significant historical features of the City of Fullerton. Our next project is to address the need for improving the safety and identification of the Amerige Brothers Real Estate Office.

There has been an increase in the homeless population in Fullerton. One of the areas where the homeless seek to hide is around the Amerige Building, where they broke into the electrical box to gain control over the lighting and exterior outlet. The

front of the building is quite dark with no appropriate place to mount security lighting.

The City has agreed to participate with us to increase the security of the building by installing fencing to secure the rear of the property and lighting in the front. At the same time, we would like to install additional landscaping and items that create a setting that will further enhance visibility and interest for the public. Included are the following:

- Install additional lighting in front of the building. Using an LED fixture on an old style street light with a light sensor will allow connection from inside the building instead of from the electrical panel.
- Install side and rear wrought iron fencing. By connecting to the ball field fence on the east side front and the south side rear of the building, access

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## Advocacy Issues

by Kate Dalton

### Update on Beckman Instruments Administration Building Local Landmark Nomination:

As a follow-up to our article in the January newsletter, the Landmarks Commission directed city staff to study and prepare a resolution for a zoning change requiring owner consent for all landmark nominations. Scheduled for the Landmarks Commission meeting on September 23, 2015, they repeatedly continued the item until it was finally heard on May 25, 2016. As you can imagine, this issue is extremely important to preservation in Fullerton and if recommended by the Landmarks Commission and approved by the City Council, it will have a significant impact on our protection of historic properties.

At the May 25th meeting after considerable discussion, the Commission voted 4-3 to recommend denial of the requested zoning change. The issue must now go back to the City Council for the final decision, but we are hopeful that the Council will approve the denial, which will in effect leave the ordinance language unchanged regarding specific owner consent for Local Historic Landmark nominations.

While Fullerton Heritage always seeks owner consent for nominations, we continue to support the need, if necessary, to nominate a property without explicit consent if the property meets the objective criteria set out in the application documents. The final City Council decision regarding consent is expected in the next few weeks. Our Local Landmark application is still pending with the City.

In the meantime, Deb Richey, who prepares all of our historic documents, has completed and submitted an application to the National Register of Historic Places for the Beckman Administration Building. We have received notice from the State Office of Historic Preservation that the application is complete and it will be heard by the State Commission in October 2016. The building has a new owner who is pursuing an industrial, manufacturing, warehouse and office use project for the entire 44 acre Beckman site, including adaptive reuse of the historic Beckman Administration Building. A Public Scoping Meeting was held on June 30 to announce the plan and request early public comment on the proposal and the Initial Study leading to the Draft Environmental Impact Report. Fullerton Heritage attended that meeting and submitted written comments related to the preservation of the historic Beckman Administration Building. The new owners are not opposed to the National Register application.

### New Local Landmark Nominations:

Fullerton Heritage has nominated 2 new Local Landmarks which were approved by the Landmarks Commission on June 8, with final approval by the City Council on July 19. The first is the historic Russell House at 516 W. Amerige Avenue, built in 1903 and moved

to its current site in 1923. It is an outstanding example of early Colonial Revival architecture, one of the few remaining in Fullerton and one of the best preserved. We encourage you to do a drive by; it is stunning thanks in large part to the dedication of its current owners.

The second new landmark is the Arthur M. Thompson House at 617 W. Malvern Avenue, a well preserved Tudor Revival style home built in 1928 by notable local designer/builder Arthur M. Thompson (see accompanying article). With the approval of these 2 new nominations, Fullerton now has 97 designated Local Historic Landmarks.

### Miscellaneous Issues:

We are pleased to report that the leaded glass windows at the historic Fullerton Museum Center have recently been repaired by Judson Studios and the remaining restoration of the wooden window frame is expected to be completed in the near future.

Fullerton Heritage's restoration project at the historic Santa Fe Depot Loading Dock is now complete and the formal dedication celebration took place on March 1, 2016. The event was well attended by 3 City Council members, including Mayor Fitzgerald, members of city staff, donors to the project and members of Fullerton Heritage and the community. The event included the presentation of before and after slides by project manager and Fullerton Heritage Board Member, Terry Galvin. Stop by the depot and check out the latest Fullerton Heritage restoration project which took nearly one year.

Finally, on March 15, 2016 the City Council unanimously approved the preliminary construction drawings for the first 2 phases of the historic Hillcrest Park renovations which include the front lawn, fountain and related historic rock work. The final construction drawings are being prepared and will go to City Council once again for final approval before actual construction can begin. Completion of even the first phase will be something to truly celebrate; it has been a VERY long time in the making.

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## Amerige Building

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will be eliminated for sleeping and storing bedrolls out of sight.

- Construct a stone pilaster and install a plaque adjacent to the light explaining the history of the Amerige Building. An additional plaque explaining the history of Amerige Park will be installed on one of the adjacent park pilasters.
- Install additional drought tolerant landscaping in the area where the large tree had to be removed.

Participation by the Fullerton Rotary Club, Chevron, Fullerton Electric, Fullerton Beautiful, and the City of Fullerton will cover most of the costs. We are fortunate to have such dedicated partners for this project.



# Arthur M. Thompson Home Is New Local Landmark

In December 2015, the owner of 617 West Malvern Avenue requested Fullerton Heritage's assistance in designating the dwelling a Fullerton Local Landmark. The Tudor Revival styled home was constructed in 1928 by notable builder Arthur Marsh Thompson (1881-1942), who also used it for his personal residence.

Thompson was very active in Fullerton from 1919 to 1930, and three other dwellings designed and built by the general contractor – the Carrie E. Ford House (800 N. Grandview), the Julius S. Bradford House (545 W. Whiting), and the Raymond J. Starbuck House (834 N. Woods) – are already listed as Fullerton Local Landmarks. Thompson also constructed the Boys and Girls Library (popularly known as the Red



area, including Charles C. Chapman, Louis Plummer, and Gilbert Kraemer, but also had the distinction of being the uncle to a famous movie star: actor/singer Dick Powell. After signing a contract with Warner Brothers in 1932, Powell moved to Hollywood where he would star in such classic films as *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* (1933), *Footlight Parade* (1933), and *Murder, My Sweet* (1944). He would construct his first home in Toluca Lake, with Thompson as the builder, in 1934. A hybrid

Cross Building) in Hillcrest Park and the Firestone Building adjacent to the Fox Fullerton Theatre, both of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Thompson worked with some of the most influential men and women in the

Early California and Colonial Revival styled dwelling, Powell's home would be featured in a hand-tinted postcard sold to tourists. Powell would later purchase a home in Newport Beach, and he and his uncle would go sailing together. – *Debora Richey*

## Kit Homes

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building plans. Renovated in 2007, the 5,400-square-foot Tuffree-Fleming House (425 Fleming Avenue) would go on the market for \$1.6 million in 2008.

Once ordered, the kit home would be shipped to the site via train or truck, typically arriving in 12,000 or more pieces, including lumber, nails, glue, doors, windows, screens, hardware, paint, and a thick instruction manual. Customers could hire com-

pany workers or local carpenters to erect the home or choose to do it themselves. Homebuyers could also hire just an expert working foreman from Pacific for \$8.50 a day, plus rail fare or carfare, and room and board. Skilled carpenters typically charged \$400 to \$750 to erect



*Pacific Ready-Cut Home at 426 W. Malvern. Photo courtesy of Bob Linnell.*

a kit home. Onsite, the houses were assembled – not constructed – quickly in three to 30 days, depending upon the size of the home and how many workers were on hand. In the first phase, the sections of the home would be nailed together, including the roof. Finishing touches were added in the final phase.



*1929 Advertisement for a Ready-Cut Home from the Fullerton News Tribune.*

Today, residents may live in one of these kit homes and not even know it. From the outside, it is difficult to tell if a house was assembled from a kit, but Pacific Ready-Cut Homes can be identified in a number of ways. Owners can peruse advertisements and old catalogs, checking not only for the matching home model, but also for plumbing, electrical fixtures, and

built-ins showcased by the company. Building permits will often indicate that a residence is a "Pacific Kit Home" or the listed contractor is "Pacific Ready-Cut." From the inside, owners can look for company stamps and blue grease pencil markings, used to label orders or parts, on the underside of

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## President's Corner

by Ernie Kelsey

Greetings Fullerton Heritage members,

It's summertime and the living is easy! We've made it through our first heat wave and I know I'm hoping that was the worst of it. Fullerton doesn't need any more 108° weather! I hope everyone had a great spring and are enjoying these long summer days.

Fullerton Heritage has been busy since the last newsletter. This includes monthly board meetings, City Council and Design Review Committee meeting participation and of course advocating for a continued historic presence in Fullerton. Plus, we've had an increased presence on Facebook, a successful nomination to the Fullerton Union High School Wall of Fame and the successful completion of the restoration of the Sante Fe Depot Loading Dock! What a year!

To highlight the year, the Fullerton Heritage Annual meeting was held on June 26, 2016 at the Fullerton Museum Center. There were approximately 30 people in attendance which filled the house. The Fullerton Heritage "Year in Review" included some great achievements like our ongoing preservation efforts including welcoming the City's newest Local Landmarks #96 and #97, the Russell House and the Arthur M. Thompson House – two more precious residences preserved for the future. Vice President Tom Dalton updated the gathering on Fullerton Heritage's ongoing support for the Fox Fullerton restoration project and the excitement of the opening of Stadtgarten! More establishments mean more rent which means more restoration projects for the Fox Fullerton! We also celebrated the successful nomination of alumni and actress Sharon Lynn to the

Fullerton Union High School Wall of Fame. Fullerton Heritage research uncovered Miss Lynn's acting career (she made the transition from silent movies to "talkies", very rare in those days) and she now has a place of recognition in the City. We also had a fun Saturday morning when Fullerton Heritage led the Fullerton Founders' Day parade while also marching in the parade. What a way to start the day!

Of course we had some awards at the Annual Meeting. The 2016 Community Support of Preservation Award went to Jack Franklyn from Heroes for his ongoing support of our restoration efforts and donating time and money to help make it all happen. The 2016 Preservationist of the Year Award went to Tony Bushala for his support of time, money, materials and labor for the restoration of the Sante Fe Depot Loading Dock. We ended the meeting with a presentation by Terry Galvin on the Loading Dock project. I encourage all of you to take a trip down to the train station and check it out. Another structure preserved for our future! It was a fun meeting with great attendance. Of course everyone enjoyed some treats afterwards.

I want to remind everyone again that a membership to Fullerton Heritage is the gift that keeps on giving. Membership renewals and the memberships you give as gifts are so important to keeping Fullerton Heritage operating and working towards preserving historic Fullerton. Give the gift of a membership this year – you'll feel good! Check out our Facebook page and share our information with your family and friends. Like I always say, without our Members, Fullerton Heritage would not be such a wonderful organization!

Happy Summer everyone!!

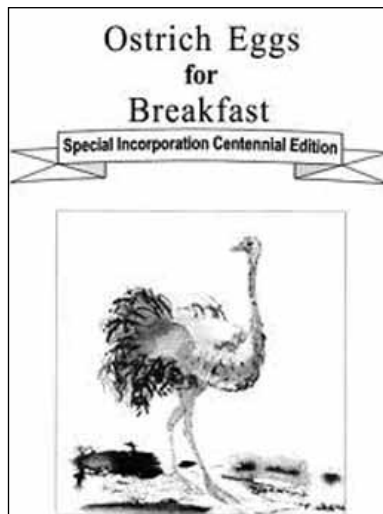
With my warmest regards and sincere thanks,  
Ernie

## Dora May Sim

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classroom visits made her a celebrity among Fullerton students whose admiration often elevated her to rock star status. In addition to all this acclaim, Fern Drive School students wrote and performed a musical based on *Ostrich Eggs for Breakfast* in 1997. *Ostrich Eggs for Breakfast* also became available to students free through the Fullerton Public Library website in 2007.

Retirement for Dora May did not mean lying on the couch, watching television, and eating bonbons. In 1986, she updated *Ostrich Eggs* in honor of the centennial of



the city's founding in 1887. In 1995, she was one of four of a team tasked with mounting an exhibit celebrating the library's 90th anniversary. After the exhibit, she began two years of research and writing, culminating in her second book, *The Bing Bang Book Machine*, a history of the Fullerton library and children's room. Researching the book required Dora May to read all the original hand-written library board minutes starting in 1906, along with annual librarian reports. Similar to her first

book, *The Bing Bang Book Machine* contains a wealth of information and is full of unusual and surprising facts about the library. In 1977, she added to her fame by starting an acclaimed After School Club. This literature-based weekly program for elementary school children, which includes stories, crafts and more, continues to this day.

One word comes to mind in describing Dora May: Humility, a term we rarely hear used today. With all of her contributions to the library and community, she shunned recognition for herself. She was known for her gentle ways, her soft-spokenness, and her love of history. Dora May was the consummate children's librarian, and her goal was to always place the perfect book in a child's hands at the perfect time. She was herself a Bing Bang Book Machine and a gift to our community.

## Fox Theatre Update

by Tom Dalton

The Fullerton Historic Theatre Foundation has been busy over the past several months working with local architect John Silber to determine what needs to be done and what it will cost to complete the work necessary for us to get a certificate of occupancy for the Fox Theatre. Without the certificate we are limited to 50 people at our events unless we hire valet parking attendants plus four fire personnel for four hours (minimum), and rent portable toilets. Mr. Silber has completed his assessment and determined that it will cost between \$1.2 and \$1.5 million depending on how elaborate we get on the finishing work and furnishings. The main issues to be resolved center around completing the restrooms, upgrading the HVAC system, and fire life safety improvements. Once we get these projects completed we still have the issue of parking to get resolved. Fortunately, the City Council at its June 21st meeting approved an

Exclusive Negotiating Agreement with Pelican Communities to put together a proposal to build a 200 space parking lot and present plans to develop the Fox block with a compatible project. Pelican will spend the next several months researching market demand and conducting workshops to understand the community's vision for the property followed by presentation of their findings to the Planning Commission and City Council.

Another piece of good news is that both Dripp Coffee and Stadtgarten (a new sausage and beer restaurant) are open for business in the historic Firestone building attached to the Fox. The Foundation receives a portion of the rent for both of these businesses and looks forward to the help paying the bills.

### Welcome New Members

Steve and Tracy Cooper, Nancy D. Parker, Brad and Leslie Owen

## Kit Homes

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floorboards or on beams, joists, and rafters in crawl spaces and attics. A good place to get started is Rosemary Thornton's *California Kit Homes: A Reprint of the 1925 Pacific Ready-Cut Homes* catalog, available in the Local History Room of the Fullerton Public Library.

The most famous kit house in Orange County is the birthplace of former President Richard Nixon, a National Historic Landmark, located on the grounds of the Nixon Presidential Library & Museum in Yorba Linda. The President's father, Frank A. Nixon, assembled the modest white clapboard home (900-square-feet) over a weekend with other members of his Friends Church in 1912. Tourists are also eager to visit the identical side-by-side Ready-Cut Homes constructed by Roy and Walt Disney in 1926, a few years after founding the Disney Bros. Studio in Los Angeles. Mirror images of each other, the Tudor Revival homes featured two bedrooms and one bath (1066-square-feet) and cost each brother \$8,000, including the land. Located in the Silver Lake district, the two houses (2491 and 2495

Lyric Avenue) were the brothers' first homes of their own. The first Mickey Mouse cartoons would be made in Walt Disney's pre-cut garage. Kit homes have never completely gone away, and the 2016 season of *This Old House* included construction of a new catalog home.

Homeowners are discovering the charm of kit homes, drawn to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century homes, unlike any other residence on the block or even in town. Kit homes are now highly prized by history buffs who appreciate living in a part of American architectural history. If the house can be documented as being a kit home, the value of the property will be enhanced, especially if interior and exterior features are original.



Roy and Walt Disney's matching Kit Homes



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