



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.

Neither Snow Nor Rain Nor Heat Nor Gloom of Night: Fullerton's First Woman Postal Carrier

by Deb Richey

Until the late 19th century, residents of rural areas had to either travel to a post office to pick up their mail or pay for delivery by a private carrier. As an election issue, politicians began supporting rural free delivery (RFD), but were quickly opposed by private mail carriers and merchants fearful that farmers would no longer visit town to pick up their mail and stay to shop. Other Americans were simply opposed to the cost of the free mail service. The nearly 41 million people – 65 percent of the American population in 1890 – living in rural areas fought back, requesting the same free home delivery city dwellers had been receiving since 1863. The federal government established experimental rural postal delivery on three routes in West Virginia on October 1, 1896, and the service was so successful that it steadily grew. It would eventually become one of the most popular federal programs in the nation's history.

Campbell, California, on February 1,

1897, became the first city in the state to offer free rural mail delivery. In 1900, Fullerton secured the first rural route in Orange County. By 1901, Fullerton's petroleum industry was booming, and a second RFD carrier was hired to service a 23-mile oil well route. Fullerton would eventually have seven rural routes.

The first two Fullerton rural mail carriers were men, Charles Curtis and Austin A. Pendergrast. Curtis serviced RFD 1, which wended its way through the pleasant orange groves and beautiful homes of Fullerton out



*Mrs. Vail delivering mail along her route.
Los Angeles Herald, April 6, 1902.*

to Orangethorpe and the surrounding areas. Pendergrast covered the shorter RFD 2 oil route, but serviced eight separate settlements – six at Olinda, one in Brea canyon, and one at Puente hills back of the La Habra Valley – accessed by more treacherous roads. When Pendergrast resigned to become town constable, widow Cora Vail, then 34, was hired as his replacement on July 24, 1901, becoming the city's first female mail carrier, and one of only four or five in the entire nation. Born

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Fullerton Heritage Hosts Member Appreciation Open House

by Maureen Burton

Cinco De Mayo (May 5) has never been more fun for the Fullerton Heritage Board! The Board hosted a Member Appreciation Open House at the Edgar Johnson House, 444 West Brookdale Place. The Open House was replete with Margaritas and Mexican fare.

In addition to enjoying the food and drinks, members toured the Edgar Johnson house which was built by Johnson and his wife in 1928, and is Local Landmark #HL-52.

Johnson founded the *Fullerton Tribune* in

1893 and spent 40 years in the newspaper industry. The *Tribune* was 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.

The Johnsons chose the Spanish Colonial Revival style with some minor Mayan details, including a fireplace built by California Clay Products Company (CALCO). To design and construct the house, Evan Jackson Herbert was hired as the builder. The house cost \$15,000 to build. Working

with renowned architect Frank K. Benchley, Herbert also built the Walter Muckenthaler estate, now the Muckenthaler Cultural Center.

About 40 members joined the Board for the enjoyable and informative event. Thank you to our members who made the event such a success and for their support.

For more detailed information about the historical background of the house, its builder, and the California Clay Products fireplace, go to our website www.fullerton-heritage.org.

Advocacy Issues

by Kate Dalton

National Register and Local Landmark Nominations:

On February 1, 2019 the California State Historical Resources Commission recommended approval of the Hunt Center listing to the National Register of Historic Places and subsequently it was officially listed on April 12. This is particularly timely since the city is in the process of determining what the building's future use will be. It was recently reported that the City of Fullerton has been awarded a \$2.5 million grant from the State of California for much needed interior renovation that the City has been unable to afford. Thank you Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk Silva for securing this much needed funding.

As reported in the last newsletter, The Beckman Instruments Administration Building, a Fullerton Local Landmark and National Register listed property, has been purchased by A.J. Kirkwood & Associates, a large electrical contractor previously based in Tustin. If you have not seen the property in the past few months, take the time to drive by and enjoy the beautiful exterior restoration that is nearly complete. The new owner continues interior renovation, with projected move in sometime in August and a formal dedication sometime in late September or October. We look forward to celebrating the preservation of one of Fullerton's truly iconic historic properties.

Fullerton Heritage board members Debora Richey and Bob Linnell have just completed our latest National Register nomination of the Edgar Johnson House at 444 W. Brookdale Pl. and have sent it to the State Office of Historic Preservation where it will be reviewed and scheduled for the agenda of the State Historic Resources Commission. They are also working on documents for the nomination of additional Fullerton Local Landmarks.

We are currently working with the City of Fullerton Community Development Department on an update of our historic building survey, Fullerton Through the Years, and updates to the General Plan and zoning ordinance with respect to preservation issues.

Fullerton Community College Historic Chapman Houses:

As you may recall, this project involves the proposal to move the historic houses at 428, 434 and 438 E. Chapman Ave. that the district owns, to the vacant lots in the 400 blocks of E. Wilshire and Amerige Aves. (which the district also owns) so the district can construct a new building along Chapman. Two previous bid processes were not successful, but the third bid meeting held on April

22 was successful, with the bid awarded to Tony Bushala, one of two capable local developers who bid on the project. The sale to Mr. Bushala, who has extensive experience moving historic structures and owns numerous historic properties in Fullerton, was approved by the NOCCCD Board at its meeting on May 14. Reportedly the purchase and sales agreement is currently being negotiated and when completed this long awaited project can begin, preserving important historic houses as well as providing much needed housing in Fullerton.

CSUF Master Plan:

CSUF is in the process of formulating a new master plan and in researching the plan, Fullerton Heritage is concerned that the current plan shows the eventual demolition of the Alumni House which is the historic Lottie M. Hetebrink House built in 1928. We immediately met with the Director of the Alumni House, who shares our concern for preservation of this important building. Fullerton Heritage subsequently wrote a letter to the CSUF President and those in charge of the master plan, enumerating our concerns for not only this historic resource, but also the other 2 historic properties on campus (Henry Hetebrink House/Titan House and Dr. George Clark House/ Heritage House), as well as our concerns for preservation of the Fullerton Arboretum. We have been contacted by the university officials and look forward to meeting with them to further discuss our concerns for preservation on the CSUF campus.

Historic Preservation Zone/Local Landmark Projects:

Fullerton Heritage is currently working with property owners and Community Development staff on projects within Fullerton's Historic Preservation Zones, including 221 N. Yale Ave., 1015 N. Lemon St., 341 W. Whiting Ave., 536 W. Jacaranda Pl., 444 W. Malvern Ave., and 142 W. Brookdale Pl. to ensure quality development that follows the Design Guidelines for Residential Preservation Zones.

Finally, the historic Gardiner House (LL#61) at 1155 W. Orangethorpe was recently sold to a new owner, after the previous owner was denied a Conditional Use Permit for a student housing dormitory. The original wood windows were all removed from the building at some point before the Gardiner family sold the property, but luckily they kept and stored them in the basement. Because this was a violation of the Local Landmark Ordinance, the City required they be restored and that work is now being completed by Window Restoration and Repair, experts in the field of historic preservation. The new owner reportedly intends to live in the home which is zoned single family residential.

Vail

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in Indiana, Mrs. Vail, then Cora Jessup, had moved to Fullerton in 1896 to join her sister, Flora Starbuck, the wife of well-known businessman William Starbuck. Cora met and then married William C. Vail, an employee of the Golden Belt Fruit Association, on May 12, 1897, and two daughters soon followed. On a trip to visit his relatives in North Collins, New York, William Vail died suddenly of quick consumption on June 19, 1899, leaving his wife with two infants and only a \$1000 insurance policy. Unable to find work, Mrs. Vail applied for the mail carrier position, later noting: "There seemed to be nothing else for me to do and I had heard of one or two lady carriers employed on eastern routes, so I thought I would at least try it."

Mail carriers were paid by mileage, and Charles Curtis, who had the longer route and sorted through and delivered 8,000 pieces of mail monthly, was paid \$702 a month. Mrs. Vail, who sorted and delivered between 10,000 and 11,000 pieces of mail monthly, was paid \$612. Out of their salaries, both carriers were expected to furnish



Cora and William Vail, ca. 1897, around the time of their marriage. Courtesy of the Fullerton Public Library.

and maintain a horse and buggy that was to be made available to substitute mail carriers. Curtis and Mrs. Vail sorted mail from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m., then left downtown Fullerton, delivering mail and packages from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., working six to seven days a week. On Sundays, Mrs. Vail generally used a substitute to deliver the weekly *Fullerton Tribune* to subscribers along her route as regular mail service was not provided that day.

Despite her small and slight stature, Cora Vail met the physical demands of the job. Foul weather, pitted and washed out roads, bobcats, and mountain lions, as well as the fear of robbers eager to grab the thousands of payroll dollars she delivered monthly on the fifteenth to oil workers, failed to stop her. She missed no days of work during her first two years of employment. On December 22, 1903, while breaking in a new horse, the horse slipped down a steep grade, throwing her from the mail buggy. The horse and Mrs. Vail were slightly injured, but the buggy, which had turned over several times, was completely destroyed. She was helped back to Fullerton by merchant James Ford, who was returning to town with a load of laundry. In an extensive article in the April 6, 1902 issue of the

Los Angeles Herald, Mrs. Vail admitted that the worst part of her job was jumping in and out of the mail buggy all day, but that the best part was the people she met along the way. Efficient and personable, Mrs. Vail was well-liked by the nearly two hundred residents along her 23-mile route,

which often required her to retrace her steps uphill and downhill into many oil camps.

When the job of postmaster opened up in 1904, Mrs. Vail decided to apply. At the time, postmaster positions were not based upon merit, but granted instead by elected officials. As part of the application process, Mrs. Vail was required to obtain petition signatures that she submitted to the Orange Country Central Committee whose members then made a formal recommendation. Mrs. Vail's industriousness and strong work record greatly benefited her, and she quickly gathered over 500 signatures and the support of nearly all of Fullerton's businessmen, many of whom wrote personal letters of support. She, however, faced fierce opposition from Fullerton's Republican Congressman Milton R. Daniels, who announced that he would "absolutely refuse to recommend any woman for the position". Daniels' pronouncement both perplexed and angered Fullerton townspeople. Not only had women been serving as postmistresses since the Revolutionary War, but Fullerton's postmistress and assistant postmistress at the time were both women. Appointed by President Cleveland in 1894, amiable Fullerton postmistress Nancy M. Gregg had overseen the construction of a new downtown post office building that same year and had always run an efficient postal operation, but after a decade was ready to retire.

Fullerton Mayor Charles C. Chapman

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In 1902, Cora Vail, top left with white hat, sits with two of her vocal supporters: Fullerton Tribune newspaper editor/owner Edgar Johnson and his wife Mildred (to his right). Seated to the right on the bottom step is Mrs. Vail's sister, Flora Starbuck, and her son Raymond. Courtesy of the Fullerton Public Library.

Vail

(continued from page 3)

recommended ambitious Vivian M. Tresslar, the male editor of his newspaper, the *Fullerton News*, for the postmaster position. Tresslar gathered only twelve petition signatures and failed to receive the endorsement of Fullerton businessmen. Nonetheless, Chapman, who was a close personal friend of Congressman Daniels, pushed for Tresslar's appointment. When Tresslar was formally declared Fullerton's fourth postmaster on December 12, 1904, it was one of the most unpopular appointments in the city's young history. Edgar Johnson, the editor/owner of the *Fullerton Tribune*, saw the appointment as cronyism at its worst, and came to Mrs. Vail's defense. Even in an era of sharp-tongued journalism, Johnson's editorial rants stood out for their fierceness. He nicknamed the *Fullerton News* the Fullerton Snooze and began casting aspersions on Vivian Tresslar's masculinity by calling him Vivvy Ann. In one editorial rant in the December 22, 1904 issue of the



The Fullerton News, ca. 1902. Editor Vivian Tresslar is believed to be on the left. Courtesy of the Fullerton Public Library.

Tribune – “Tresslar Has Water on the Brain” – Johnson called the new postmaster a “falsifier, a coward, a two-faced sneak, and a stab-you-behind-the-back tool”.

Tresslar exacerbated the controversy by trying to have Mrs. Vail fired. She had missed days of work to gather petition signatures, and he tried to use those days of absence as justification for her dismissal as a postal carrier. When Edgar Johnson got wind of the plan to fire Mrs. Vail, he unleashed a second round of attacks on Tresslar, who eventually backed down.

A little over a year after

Tresslar's appointment, “shortages” began to appear in various departments of the Fullerton post office. In July 1906, the post office inspector for the Pacific Coast recommended that Tresslar be removed for “incompetency and neglect of duty”, but Tresslar was able to fight the charges. While Tresslar's friends and supporters claimed the shortages were unintentional, a second outside investigator recommended to the United States Post Office in early 1907 that a change be

made in postmasters. Tresslar was asked to resign, which he did in April 1907, and he was quickly replaced by Lucien C. Edwards. Tresslar and his wife Grace moved to Los Angeles where he worked as general manager of the Southern California office of the National Life Insurance Company, later establishing the Tresslar Insurance Agency. The couple became one of the first to settle in La Habra Heights in the 1920s, where they started an avocado ranch.

Cora Vail continued as a postal carrier until she remarried on June 22, 1907. She moved to Riverside to be with her new husband, farmer James W. Allen, and had a third child, a son born in 1909. James Allen adopted her two daughters, Lois and Mary, from her first marriage. She would be widowed for a second time in 1925, and pass away in Highland Park in 1932 at the age of 66.

Fullerton would not have another female mail carrier until October 1966, when Diane Clanton, 21, was hired at the East Chapman post office. Married with a one-year-old child, Clanton loved her new job. Like Cora Vail, she was given no special privileges. She did, however, have a 4 or 5 year-old boy on one of her routes come up and hit her, saying “You're not supposed to be a mailman – you're a lady.”



Fullerton's second female mail carrier, Diane Clanton, in 1967.

President's Corner & Annual Meeting Recap

by Ernie Kelsey

Greetings Fullerton Heritage members.

Happy Summer everyone! Here it is July already and the summer is starting to heat up.

Speaking of heat, Fullerton Heritage is keeping it burning with our ongoing advocacy and love of all things Fullerton. We recently had our Annual Meeting and I thought I would take some time to review what we've been up to over the last year.

This year's Annual Meeting was a packed house and almost standing room only! We started by reviewing Fullerton Heritage's goals and objectives and our efforts Advocating, Communicating and Educating the public and public servants about our historic resources and the need to preserve them for future generations to enjoy.

We then had an update on the Fox Fullerton where we learned that new money is coming in to support the Fox. A recent private donation was made and is earmarked for restoring the murals inside the theater. The programming at the Fox was so popular at the Day of Music the Fox was full! People love the Fox and really want to see the restoration completed.

We celebrated our relationships with the Rotary Club who gives us money every year for Local Landmark plaque placement and the Fullerton Public Library where we donate books and photographs taken by the Interns Fullerton Heritage commissions. We love our friends!

We then talked about our Advocacy efforts including the approximately 100 hotline calls, numerous City meetings, individual homeowner meetings and meetings with City officials. We discussed the Amerige Brother's Realty Office and how two Fullerton Heritage board members go every week to sweep, clean and check up on this precious resource.

We discussed our advocacy efforts regarding the California State University, Fullerton Master Plan and their historic buildings, the renovation of Building 300 on the Fullerton Community College campus and the efforts to move some houses the Community College owns on to vacant lots in the vicinity. A win-win for everyone involved!

We reported that our communication efforts have been strong this year with over 10 walking tours of Downtown and Historic Hillcrest Park. We have our bi-annual newsletters and our Social network presence continues to grow with our increased activity on Facebook, Instagram and Google. Check out our new website (www.fullertonheritage.org) and see the updated Architectural Styles of Fullerton section and photographs from our interns.

We were very excited to show the latest pictures of the Beckman Instruments building that Fullerton Heritage advocated to preserve. We're proud to say that the first building bought in the new development was the historic Beckman Administration building. An excellent electrical engineering company (J.K. Kirkwood & Assoc.) has purchased the building and the restoration is almost complete!

We also celebrated the fact that the Hunt Wesson Center (Administration Building, Library and Grounds) were added to the Local Landmark list and the National Register! That was several years of hard work that Fullerton Heritage performed and the end results are excellent!

We also gave out some awesome incredible awards!

The Outstanding Craftsmanship Award went to Russ Riner of Awnings by Russ.

The Contextual Infill Award went to Danielian and Associates for the work on the ABC Home at the corner of Trustlow and Highland.

The Preservationist of the Year Award went to Bob Babcock for his hard work on restoring the two baggage carts at the Fullerton train station. Terry Galvin also gave a presentation on the Baggage Cart restoration that was enjoyed by the whole audience.

Wow – what a year! We couldn't have done this without all of you – our dedicated members. With your help and support, we will continue to advocate for preserving Fullerton's historic past so the many generations to come can enjoy this beautiful town and everything that makes it unique.

Again, please check out our new website. You can now donate or renew your membership online. Fullerton Heritage memberships make a great gift – and now it's even easier to donate! Follow us on Facebook and watch our Instagram page! See you around town everyone.

With my warmest regards,

–Ernie

Welcome New Members

A big **Welcome!** to our many new members:

Becky Blake

Jordan Byers

Cheryl Crippen

Linda Crippen

James & Kate Crippen

Joan Davis

Chris Gaarder

Mark Johnson

Mo Lenjavi

Nancy Liem

Joanna & Joe Lisardi

Diane Luongo-Gazich

Laurel Mason-Estrada

Mary & William O'Neil

Diane Vena

Stephanie Wolcott

Jerry Young

Karl & Jennifer Zener

Russ and Debbie Rinner

Fox Update: Optimism Grows as Pieces Fall Into Place

by Tom Dalton

As mentioned in the last newsletter, the required forms for the \$2.5 million grant that Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk Silva was successful in securing for the Fox restoration project have been completed and sent to the state for approval. We're still waiting to hear back from them but these things always take longer than you'd think they should.

We received the \$100,000 donation that D. Richard Odell left the Foundation in his will and have picked the perfect way to honor his wishes. One of the things he cared about most in the theatre were the Anthony Heinsbergen murals that were painted over in the 1950s. Mr. Odell's generous gift will be used to restore those murals.

Dick Hamm of Pelican Communities is still waiting to finalizing the contracts with the City on the Fox Block parking structure and alley improvements. This is an important piece of the overall Fox

project and we are eager to see this get underway.

In anticipation of obtaining a Certificate of Occupancy from the City upon completing the restrooms, fire, life safety, and HVAC upgrades, the Foundation is negotiating with a consultant who will help us find a company that specializes in the operation of historic theatres. It's still a ways off but things are finally starting to happen and optimism is in the air.

Finally, we had another very successful Day of Music event at the Fox this year with over a thousand fans visiting the theatre to hear the (mostly) all women performers play a wide variety of rock 'n roll. At one point the theatre was so full we had to ask people to wait outside until some of the crowd moved on. Many thanks to Todd Huffman, Pat Shepard and the many Fox Volunteers for all of their hard work putting on such a great event.

Fullerton Heritage Intern Updates City Photo Survey

by Deb Richey

During the 2019 Spring Semester, Fullerton Heritage engaged a freelance photographer, Jax Barbour, as an intern. Born and raised in Orange County, Ms. Barbour is currently attaining her degree in Photography at Fullerton College. She originally started as a hobbyist taking photographs on her travels, but the amount of recognition she received for many of her shots prompted her to take her passion further. She loves all types of photography, and has a passion for wildlife and nature, but for the Fullerton Heritage project, she concentrated on sites and properties around the city.

As part of the Fullerton Historic Survey in 1978, photographs were taken of historic residences, commercial struc-

tures, and other properties that were at least fifty years old. While those photographs have been invaluable to researchers, homeowners, and city staff, they have become dated. Lots of changes have been made to Fullerton since 1978, and Ms. Barbour was asked to update the survey, photodocumenting sites around town, particularly churches and manufacturing facilities. All of the photographs she took are on file in the Local History Room of the Fullerton Public

Library where they will be available to the public. Some of her photographs may be seen on the Fullerton Heritage website.

The 2019 photography internship was sponsored by Kay Miller, who is well-known for her engaging public tours of Hillcrest Park.



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