

## Fullerton & the Small Homes Movement

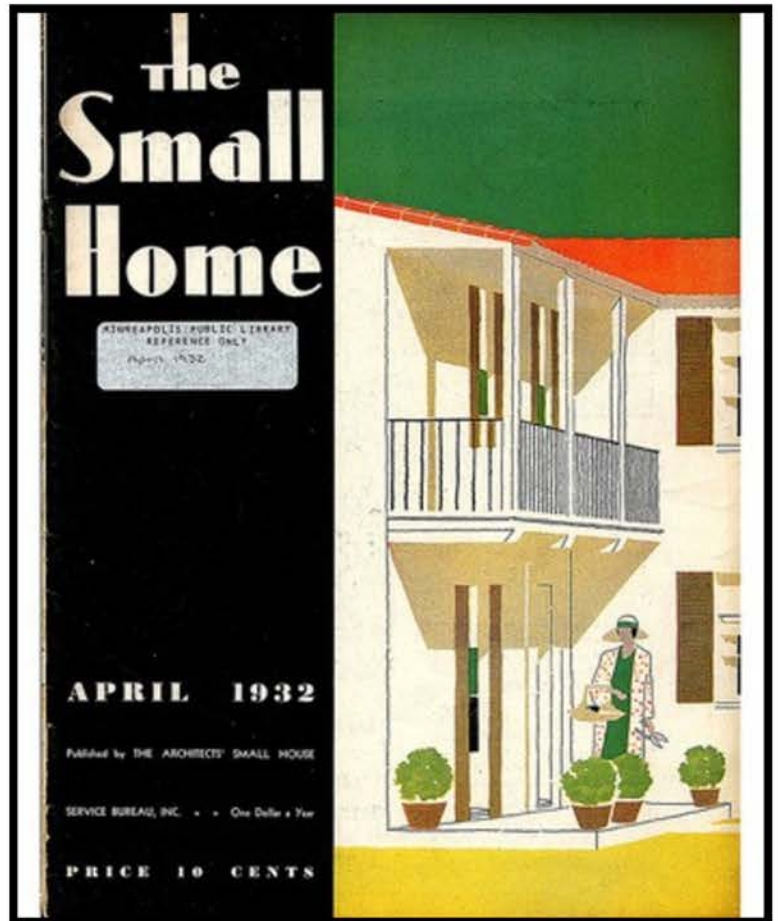
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by Debora Richey

Although general stock home plans had been published as early as 1840, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) established the Architects' Small House Service Bureau (ASHSB) in 1919. The nonprofit organization pioneered a groundbreaking plan service that offered prospective homeowners the opportunity to purchase small house blueprints by mail. After World War I, there was a severe housing shortage – it was estimated that one million homes were needed – and the time was right for architect-designed, small house plans geared toward returning veterans and the nation's booming population. The Bureau's goal was to protect people from the shoddy designs and poor construction that plagued modest single-family homes. At the time of the ASHSB's founding, ninety-five percent of homes constructed were designed by untrained individuals, and the AIA wanted to ensure that modest homes built for lower- and middle-class Americans were stylish, architecturally correct, and well built.

The Bureau advertised its house plans through local newspapers, 750 magazines (e.g., *Good Housekeeping*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *House Beautiful*, etc.), sales catalogs, and its own magazine, *The Small Home*, available to subscribers for an annual cost of one dollar. The magazine also offered advice on financial planning, interior décor, landscaping, and modern appliances. Some architects balked at creating modest house plans, preferring to concentrate on larger commissions, but several prestigious California architects did participate, including Paul R. Williams, Reginald D. Johnson, and Carleton M. Winslow, the campus architect for Fullerton Union High School.

The plans ranged from 700 to 2,200 square feet in a variety of period revival styles – Dutch Colonial, English Cottage, Spanish Colonial Revival, Italianate – but nothing was more popular than Colonial Revival. Geared toward the working- and middle-class, the modest homes were always six rooms or less that could be constructed for around \$5,000. The compact designs differed sharply from large Craftsman or Victorian-



*The Small Home Magazine, 1932*

# Historic Fullerton College

## 300 BUILDING

by Terry Galvin

Building 300 at Fullerton College was the subject of much concern and review by Fullerton Heritage during the years when the scope of the project and the plans were first being decided. It was finally determined by the Chancellor's Office that the project had over shot the available funds and could not be redefined to accomplish the desired outcome within the available funding by the deadline for securing the funds, and to satisfy the desires of the State Architect's Office to include the proper seismic improvements.

In 2022, the project was assigned an alternative funding source and was restarted with a new design team and project schedule. During this time, the building, along with three of the other original campus buildings and some original open spaces were listed on the National Register of Historic Places. With the support of the Chancellor's Office, Fullerton Heritage prepared all of the required documentation to complete and submit the application to the California Office of Historic Preservation. The buildings and adjacent open spaces were listed as an historic district in 2023.

Restoration of Building 300 (the Business/Commerce Building) is now underway with completion scheduled for 2026. The original restoration plans have been retained and additional seismic work is being accomplished without major changes to those plans. Fullerton College is working to include a preservation certificate option within its architecture curriculum, to include courses that will carry transfer credit to other California colleges and universities.



Courtesy of the Local History Room, Fullerton Public Library

# In all this world

there's no other place so dear to you and me as that spot we call "home"



**BETTER HOMES, BETTER HOMES, BETTER HOMES**—These are the slogans of today. They are telling the American people to thinking as they never have in the past. We even have a national "Better Homes Week" once a year to impress upon us the importance of having a Home of Our Own, and making that home the very best possible.

There is no question about it—the dearest spot on earth to you is home—for it is there you expect to spend at least the greater portion of your life; there the children will be born and live to maturity, and should be reared "in ideal surroundings; there the beloved wife will devote the principal part of her time while you are at business and while the kiddies are at school.

Your new home is going to represent the fulfillment of so much in your life, it is wisdom for you to be careful in choosing the location, the plans, the building materials, and its furnishings.

Location plays a large part in the establishment of a successful home; among the things which should be considered are the character and desirability of the neighborhood. A thousand dollars' difference in the price of a lot often spells the difference between a neighborhood which is bound to run down in time and one which will improve with years. Schools, churches, playgrounds, library and transportation services are other considerations which are inseparable from the desirable homes of today.

The size and site of home will depend entirely upon individual taste, requirements and income. The largest need is sunny, deep-set front yards and building conditions, but in most cases prices limit America's most popular architect and builder of these magnificent construction, size, convenience and adaptability for any location, are aptly entitled to the proud position they occupy. The material home, however, is not always well adapted to these when requirements call for a large number of rooms in heating, fire, and building.

The furnishings of the new home should be the subject of much careful thought. A play room for the kiddies, with a piano for you when not in use. The home library with book shelves and tables. The wife should be the one to furnish the bathroom, see the bathroom. She will not so intense interest and make a great job in making them come plans and layouts. Saving some, dining room, breakfast room, and library should be planned for service, and should be decorated in harmony, as have hundreds of thousands of people.

And then the lawn and the flower garden and the back yard, with trees and fruit trees and roses and vines climbing the sides of the home and garage—oh, doesn't such the making of a home, and you will grow just as naturally when you have seen the start.

—How you get a home of your own? If you can, you should take the first step. The series of Home Building articles here has been written in order to inspire you to home owning and to aid you in choosing just the plan in meeting all of your requirements.

A number of progressive firms and individuals—all interested in you, and some of your personal friends, are making this service possible for your benefit. They have combined the assistance of expert home builders, whose advice is given for the making. They are in every in the Home Building Series, with this paper.

—The following organizations, public-spirited firms and individuals, are anxious that you enter the charmed circle of home-owners. They want to be of every possible help to you and have retained the services of competent home designers who will gladly advise with you and give valuable assistance in planning your new home. Address all inquiries to the "Home Building Editor," care this paper.

Taylor Electric Co., 130 E. Ansonia	Frederick Oak, 115 W. Commonwealth	A. B. Corona, Painter, 212 E. Truax
Cover Bros., Trust Company, 620 W. Commonwealth	J. A. Miller, Auto Painting, 114 N. Madison	Robertson-Harrison, W. Commonwealth
<b>MELSON MURPHY CO., 108 S. Spadra</b>	James E. Ellis, Contractor, 505 W. Ansonia	Olsen Furniture Co., W. Ansonia
E. S. Gregory, Builder, 600 N. Spadra Road	Brown & Pyle, Painting, Decorating, R. F. D. 1	Frank P. Taggart Co., Auto, 121 W. Commonwealth
Millman & Vandermant, Clothiers, 102 N. Spadra	Whitman Employment Co., Ford Agency	El Dorado Ranch, Harry Gaston, Proprietor
Pullman Ice Co., 112 E. Walnut	Chicago On Location, Wholesaler, 112 E. Commonwealth	Frank K. Benchley, Architect, Broadway Bldg.
Chicago On Location, Wholesaler, 112 E. Commonwealth	McClure & Vail, Druggists, 115 N. Spadra	L. J. Ellis, Contractor, 201 Ansonia
Blain, Hodge & Black, Hardware, Groceries, 109 E. Spadra		Harry G. Maxwell, Real Estate, 105 W. Commonwealth

**The Better Homes in America Program, Fullerton News Tribune, January 11, 1923**

styled dwellings, eliminating the "wasted space" of parlors, servants' quarters, formal dining rooms, hallways, large porches, and customized rooms, such as music rooms, libraries, and studies. ASHSB staff were available for consultations at regional offices, and potential homeowners had hundreds of plans to choose from to suit their needs. Buyers could reverse a floor plan; add, subtract or combine rooms; and customize the homes to fit their budgets. Most of the homes were rectangular-shaped and plans were included for detached garages. The plans were also developed so that homeowners could easily add onto the dwellings as their income increased. Buyers of the house plans were encouraged to hire an architect to supervise construction, but the Bureau assured purchasers that their homes would be in "good taste and of correct architectural design"; efficiently arranged; comfortably laid out; and of sound construction using only a building contractor.

At its peak in the late 1920s, the ASHSB maintained ten regional offices throughout the country and was reaching two million people weekly. The total number of homes built from the sale of the house plans is not known, but the Bureau's plans spawned hundreds of competitors who published their own

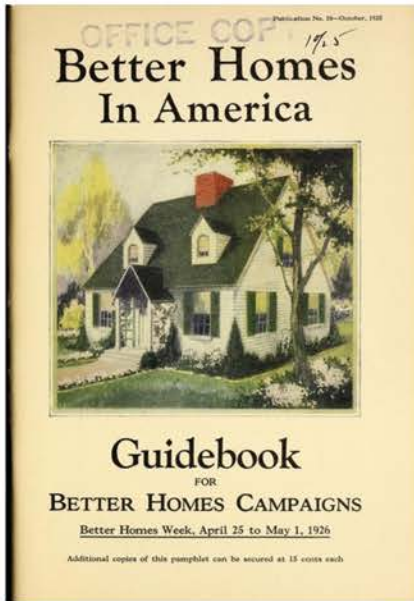
pattern books throughout the 1920s, initiating what is now known as the Small House Movement (1919-1945). There is no doubt that the architect-designed plans greatly influenced architectural practices and changed the course of 20th century residential design for the better.

### Better Homes in America Program

Impressed by the ASHSB's attempt to improve American housing, journalist and reformer Marie Mattingly Meloney (1878-1943), editor of a popular women's magazine, *The Delineator*, founded the Better Homes in America Program in 1922. She started a national campaign to make homes the "models of comfort, beauty and convenience" that would, in turn, result in "better homes" from which would "grow a better home life". At the time, millions of Americans were living in shoddy and unclean homes, often in cramped tenement buildings. The Better Homes Movement would eventually involve thousands of communities across the country, bringing together architects, contractors, realtors, banks, furniture stores, churches, schools, and the Boy and Girl Scouts to build better homes. The nonprofit organization, headquartered in Washington, D.C., gained legitimacy when Presidents Coolidge and Hoover endorsed the program.



Left: Marie Mattingly Meloney, founder, Better Homes in America Program, ca. 1921. Right: Marie Meloney with Marie Curie and her two daughters



**The Better Homes in America Program, April to May 1926**

committee members were encouraged to build a demonstration home open for public viewing that showcased the joys of small home living. Committee members had wide leeway on the architectural style and floor plan; even older homes could be remodeled. Some of the model homes were built on wheels so that they could be easily moved to different communities. Most participating cities or towns constructed at least one model home; others, such as Stockton, Santa Barbara, and Sacramento, built multiple exhibition homes.



**Model Home Advertisement, Fullerton News Tribune, October 22, 1927**

Maloney and her cohorts organized the first Better Homes Week held October 4-9, 1922, which became a showcase for home improvement. The organization widely distributed free pamphlets (*Guidebook for Better Homes Campaigns*, *Plan Booklet for Demonstration Week*, etc.) that laid out how to start and run what became an annual weekly event, and later gave awards to the best programs. During Better Homes Week, men and women across the country attended lectures on how to finance and purchase a home; received instruction on cleaning, table-setting, cooking, decorating, and gardening; and viewed displays of furniture and labor-saving products. Millions attended Better Homes Week demonstrations, but the main audience was small families, including newlyweds, immigrants, farmers, and African Americans. Better Homes officials knew that most Americans could not afford a grand home, but believed that working- and middle-class families could achieve a decent, attractive, and convenient “small house” they could call home. They also hoped that home ownership would promote democracy, family stability, and consumer responsibility.

Central to the Better Homes Movement was the exhibition or model home, “a living example of what an American home should be”.

**Fullerton’s Model Home (701 North Richman Avenue)**

During the last decade, preservationists have tried to identify model homes constructed as part of Better Homes in America campaigns. Small and overlooked, many of the model homes have been demolished or altered beyond recognition. Fortunately, Fullerton Heritage identified the city’s one model home – a cottage-styled dwelling at 701 North Richman Avenue (originally 633) – now a designated Fullerton Local Landmark.

Fullerton residents embarked on their first Better Homes in America campaign in 1925. That year, the city was one of five California communities (71 participated) that received an honorable mention from the Advisory Council of Better Homes in America. On June 21, 1927, Dale R. King, President of the Fullerton Chamber of Commerce, announced local contractors had formed a group to construct a two-bedroom, one-bathroom model home to be known as Fullerton’s Exhibition Home. An outgrowth of the Fullerton Board of Trade, the Fullerton Chamber of Commerce had incorporated on September 11, 1922, and the members and their wives would oversee all aspects of the model home’s construction. The lot for the home was donated by developer



**701 N Richman Ave, built in 1927**

Robert E. Corcoran, Sr., a former Board Member of the Fullerton Chamber of Commerce, who had laid out Lower and Upper Golden Hill in partnership with his son-in-law, Walter Jack Cadman. Richman Avenue was selected because there were several empty lots along the street. Notable local contractors Robert Ben Carey (1882-1967) and William (Willie) B. Potter (1886-1964) agreed to design and construct the 1,425-square foot wooden-frame dwelling. During their partnership, Carey & Potter constructed numerous dwellings around Fullerton (e.g., 1234 Luanne Avenue, 1206 North Lemon Street, 626 Beverly Drive), and they were highly experienced contractors. Materials for the Exhibition Home were provided by Fullerton businesses: the Fullerton Hardware Company, Gibbs Lumber Company, Foster Sand and Gravel, Hammond Bros. Hardwood Floors, etc. The Trustees of the home, which was expected to be eventually sold, were influential officers of the City's three banks: Waldo O'Kelley, President of the Bank of Italy National Trust and Savings Association (later the Bank of America); Samuel W. Smith, President of the New First National Bank of Fullerton; and Howard A. Krause, cashier of the Pacific Southwest Trust and Saving Bank and President of the Orange County Bankers Association.

Construction of the Exhibition Home began on June 13, 1927, and the house received a remarkable amount of attention from the local press. The dwelling was tracked by the *Fullerton News Tribune* from its construction to its public opening, with advertisements noting that the dwelling was "Built Up to a Standard; Not Down to a Price". The Fullerton Chamber of Commerce had adopted the slogan, "Life's realizations are largely incorporated in home ownership", and the model home showcased the basic tenets of the Better Homes Movement: beautiful home architecture, better planning of gardens, more practical kitchen arrangements, and an enhancement of the comfort and attractiveness of home life. Described in the *Tribune* as a "modernized" English cottage, the dwelling featured 20th century interior decoration, labor-saving devices, multiple built-ins, and the latest technology, including a radio. The kitchen – "the work room for women" – featured a Servel electric refrigerator, an electric range, a cooler, an extra amount of cupboard space, metal lined flour and bread bins, an ironing board cabinet, tile sink, and enameled walls.

When finished, the Fullerton Exhibition Home – fully furnished by Fullerton furniture stores – was opened to the public every day from 1:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. from October 15, 1927, to November 20, 1927. Most often, female hostesses welcomed visitors to model homes, but in Fullerton's case, Richmond W. Jaffray, manager of the Men's Business Club, greeted each guest to the home, providing light refreshments and information on the house's construction and sale. Signs directing visitors to the model home were placed around town and eventually 2,600 people visited the home, some from as far away as Ohio, Kansas, and Illinois. Although advertised as affordable, the dwelling's steep selling price of \$9,200 made it too expensive for the average family, and it was eventually sold in April 1929 to Robert E. Corcoran, Sr.

After complaints from local architects about competition with rival ASHSB's plans, the American Institute of Architects pulled its endorsement of the Bureau in 1934, and it formally dissolved in 1942. By 1935, the Better Homes in America Program still had over 10,000 participating communities, but the Depression and decreased funding took their toll on the organization. In addition, President Roosevelt was not supportive of a program endorsed by his predecessor, Hoover. Consequently, the research section of the program was transferred to Purdue University, with some model homes still constructed. Although greatly reduced in size and scope, Fullerton residents continued to participate in Better Homes in America Week until the start of World War II. While the Better Homes Movement was short-lived, it did result in increased homeownership and greatly improved home design and construction.



**Better Homes in America Program,  
Fullerton News Tribune,  
April 26, 1940**

# TWO NEW

## HISTORIC DISTRICTS APPROVED

by Ernie Kelsey

Yes, you read that headline correctly! We have two new Historic Districts (also known as Preservation Zones) in Fullerton. The Upper Golden Hill Historic District was approved by the City Council (5-0) on October 15, 2024. A special thank you goes out to Joe Marshall and Sharon Keyser for being block leaders accomplished everything they needed to do quickly and efficiently! A big congratulations to the entire neighborhood.

The excellent progress continues! On December 3, 2024, the City Council approved the Woods, Wilshire, Wickett Square Historic District. With a 4-0 vote (Whitaker absent), the efforts of the neighbors really paid off. Tim Johnson and Julie Rayburn worked very hard to get everything together. Katherine England hosted the kick-off discussions. Thank you to the entire neighborhood!

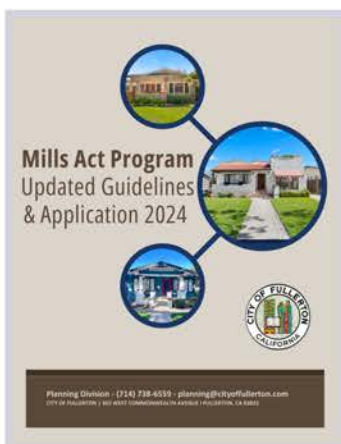
We have three more Historic Districts in the works. Neighbors are currently out getting petitions signed in the Lower Golden Hill, Skyline Park and Oceanview neighborhoods. We'll have more information on these efforts later this year.

This is great news for the entire city of Fullerton. As we move into a possible period of new development, it's very nice knowing that we have preserved some of our most precious historic neighborhoods.



## MILLS ACT

by Jennifer Harris



**City of Fullerton**  
**Historic Resources**

2024 was a big year for preservation. In addition to new historic districts the City Council also voted unanimously in favor of approving four new Mills Act Contracts.

Once approved the Mills Act can help reduce a home's property tax, the efforts to preserve is rewarded with a savings of up to 60% off. 2024 is the first year the cap to the purchase price has been eliminated, making approval more attainable for more historic homeowners.

Homes located in Historic Districts or Local Landmark homes can apply. Thank you to our City Council for seeing the value and importance of maintaining our city's housing stock.

# FULLERTON ROTARY *thank you* by Ernie Kelsey

Fullerton Heritage can't thank the Fullerton Rotary enough for their generous support. From helping restore the Fullerton Police Department neon sign (they paid half!), to their Community Investment grants, our city is better off because of the Fullerton Rotary.

With our 2024 Community Investment Award funds from the Fullerton Rotary, we ordered two plaques for the recently restored (and reopened) Hunt Library.

We worked with Public Works and determined the best place for these plaques was inside the Hunt Library. We have a picture above but do yourself a favor and take a visit to the Hunt Library to see how nice the building looks and how well these plaques look hanging in this beautiful building.

Thank you again to the Fullerton Rotary and to City Staff, Friends of the Fullerton Library and the Library Board that helped make this happen.



## *This year's Holiday* **DECORATION WINNERS** by Noelle Rossi

We want to recognize and congratulate the winners of our 2024 Christmas holiday decorating contest. Postcards were hand delivered to residents who live in Preservation Zones in Fullerton; including two new zones just recently designated. The winners received a cash prize of \$100 plus a Fullerton Heritage family membership for one year. Thank you to all who submitted photos; you all have amazing Holiday spirit. Wish everyone could have won!



**Most Traditional:** Rachel and Jeff Tustin at 421 W. Brookdale Pl.



**Most Creative:** Sarah Jensen Harte at 428 W. Malvern Ave.



**Best Use of Light Display:** Eric Ruiz at 336 N. Adams Ave.

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**Join, Support & Follow**



# Presidents Corner 2025

## Happy New Year!

Hope this newsletter finds you filled with optimism for the new year and what it has in store.

Since our Annual Meeting in late June, we've had a lot going on! Starting off with a tour of the Fullerton Union High School (FUHS) library led by librarian **Jean Page**. I went to FUHS and it was nice to see inside the library again. We got to see the area planned for a "FUHS History" display that **Principal Caffey** is envisioning. We even saw some fresco drawing samples by artist Charles Kassler for the mural on the west side of the FUHS Auditorium.

We continue to build our relationships with City Planning Staff and have had several meetings to discuss historic preservation, preservation zones and the Mills Act. In fact, we met the newest member of the team, **David Lopez**, who will now be the primary contact for anything related to the Mills Act. It's great to see the City Staff grow their team – they are severely understaffed to say the least.

We met with **Stephen Bise** and the team from Public Works to discuss hanging our Historic District Marker signs. It was great to see **Police Chief Jon Radus** (and Stephen again) to continue our discussions about the Historic Restoration grant for the Fullerton Police Department and the FPD Neon sign that has been on the fritz lately. We have every confidence that Public Works will get it fixed and always enjoy meeting with these City leaders.

We met with **Preserve Orange County** again to discuss the future of 801 S. Acacia Avenue, historically known as the **Arcadia Metal Products** building, designed by the renowned team of mid-century designers, **Jones and Emmons**. More to follow on this!

We conducted several walking tours and are looking forward to 2025 when we introduce **more tour options** to our stable of tours. Keep an eye out for our tour announcements on our website and Facebook/Instagram pages and come on down for a fun Saturday morning!

Architecture curriculum changes are happening at **Fullerton College** (FC). We've been meeting with Professor of Architecture **Alan Ray** and are happy to hear that his department will be introducing a certificate program for the study of architectural preservation and restoration. This is exciting news, and Fullerton Heritage will fund a \$500 scholarship to qualifying students when the program is in place sometime in 2026.

I had the honor of presenting Fullerton Heritage's "Year in Review" to long-time Fullerton Heritage member **Jorice Maag's** PEO group in November. Jorice was instrumental in getting the Dr. Clark house relocated to the Arboretum and it's always so fun to get out and talk about Fullerton Heritage and our preservation efforts.

We have two new local landmarks awaiting approval by the City Council. We'll have more info on these when they're approved. You can read about our **two new Historic Districts** in this newsletter.

It's the time of year to **renew your membership**. Our membership runs from January 1 to December 31. Your membership helps keep Fullerton Heritage moving forward with all our preservation efforts. Please renew today. It's easy to renew online or just fill out the insert with this newsletter and mail it back.

Thank you all for your continued support. On behalf of the Fullerton Heritage Board of Directors, we wish you all a healthy, happy and prosperous New Year!

With warm regards,  
Ernie