

# Fender Radio Shop

**107 S. Harbor Boulevard**

**ca. 1911**

**Brick Commercial**

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



This building is historically associated with two prominent residents: Edgar Johnson, the owner/editor of the town's first newspaper and Clarence Leo Fender, the developer in the mid-1940s and early 1950s of the legendary Telecaster, Stratocaster, and Precision Bass, the first viable solid-body electric guitars that revolutionized the music world.

Located in the original core of Fullerton laid out by town founders George and Edward Amerige in 1887, the south 100 block of Harbor Boulevard featured plain and simple single-story storefronts, representative of early 20th century commercial architecture. At some point, most likely the 1930s, the building's wood and glass façade was replaced with large plate glass display windows. The façade currently has a somewhat Streamline Modern style.

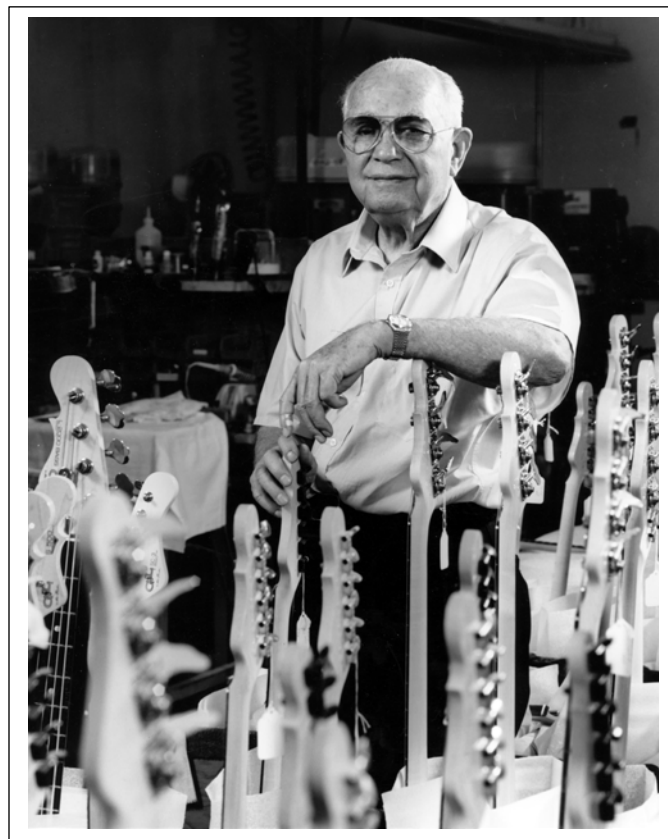
Of brick construction, the 30-foot wide building has had a succession of owners and renters, two of which have played a major role in the city's development. Edgar Johnson established the first local newspaper in 1891; by 1911, he needed more space and so he moved the offices of the paper to this building, where it remained until 1931. A political conservative, Johnson was an influential voice in civic affairs and a strong proponent of city incorporation as well as the development of the high school. Johnson remained the owner/editor of the Fullerton News Tribune until 1929, when he sold out and retired.

Clarence Leo Fender owned a series of businesses located throughout Fullerton from 1939 until his death in 1991. From 1940 to 1944, Fender's Radio Service was at 112 S. Harbor Boulevard (razed), where

before he ever put his name on amplifiers and guitars, he designed, repaired, and rebuilt radios, record changers, and public address systems. In 1945, Fender's Radio Service moved to 107 S. Harbor Boulevard where it remained in business until 1951. It was this first decade of design from 1945 to 1955 that laid the foundation upon which much of his manufacturing company's success was built. It was also at this location that the development of the electric guitar began in earnest. The front part of the store was used for "radio sales, service and rental," along with "electrical appliances, phonograph records, musical instruments and repairs, public address systems, and sheet music." The back of the shop was used to invent and refine guitars and amplifiers.

Gradually the business began to split between the front trade shop and the rear manufacturing enterprise. With government war restriction on materials lifted, Fender wanted to shift to more manufacturing; in 1946, Fender began work on designing a marketable solid-body guitar, and by 1948, he had come up with the Fender Broadcaster, later renamed the Telecaster, which still remains one of the world's most popular guitars.

Space and zoning restrictions prohibited the full production of the Broadcaster/Telecaster at the Harbor Boulevard shop, and in 1946, Fender constructed two metal buildings at the northeast corner of Pomona and Santa Fe Avenues (120 S. Pomona Avenue, razed) to manufacture new guitars and amplifiers for professional musicians. Fender continued to work in the back of this Harbor store, but also began to move from the Harbor shop to the makeshift manufacturing facility, which initially employed only a handful of workers who often worked in unsafe conditions. In 1949, Fender sold the store on South Harbor Boulevard to his longtime employee Dale Hyatt, who sold Fender instruments and amplifiers directly to musicians.



**Leo Fender, ca. 1955**