

## ***Washington Didn't Sleep Here, but Someone Did***

By Janet O'Dea and Allen A. Hazard

There are many fascinating aspects to appreciating older homes. It is thrilling to recognize the architecture and find intact character defining features as well as learning about the original architect or builder. For some, learning about the person who had the house built, or who found it, if it was built on speculation, might be even more endearing.

Gaining some perspective and understanding of the people who shaped the history of your city and how that contributed to our state and national history is something to behold. Criteria B for local San Diego historic designation for a building are defined as: *identified with persons or events significant in local, state or national history*. These touchstones to our past occurred in what we currently consider San Diego's older housing stock as our region of the country was being shaped.

Finding out information about the original owner of your own house opens up your imagination and profoundly connects you to its past and to a broader American experience. Imagine the meaningfulness of discovering that a former resident of your house was connected to a civil war widow. Knowing who lived in your house, their occupations or their contributions to the nation or community somehow connects you to those former owners on a daily basis.

Recently, the City of San Diego has started working on a Historic District policy that is largely focused on the architectural integrity of a building. While the ink hasn't dried on this policy the Historic Resources Board has an opportunity to include provisions to encourage more information to examine the past owners and resident information.

Along with the architecture, architect and builder history, the narrative of past residents adds depth to the story of your home. By simply knowing about the deeds or misdeeds of its past residents instills greater interest and may even form a deeper emotional connection to the building itself. This association, interest and connection may be the difference between saving or losing the building someday.

While it can be difficult to find any reasonable amount of information about a former resident the search can be very rewarding. Occasionally, when researching the history of your house you can strike gold and find a relative of a former owner, a document or other evidence that provides some insight into the personality and character of the person or the struggles they endured in their lives.

My neighbors are one of the lucky ones. They have a 1910 Dutch Colonial house and several vintage photos of their house being built. They also have several photos of the first owners, Eugene and Caroline Fuller. Mr. Fuller was a member of the International Workers of the World or Wobblies, a radical worker's party of the early 20th century. It appears that Fuller began to build the house in 1908 based on a handshake with then local realtor Percy Goodwin who sold him the lot (since the deed was not recorded until the next year).

Fuller had several occupations, working as a carpenter in 1912 and machinist and mechanical

engineer for many years thereafter. In 1927, the couple's son joined the work force and was a clerk for the Southern Electric Company. In 1928 Eugene Fuller died. Caroline remained in the home until 1937 as a widow living with her son and his wife.

Physical reminders of the Fuller family are found in the back of the house. Footprints of the young Fuller children marked the concrete of the back stoop 100 years ago. The family dog also contributed a paw print. Doesn't having something documented on the history of the owner/builder make this house more interesting, and provide meaning to the old photos and concrete footprints? Today, the current owners have a unique sense of their part in both the future and in the past of their home as they build upon their memories there.

If you don't already know your homes history, and your interest has been piqued then you can begin by looking at the old title records. From there you can search websites like [www.Roots.web](http://www.Roots.web) and in San Diego visit the California Room at the San Diego Public library downtown to get started. Projects for young people abound when they live in an old house - resident history may be a project to work on for students. What they may find will educate the entire family besides learning some new research techniques that existed long before *Google*. Keeping this information with the building will also serve generations to come.

If you already have the history on your house or know of the resident and owner history from one of our famous San Diego landmarks then you probably already understand how the resident history contributes to the story. We hope that by digging a bit deeper for owner and resident information of our older building stock that a greater appreciation for those who contributed to our San Diego heritage will emerge. In our opinion, this simple association and knowing about past owner history will garner a greater force to protect and preserve the building should it become challenged and that is significant for all of us.