



Fullerton Union High School Auditorium  
Name of Property

Orange, California  
County and State

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____ 3 _____	_____ 1 _____	objects
_____ 3 _____	_____ 1 _____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: auditorium

RECREATION AND CULTURE: work of art

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: auditorium

RECREATION AND CULTURE: work of art

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS

Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: poured in-place concrete; cast concrete; red clay tiles; ceramic tile; lime plaster; watercolors; wrought iron

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993 as the Louis E. Plummer Auditorium, the renamed Fullerton Union High School Auditorium<sup>1</sup> was designed by master architect Carleton M. Winslow, Sr., an early California proponent of Spanish-styled architecture, in 1930. The elaborately decorated Spanish Colonial Revival building includes Italian Florentine, Renaissance Revival, Mission, Greek and Moorish elements on both the interior and exterior. The imposing south-facing front façade of the 10,950-square-foot auditorium is symmetrical in design and richly decorated with Neoclassical motifs. The wide variety of cast concrete emblems adds interest and character to the front façade, embellishing the classically shaped parapet, windows, and rectangular portico. A red clay tile gabled roof is attached to the back of the uniquely shaped parapet and red clay tile shed-style roofs form narrow rows along the east and west façades. On the west elevation, the shed-style roof shelters a dramatic fifteen-arch arcade. The four-story-high tower is crowned with a dome clad in mosaic tile in rich shades of blue and

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<sup>1</sup> The Fullerton Joint Union High School District Board of Trustees voted unanimously on June 16, 2020 to remove Louis E. Plummer's name from the Plummer Auditorium in Fullerton amid evidence that Plummer was a member of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s.

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gold. All four faces of the tower contain large clocks featuring Roman numerals. The interior is crowned with an elaborate ceiling of painted beams, the original wrought iron chandeliers, arched side isles with composite capitals, and other character-defining architectural elements. Situated on the west wall of the auditorium is the *Pastoral California* mural, dedicated on November 22, 1934. Painted over in 1939 and restored post-listing in 1997, the mural reflects the ornate Spanish Colonial Revival architecture of the auditorium. Charles M. Kassler II and his assistant, Julian E. Williams, created the mural using watercolors over wet plaster, known as the fresco technique. The vibrant 15- by 80-foot, 4-inch mural is sheltered by an expansive covered arched walkway that runs the length of the auditorium, leading to classrooms at the rear (north) of the property. Funded by the Federal Works of Art Project (FWAP), the fresco depicts California's mission and rancho periods from 1776 to 1846 in a series of scenes that feature animals, games, and historical Mexican and Spanish figures from early California and Orange County. The amended nomination identifies three additional contributing objects, the mural and two sets of Mayan Revival wrought iron gates designed to frame the fresco, produced by FUHS shop students in 1934. A third set of gates is the noncontributing post-period of significance object, created at the time of the 1997 mural restoration. The property retains all aspects of historic integrity.

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## Narrative Description

### Setting/Location/Parking

The Fullerton Union High School Auditorium is located on the prominent northwest corner of Chapman Avenue and Lemon Street near downtown Fullerton. Established in 1893, the high school was moved to its location on East Chapman Avenue in 1913. The auditorium is located in the southeasternmost corner of the 17.20-acre high school, immediately south of the Fine Arts Building, and east of the Administration Building. The auditorium and high school are situated in the central core of the city laid out by town founders George Henry Amerige (1855-1947) and Edmund Russell Amerige (1857-1915) in 1887. The high school's central location along a primary arterial thoroughfare made it accessible to residents in Fullerton and nearby cities, such as Brea, La Habra, Placentia, and Yorba Linda, who were also served by the school district.

In 1919, the Board of Trustees of the Fullerton Joint Union High School District hired Master Architect Carleton Monroe Winslow, Sr. (1876-1946), an early major proponent of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture, to develop a master plan for the new high school, and all of the buildings are designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival style. The ornate FUHS Auditorium was erected at a cost of \$295,541 in 1930, and since then has served as an important cultural center for residents of all ages in the north Orange County area.<sup>2</sup> The graceful arcade that runs along the west side of the auditorium, sheltering the mural, sets the tone for the architectural style of the high school; the arcades used on adjacent buildings are a recognizable architectural feature along East Chapman Avenue. A manicured and open lawn, approximately 85-feet by 225-feet, with mature trees and shrubs flanks the west side of the auditorium (**Figures 1, 2**).

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<sup>2</sup> "School Auditorium to be Erected: Building to Serve Fullerton College and High School," *Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 1928.

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The auditorium and high school are situated one short block east of Fullerton's historic downtown in what was then, and remains, an older residential neighborhood. The campus is still surrounded by single-family homes, bungalow courts, and small apartment buildings constructed between 1895 and 1940. Two historic preservation zones—College Park and Hillcrest Drive—are within walking distance. Nearby historic properties, a number of which are also listed on the National Register, include John W. Hetebrink House (515 E. Chapman Avenue), Alician Court Theatre Complex (500-512 N. Harbor Boulevard), the Masonic Temple (501 N. Harbor Boulevard), Pomona Court and Apartments (314 and 320 Pomona Avenue), and Hillcrest Park (1300 N. Harbor Boulevard).

Staff and student parking lots are situated at the rear of the campus, accessible from Lemon Street and Pomona Avenue. Parking for those attending events at the auditorium is provided by a two-story public parking structure (230 East Chapman Avenue) directly south and across from the high school campus. Theatergoers also use free parking at adjacent Fullerton College. The Fullerton Union High School campus has always been inviting, visible, and accessible. There are no gates and walls that block access, and anyone can walk into the campus from the street to enter the auditorium or view the *Pastoral California* mural, which remains a popular stop on walking tours of the historic core of Fullerton.

### **Roofscape**

The prominent roof ridge of the auditorium's decorative front gable features a narrow border at the top; a lyre, representing music, in the center of the decorative pediment at the peak; and small pediments at each end. Those pediments are accented with comedy and tragedy masks. This feature is a fine example of a false front with a front-facing gabled roof attached to the rear. The roof is clad in red clay tiles. Approximately fifteen feet below the main roof, on the building's east and west sides, are shed-style roofs clad in red clay tiles. The roofs run almost the entire length of the east and west sides. A single-storied flat-roofed arcade forms a row of fifteen arches along the west side. The roof of the projecting portico in the center of the front façade is flat and finished as a balcony with a solid rail that forms the top of the portico. The rear one-eighth of the building is approximately twenty feet taller than the main section and denotes the stage section where the mechanisms to control the curtains and the sets are located.

### **Front Façade**

Symmetrical in form, the front façade is centered with an elaborate rose window. Moderne pilasters accent the corners, below the corner pediments. The word "AUDITORIUM" is centered above the wide doorway that leads to the balcony above the projecting portico. A trio of blind windows, elaborately surrounded with squares in a classical motif and crowned with a wide decorative cornice, flank each side of the center section. A second pair of Moderne pilasters forms the edges of the outside walls. A wide portico, featuring three matching arched openings with beautifully detailed cast concrete decoration, is a good example of conservative classicism. Three tiers of pilasters and cornices reach from the top of the balcony to the base of the portico, with the four pilasters separating and flanking the three arches. A large cartouche crowns the central arch. Rusticated stones accent the inside face of each arch and outline the three rectangular panels above the openings. The pilasters are topped with unique capitals featuring

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acanthus leaves and shields. Wide concrete steps, flanked by concrete piers, lead to the portico. A tall and elaborate wrought iron lamp adorns each pier. Two wrought iron railings separate each of the three sections of stairway. The three identical arches lead to the rectangular interior of the portico. A wrought iron lamp hangs from each of the three vaults of the portico ceiling. Ticket windows with elaborate surrounds and cornices are located on the east and west sides of the interior. Three sets of doors leading to the lobby are contemporary metal and glass, one of the few alterations to the building's exterior.

### **East Façade**

A narrow shed-style roof, clad in red clay tiles, forms a row along the east façade, approximately fifteen feet below the eave of the main gabled roof. A row of blank arches, filled in with black and white and yellow and white ceramic tiles, is located between the main and shed-style roofs. A side entrance, topped with an arched opening and flanked by cast concrete pilasters and ornate capitals, is placed close to the front (south) façade. Concrete piers, tipped with wrought iron rails, border each side of the stairs. The original patterned metal door, which matches those used throughout the first floor of the building, is deeply recessed from the entry arch. The east façade is blank between the side entrance at the south end and a similar and plainer entrance at the north end. The low hipped roof of the stage and the vertical wall that extends above the main gabled roof that occupy the rear one-eighth of the building are visible from the east side

### **West Façade and Tower**

The main attractions of the west façade are the impressive and beautifully decorated five-story tower and the arcade featuring fifteen arches. The tower, reminiscent of those at Mission Santa Barbara, is crowned with an octagonal dome clad in blue and gold ceramic tiles. Elaborate cornices, with decorative pediments at each corner, cap the twin arched openings that occupy each side of the belfry. Chevrons decorate the corner pilasters that flank each set of openings. Another wide cornice separates the twin arches of the belfry and the single arched opening below. These openings, surrounded by ceramic tiles in blue, gold, and green, are centered in the middle of each section. A narrow balcony, accented with carved brackets and pilasters, is attached to each single arched opening. Large clock faces, consisting of Roman numerals, are centered in each façade, below the balconies. The clocks were made by the shop department of the high school. The remainder of the tower is plain concrete, with a few small recessed multi-paned windows. At the bottom of the west side is an arched opening with an elaborate surround. The recessed opening has been filled in with a plain recessed wall.

The single-storied arcade, which runs along the west façade, is topped with a flat roof, and extends from a point ten feet from the front façade to the north side of the tower, extending thirteen feet beyond the tower. Fifteen arches, separated by pillars with unusual capitals featuring chevrons, form a neat row along the west side. The first, or southernmost, arch is accented by molding and urn-like decorative elements. It serves as the south entrance to the arcade. Seven steps, flanked by concrete piers, lead to the opening. The floor of the arcade is clad in large red clay tiles. Situated within the arcade on the building's west wall is the *Pastoral California* mural.

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### **North Façade**

The rear of the building is visible from very few angles, due to the proximity of the music arts building to the north and east and the building's arcade on the west. A small patio between the two buildings enclosed in 1993, is used for storage and restrooms. The addition is clad in plain stucco, has no architectural elements, and is topped with a flat roof.

### **Interior**

The richly decorated interior, which seats over 1,300 people, features the same strong classical ornamentation as the exterior. The ceiling, with its original painted and decorated rough-hewn beams and wrought iron chandeliers, is very Spanish in influence. The front of the balcony is accented with a row of blank arches and corbels. The aisles down each side are embellished with composite capitals. The same design is featured in the large capital faces along each side wall. The original metal doors, featuring decorated squares, are located in the center of each side wall. Elaborate balconets, centered with arched openings and flanked by pairs of tall, narrow openings, occupy the diagonal walls on each side of the proscenium. Finials cap the corners, and a decorated pediment tops the central arch. Carved brackets underscore the decorative sill below the openings. A different saying is featured on each balconet: "Knowledge is in Every Country the Surest Basis of Public Happiness," and "This Country, With its Institutions, Belongs to the People Who Inhabit It." Pairs of doors, which match those on the sides, lead to the backstage area.

The entrance hall is the same length, east to west, as the auditorium, and features its original arched ceiling and crown molding. The balcony is reached through arched openings at each end of the hall. The staircases, recessed into the front wall, are bordered by wrought iron railings and columns. The trio of glass and metal front doors are not original and fill the original spaces. The wall between the hall and the auditorium was changed to a plain wall when the auditorium seating plan was changed in 1972.

The auditorium features a Grand Wurlitzer theater organ, only one of two in the United States. The concert instrument is unique in its ability to bring the resources of an entire orchestra (strings, woodwinds, brass) to a single player. Throughout the interior are wrought iron grilles, hanging chandeliers, sconces, and other features made by metal shop students from Fullerton Union High School and Fullerton College in 1929-30.

### **Auditorium Alterations**

Changes made to the exterior and interior of the auditorium were designed to primarily improve safety and access while adding new, modern equipment. In 1972, while the auditorium was undergoing a seismic retrofit, the auditorium seats were replaced, and the seating plan was changed from a center aisle arrangement to a side aisle configuration. The wide entrance at the back was walled over and the side entrances became the access for the auditorium. The walls, ceiling, balcony, and decorative elements were not altered, allowing the auditorium to retain integrity of design. In 1993-94, there was increased demand from theatrical organizations to upgrade the auditorium's technology and provide a better and more efficient backstage experience for performers. Stage systems—including lighting, curtains, and sound—were



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upgraded, air-conditioning was installed, and a hydraulic orchestra lift was added. A 2,000-square-foot addition was added at the rear, housing new dressing rooms and storage areas, along with handicapped access restrooms. The famous Wurlitzer organ remained the same in appearance, with the inner workings converted to a more modern system.<sup>3</sup> The renovation was funded by the Fullerton Redevelopment Agency with the exception of the renovation of the theater organ, which was funded by the Fullerton Joint High School District Educational Foundation. During the renovation, the walls, ceiling, balcony, and decorative elements were not altered, allowing the auditorium to retain integrity of design.

The auditorium is undergoing upgrades to bring the building up to current seismic standards and to implement other safety equipment. Additional footings will be added to strengthen the auditorium during earthquakes, electrical conduits will be added to allow for installation of required smoke and fire-related warning systems, and a small addition on the east side will provide access for the disabled. Funded by local bond money, the project is expected to be completed in 2022-23.

### ***Pastoral California Mural***

Painted during the summer months of 1934 by artist and teacher Charles M. Kassler II and his assistant, Julian E. Williams, *Pastoral California* was formally dedicated on November 22, 1934. The 15- by 80-foot, 4-inch mural (1,204.5 sq. ft. in area) is sheltered by an extensive covered arched walkway that runs the length of the west side of the Fullerton Union High School Auditorium, leading to classrooms at the rear (north) of the property. The covered walkway provides protection from the elements. From a distance the mural is somewhat hidden by the projecting arcade. Kassler planned the colorful fresco so that between each of the square columns there was a complete vignette, so that anyone viewing the mural through a single archway would see a full picture panel or scene. Opposite the mural is a low 33-inch-high stuccoed wall capped with 9-inch by 9-inch terracotta tiles, in turn topped by six round arches. The square-shaped columns feature chamfered corners, folded leaf capitals, and shield details. Wrought iron railings are positioned between each archway. The floor of the arcade is paved with 6-inch by 6-inch terracotta tiles. Positioned in the center of the expansive mural is a set of double wooden doors leading to the auditorium.

Access to the mural is through three sets of matching and elaborately detailed Mayan Revival wrought iron double gates that measure 7 feet by 9 feet. Each gate features nine matching square-shaped figures that represent a day on the Mayan calendar. Two of the original gate pairs are positioned on the north and south ends of the covered arcade; a third set, added during the 1997 restoration, is located on the west side facing the mural. A six-step concrete staircase on the north side of the arcade provides access to the north gates. The original contributing gates, which highlight and frame the mural at each end, were hand-crafted by Fullerton Union High School students enrolled in a metal shop class taught by instructor Charles Hart in 1934. In 1997, the set of west-facing metal gates were produced to match the original ones and to provide additional protection from vandals. The gates are secured by padlock loops. The heavy doors can be kept

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<sup>3</sup> Alan Eyerly, "A Pipe Dream Comes True in Fullerton," *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 1994.

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open by using a T-shaped metal hook, attached to the gate by a chain, that slides into a latch mounted to the wall.

Charles Kassler and his assistant, Julian E. Williams, created the mural using watercolors over plaster, known as the fresco technique. Williams was responsible for preparing the plaster and keeping it wet. Kassler painted the fresco directly on wet lime plaster, and when the plaster dried, the fresco mural became part of the long wall. Before painting the mural, Kassler drew the work on brown wrapping paper. He then separated the paper into 36-inch squares and transferred them to the wall a square at a time, using them to trace the montages on the wall.<sup>4</sup>

The vibrant fresco depicts California's mission and rancho periods from 1776 to 1846 in a series of vignettes or montages that feature animals, games, and historical Spanish and Mexican figures from early California and Orange County. The mural is an idealized and romanticized snapshot of life on a rancho in the early 1800s, before the Gold Rush and California statehood, in what was to become Orange County. Featured are large pictures of horses, cattle, Franciscan padres, vaqueros, fiestas, and women grinding corn and washing clothes. The predominate colors are green, blue, and brown. The mural is regionalist and fits within the social realism preferred by New Deal painters, who tended to favor the positive depiction of Americans engaged in everyday situations and activities.

On the north end of the mural, Kassler depicted Pio Pico (1801-1894), the last Mexican Governor of California. He and his wealthy party, dressed in finery, listen to Laura Moya, a popular singer, while enjoying a fine banquet. At the time Kassler was creating the mural, he was having an affair with Luisa Ronstadt Espinel (1892-1962), a popular Mexican American singer, dancer, and actress (**Figure 3**), while still married to his first wife.<sup>5</sup> Espinel is thought to be the model for Laura Moya.<sup>6</sup> Above and behind the banquet scene sits Mission San Juan Capistrano, founded in 1776, by Junipero Serra as the seventh of twenty-one missions established in California by the Spanish.

Depicted in the center of the mural, above and around the ornate wooden double doors, is Jose Antonio Yorba (1743-1825). Yorba was a Spanish soldier, a corporal in Gaspar de Portola's expedition of 1769, and early settler of Spanish California. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, a number of Yorba family members graduated from FUHS, and in 1939-40, Bernardo Yorba, the great-great grandson of Jose Antonio Yorba, was class president. Shown lassoing a wild horse, Jose Antonio Yorba and his vaqueros participate in various games, including carrera del gallo, in which horse riders pluck a half-buried, live cock from the ground while dashing at full gallop,

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<sup>4</sup> Carroll Gewin, "Fullerton Has a Treasure Buried under X Coats of Paint at Plummer Auditorium," *Fullerton Observer Weekly*, December 1, 1995. Kassler left the brown paper drawings with the high school, since lost.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas E. Sheridan and Joseph Noriega, "From Luisa Espinel to Lalo Guerrero: Tucson's Mexican Musicians before World War II," *The Journal of Arizona History* 25, no. 3 (1984): 285-300. Accessed August 23, 2020 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41859599>.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Giasone, "A Mural's Mystery Woman," *Fullerton News Tribune*, August 21, 1997; Mimi Ko Cruz, "The Renaissance of a Fullerton Mural; History: 'Pastoral California' is Unveiled 60 Years after School Officials Covered Over Charles Kassler Jr.'s Fresco," *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1997.

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and a lariat game, where horsemen jump into an eight-foot rope circle without being unhorsed. As the vaqueros watch the games, a bull and bear engage in a fight.

On the south end of the mural, women engage in various activities, including grinding corn, gossiping, and washing and wringing clothes in a brick-lined pool. Children eat tortillas passed out by Franciscan padres. The bottom of the mural is bordered with a row of ziggurats painted red, brown, and white.

### **Mural Alterations**

On August 29, 1939, the Board of Trustees of the Fullerton Union High School and Junior College District voted to paint over the mural in response to complaints from the community. Prior to being painted over with beige paint in November 1939, the mural was protected with an oil coat to allow for future restoration. In 1996, the school district approved restoration of the mural with funding provided by the Fullerton Redevelopment Agency, the California Heritage Commission, and community donors.

A test of several sections of the wall by art restoration experts Suzanne Friend and Duane Chartier of ConserArt Associates revealed bright colors under the auditorium's beige exterior. Under the layers of paint, removed by repeated applications of paint stripper, Friend and Chartier confirmed that vivid pigments had bonded to the plastered and frescoed wall. Restoration of the mural was deemed possible, and work began in 1997. There had been a number of interventions to the wall itself, mostly for seismic stabilization during an earthquake retrofit in 1972, which resulted in the loss of approximately 180 square feet. These were reconstructed using the original sketches (cartoons) of Charles Kassler II, obtained from the National Archives. The refrescoing of these areas was done by art restorationists of ConservArt. Much of the stripping and other restoration work was done by volunteers. The Mayan-styled wrought iron gates were found and restored, then reinstalled in 1997, with new matching gates added on the west side facing the mural. After the successful restoration, the mural was rededicated on September 6, 1997.

### **Integrity**

Both the exterior and interior of the auditorium retain the unique character planned by architect Carlton M. Winslow, Sr. in 1930. The only change made to the auditorium since its listing in 1993 was the exposure and restoration of the mural on the west side of the building. In remarkably good condition, the mural also retains its historic integrity.

The auditorium and mural retain their historic association with the high school and their relationship with the Fullerton community. The rediscovery of the mural, fifty-eight years after it was whitewashed, reintroduced the mural to the high school and the Fullerton community. The location of the auditorium, which still sits alone on a prominent corner, with its front façade in full view, has remained a visual landmark in the city. The auditorium is still situated in an older residential neighborhood adjacent to the historic downtown area. The setting has evolved somewhat throughout the high school's history, as early campus buildings have been replaced by new buildings over time. The overall setting of the auditorium has remained fairly constant, and the ornate building and accompanying mural continue to be positioned amid broad lawns,

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arcaded walkways, and Spanish Colonial Revival buildings. The auditorium still dominates the street view along Chapman Avenue, one of Fullerton's primary east-west automobile thoroughfares. In good condition, the auditorium still reflects the workmanship, design, and materials employed by architect Carleton M. Winslow. The excellent craftsmanship and technical skills of fresco mural painting employed by Charles Kassler and assistant Julian E. Williams are also apparent, and the mural shows the lines, brush work, composition, and colors that Kassler used to create his idealized depiction of early California and Orange County rancho life. The large figures and sheer size of the mural still evokes a feeling of surprise and remains impressive as does the auditorium's elaborate façade.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

PERFORMING ARTS

ARCHITECTURE

ART

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1930-1943

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1930

1934

1939

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Winslow, Carleton M., Sr.

Shirley, William J., Sr.

Kassler II, Charles M.

Williams, Julian E.

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Fullerton Union High School Auditorium was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993 at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Performing Arts and under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. With the inclusion of the *Pastoral California* mural, the property is additionally eligible under Criterion C in the area of Art, as a significant example of New Deal artwork. The New Deal programs funded art for nearly a decade, helping to create a distinct America art form, and the mural exemplifies the legacy of the Federal Works of Art (FWAP) program created to provide art for municipal buildings. The period of significance begins in 1930 with construction of the auditorium, continuing through 1934, when the mural was completed and 1939, when the mural was whitewashed. Although the 1993 documentation closed the period of significance in 1943 as an arbitrary end date fifty years prior to nomination, no later event or action warrants amending the period of significance.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

### **Historical Background**

After attending the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego, influential Fullerton residents invited architect Carleton M. Monroe, Sr. (1876-1946), who had selected the Spanish Colonial Revival style for the exposition, to visit Fullerton. Winslow gave a series of lectures touting the Spanish Colonial Revival style, and in July 1919, the Fullerton Board of Trade (later the Fullerton Chamber of Commerce) and other important organizations in the city adopted the Spanish style as the preferred architectural style for public buildings. Winslow was immediately hired as the campus architect for Fullerton Union High School, a position he held until 1940. Over the next two decades, the classically styled buildings on the campus were replaced by Spanish Colonial Revival buildings. Winslow presented preliminary sketches for the proposed auditorium to the Board of Trustees for the school district in 1923, with new plans presented in 1927. The general building contractor was William John Shirley, Jr. (1891-1940) of Los Angeles. As with most of the school buildings, architect Harry K. Vaughn (1882-1962) served as the supervisor of the auditorium project. Fullerton College and Fullerton Union High School students enrolled in metalwork courses crafted light fixtures, grates, gates, and other wrought iron architectural features for the auditorium.<sup>7</sup> To make way for the new auditorium, the Language Building on the site was moved to another campus location. The auditorium was formally dedicated June 1, 1930.<sup>8</sup>

Four years later, in April 1934, Charles M. Kassler II was commissioned under the Federal Works of Art Project (FWAP) to paint a mural on the exterior west wall of the auditorium of

<sup>7</sup> "New High School Auditorium Fixtures Are Student Made," *Fullerton News Tribune*, June 2, 1930.

<sup>8</sup> Dedicatory Service Sponsored by Fullerton Ministerial Association [Program], Sunday, June 1, 1930, Fullerton, California. On file, Local History Room, Fullerton Public Library.

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Fullerton Union High School (**Figures 4, 5**).<sup>9</sup> The mural was expected to reflect the Spanish Colonial Revival architecture of the auditorium. Kassler had gained wide acclaim for *Bison Hunt*, a fresco he had just completed in March on the east wall of the Children's Court of the Los Angeles Central Library (**Figure 6**).<sup>10</sup> The expansive library fresco was the largest mural created by one person under the FWAP. *Bison Hunt* was later severely damaged by rain runoff and painted over in 1963. The Fullerton mural, although smaller in size, was decidedly more intricate, with seventy people, sixteen horses, and a menagerie of other animals. *Pastoral California* was the first major public art project in Fullerton and was followed by two additional New Deal murals in 1942: Paul Julian's *Orange Pickers* inside the Commonwealth Post Office and Helen Lundeburg's *History of Southern California* inside Fullerton City Hall, later the Fullerton Police Station.

### **Criterion A: Performing Arts (As Listed)**

When the auditorium was completed in 1930, high school and college students used the building for general assemblies, commencement ceremonies, lectures, debates, and all types of performances, including dramas, musicals, dance productions, recitals, choir and glee club presentations, fashion shows, holiday programs, talent shows, and band and orchestra rehearsals. Until 1935, Fullerton College students shared the same campus with Fullerton Union High School students, and even though the college moved across the street, there was not a separate college auditorium until 1966. On occasion, the high school and college students performed together. When no in-house talent was available for a particular college production, professionals were hired for performances, particularly those singers and actors, such as John Raitt or Gloria Carroll, who had graduated from the institution. Many students gained their first experiences in drama, dance, and music in the auditorium. Over the decades, many historic and cultural figures, including Werner von Braun, Basil Rathbone, Admiral Richard E. Byrd, Bob Hope, and Ronald Reagan spoke or performed in front of students.

While clubs and organizations from both the high school and college performed for social and civic groups, the auditorium was not opened to bookings by local groups and organizations until after World War II. Since 1945, the auditorium has served as a venue for musicals, plays, silent movies, recitals, public forums, lectures, variety shows, and multiple other events. Numerous performing arts organizations have booked the auditorium for theatrical events, including the Fullerton Civic Light Opera, Orange County Theatre Organ Society, Orange County Philharmonic Society, and Philharmonic Chorale of Orange County. It remains an important cultural center for residents of all ages in the North Orange County area. The combination of use by the public, the high school, and the college for significant events is unparalleled.

### **Criterion C: Architecture (As Listed)**

The auditorium remains a superb example of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture with Italian Renaissance design elements. The building's strong designed character and artistic value are exhibited in no other building in Fullerton. The dramatic front façade, symmetrical in design and embellished with Neoclassical motifs and the cast concrete emblems of various designs that

<sup>9</sup> "Junior College to Have Mural," *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1934.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Millier, "Library Fresco Begins New Approach to Wall Painting," *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 1934.



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adorn the classically shaped parapet are also unique to the city. Although master architect Carleton M. Winslow, Sr. designed educational buildings, such as the Placentia, Ojai, and Los Angeles Public Libraries, the Fullerton Union High School Auditorium is the only time he built a performing arts building. It was one of the last public buildings Winslow designed before turning almost exclusively to ecclesiastical architecture.

### **Criterion C: Art (Additional Documentation)**

Fullerton residents initially weathered the first years of the Great Depression. By mid-1931, unemployment rolls started to swell, and city officials began to apply for federal relief funds. The city eventually received more federal Depression-era funding than any other city in Orange County, successfully applying for every federal relief program available. In 1934, when FUHS officials made arrangements with the Federal Works of Art Project to paint a mural on the west wall of the auditorium, without cost to the high school, it marked the first public art project in the city. It was the only New Deal school mural installed in Orange County. It is also one of the few remaining fresco murals in the nation, and the largest extant FWAP mural created by one person. The New Deal funded art for nearly a decade, helping to create a distinct art form. A historic and significant local treasure, *Pastoral California* exemplifies the legacy of New Deal art programs.

### ***Muralist Charles Moffat Kassler II (1897-1979)***

Charles “Chuck” Moffat Kassler II was born September 9, 1897 in Denver, Colorado, the second of three sons of Charles Kassler I (1870-1934) and Grace M. Stone Kassler (1872-1952). The son of a prominent Denver pioneer, Kassler I had studied mechanical engineering at Cornell University for one year before moving into the banking industry.<sup>11</sup> He worked for the First National Bank of Denver, then started his own real estate and financial firm, the Kassler Investment Company, in 1901.<sup>12</sup> The Kassler Family resided in a well-to-do area of Denver at 1421 Clayton Street, with live-in servants. At the age of 14, Charles M. Kassler II, who was interested in wireless telegraphy and chemistry, caused a violent explosion in his garage while mixing chemicals in a gas pipe. Severely injured, he was rushed to Mercy Hospital where Dr. John McNamara amputated Kassler’s right hand at the wrist.<sup>13</sup> When a Los Angeles reporter asked him about the accident decades later, Kassler quipped “One hand is plenty for fresco.”<sup>14</sup>

After attending The Hill School in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, Kassler entered Princeton University, staying until 1921. His father wanted him to continue the family investment banking tradition. Uninterested in the subject, Kassler dropped out of the university. Attracted instead to

<sup>11</sup> *The Ten-Year Book of Cornell University, Volume IV, 1868-1908* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1908), 315. Accessed August 26, 2020

[https://www.google.com/books/edition/the\\_Ten\\_year\\_Book\\_of\\_Cornell\\_University/M-DAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=ten+year+book+of+cornell+university+volume+IV+1868-1908&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.com/books/edition/the_Ten_year_Book_of_Cornell_University/M-DAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=ten+year+book+of+cornell+university+volume+IV+1868-1908&printsec=frontcover).

<sup>12</sup> *The Sixth Decennial Catalogue of the Chi Psi Fraternity, 1902* (Auburn, New York: The Eighth Annual Convention, 1902), 450. Accessed August 28, 2020

[https://www.google.com/books/edition/The\\_Sixth\\_Decennial\\_Catalogue/1t4CAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&bsq=Kassler](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Sixth_Decennial_Catalogue/1t4CAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&bsq=Kassler).

<sup>13</sup> “Mixes Chemicals and They Explode,” *Bakersfield Morning Echo*, June 27, 1912.

<sup>14</sup> “Fresco Innovator Joins Rank of Local Artists,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 19, 1933.

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art, he studied at the Church School of Art and the Chicago Institute of Art for two years. From 1922 to 1924, he taught anatomical drawing at the Atelier Denver, a branch of the Ecole des Beaux Arts School of Design of New York. He was instrumental in founding, together with painter John Thompson and sculptor Robert Garrison, the Chappell School of Art in Denver, which became the Art Department of the University of Denver.<sup>15</sup> On September 10, 1920, Kassler married sculptor Marguerite Bennett (1894-1965).<sup>16</sup> The couple had one son, Charles Kassler III (1921-1979).

In 1924, Marguerite Kassler became ill with bronchitis, and Kassler's parents agreed to send the couple to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where Marguerite could recuperate. While in Santa Fe, the couple became members of the artistic and literary community led by Harold Witter Bynner. After Marguerite's recovery, Kassler's parents agreed to pay for a trip to Europe where the couple could study art. In 1925, Charles and Marguerite Kassler left for Paris, later making trips to Sicily, Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt.<sup>17</sup> While in France, Kassler apprenticed himself to a well-known fresco painter. During this itinerant period, Kassler studied a wide variety of art, exhibited his works (sometimes with his wife), and evolved as an artist. His first exhibitions were in Europe, and later his work was shown at the Brooklyn Museum, Chicago Institute of Art, Denver Art Museum, and de Young Museum in San Francisco. He worked in a variety of mediums, including watercolors, woodcuts, lithographs, and oil paintings.

Upon his return to Denver in 1930, Kassler painted five ceiling frescoes for the Saint Thomas Aquinas Seminary Chapel, later the John Paul II Chapel. Kassler moved to Los Angeles in January 1933, settled into a small house in the Elysian Heights neighborhood at 1617 Landa Street, and rented a studio. The modern art movement was just starting in Los Angeles, and Kassler quickly gained a reputation as a supporter of more cutting-edge works.<sup>18</sup>

In 1933, Kassler was commissioned by the Federal Works Art Project to paint a mural on the east wall of the Children's Court of the Los Angeles Central Library. The *Bison Hunt* fresco was inspired by the Altamira Cave paintings in Northern Spain. Shortly after completing the library mural, Kassler received the commission to paint *Pastoral California* on the west exterior wall of the FUHS Auditorium.

At the time, there was a minor revival of fresco, especially in California and Chicago where the influence of Mexican muralists such as Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros was greatest.

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<sup>15</sup> "Charles Kassler II," *Bulletin of the Section of Painting and Sculpture* Number 4 (July-August 1935): 9. Accessed August 26, 2020

[https://www.google.com/books/edition/Bulletin\\_Section\\_of\\_Painting\\_and\\_Sculptu/xvtLAQAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Charles+Kassler+bulletin+painting&pg=RA3-PA9&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Bulletin_Section_of_Painting_and_Sculptu/xvtLAQAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Charles+Kassler+bulletin+painting&pg=RA3-PA9&printsec=frontcover).

<sup>16</sup> 41 Holly Allen Carol, *Early Colorado Women Artists*, Thesis (University of Colorado, 2007), 134-35. Marguerite Bennett Kassler often continued to use her maiden name on her artwork.

<sup>17</sup> *Videotaped Interview with Charles Kassler II, March 10, 1975, San Diego, California*, interviewed by Lydia Modi-Vitale, Santa Clara University de Saisset Museum. Accessed August 26, 2020  
[https://archive.org/details/castcdsm\\_000003](https://archive.org/details/castcdsm_000003).

<sup>18</sup> "Art War Breaks Out: Los Angeles Museum Become Battle Ground as Modernists and Opponents Clash," *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1933.

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Kassler was different because he had studied fresco techniques in Europe and had been experimenting with plaster to improve the quality and permanency of wall paintings. His frescoes in Denver and Southern California brought him to the attention of the art world, and he was asked to teach fresco painting at the Chouinard School of Art in 1933-34.<sup>19</sup> His most famous pupil was notable scene painter Millard Sheets (1907-1987). When not painting New Deal murals, Kassler also received relief funds for his easel paintings, which were displayed at a number of exhibitions, including the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art; Brooklyn Museum; and Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C.

In April 1935, Kassler divorced his first wife and married singer and dancer Luisa Ronstadt Espinel. The couple moved to the Silver Lake area at 1465 Westerly Terrace.<sup>20</sup> Also in April, Kassler won a competition to paint two frescoes for the Grand Hall interior of the 1933 Beverly Hills Post Office. Funded by the U.S. Treasury's Section of Painting and Sculpture, the two lunettes—*Post Ride* and *Air Mail*—depict the history of the United States mail service. While he was working on the post office murals, he was commissioned by the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) to paint additional lunettes on the north and south sides of the post office interior. A moderate Democrat and strong supporter of the New Deal, Kassler chose to illustrate the Public Works Administration (PWA), intending the murals to be an inspirational example of the government helping people in need. The frescoes portray the construction of a building using funding from the PWA. The construction workers are shown picking up their paychecks and then using that money to purchase groceries at a nearby market. The murals were controversial and unusual for the time, because they acknowledged that poverty actually existed in Beverly Hills.<sup>21</sup> Kassler spent a full year painting the murals. The Beverly Hills Post Office, later part of the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986, including the interior murals.

The first Southern California artist to join the FWAP in 1933, Kassler joined the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) when the FWAP ended in June 1934. He stayed with the Federal Art Project until that federal-relief program ended in 1943. In early 1939, Kassler began to move away from art toward industrial design, referring to himself as a designer or engineer rather than an artist. He continued to paint privately, and eventually stopped displaying his artwork at galleries and art shows. He began to teach at the California Graduate School of Design in Pasadena, which provided training in industrial design at a professional level. When World War II started, he accepted a position with the Douglas Aircraft Company in Santa Monica in the production illustration department of the engineering division, eventually serving as head of the unit. His son, Charles Kassler III, joined him at Douglas Aircraft as a layout man in the model design group. He continued to teach industrial design and production illustration three nights a week at the Graduate School, which merged with the California

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<sup>19</sup> "Art Study in Summer, Chouinard School of Art" [Advertisement] *Los Angeles Times*, June 12, 1934.

<sup>20</sup> "Newlyweds Visit Arizona Hacienda," *Los Angeles Times*, April 30, 1935.

<sup>21</sup> Helen Amy Harrison, *Social Consciousness in New Deal Murals*, Thesis (Case Western Reserve University, 1975), 168-171.

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Institute of Technology in 1941. The teaching position ended when the need for the industrial design of consumer products declined during the war.<sup>22</sup>

After World War II, Kassler, along with thousands of other defense workers, was laid off by the Douglas Aircraft Company in 1946. Needing a job, he worked as a melon counter for an agriculture firm in Imperial Valley, counting and weighing fruit as it moved down a conveyor belt. He worked next as a government civil engineer, a position he obtained through the California Employment Department.<sup>23</sup> He then spent ten years with Convair Astronautics in San Diego as a designer, teacher of design, and design engineer before retiring in 1965.<sup>24</sup>

On January 7, 1967, Kassler married his third wife, Barbara Rorbach Tuthill (1915-2004),<sup>25</sup> and the couple moved to Ocean Beach at 4916 Del Mar Avenue in San Diego. A long-time yachtsman, Kassler continued his membership in the Southwestern Yacht Club and the San Diego Yacht Club. He died of a massive heart attack on April 3, 1979.

#### The Controversy and Restoration of the *Pastoral California* mural

Charles Kassler selected Julian E. Williams (1911-2003), who had previously worked with him on earlier mural projects in Denver and Los Angeles, as his assistant.<sup>26</sup> Kassler was paid \$38.25 per week; Williams received \$23.85. Kassler began painting the mural around July-August 1934, and work was temporarily halted when he was called back to Denver by his father's death.<sup>27</sup> By September, the project was well under way, with both men camping on the high school campus.<sup>28</sup> The project was very dependent upon the weather, which greatly affected the plaster, and on a good day Kassler and Williams worked sixteen hours in a row.

The mural caused quite a stir in Fullerton, and its progress was tracked by local newspapers as well as the Fullerton high school and college student newspapers. While the mural was being painted, teachers, students, and residents alike stopped by to visit with Kassler and Williams and to see how the twelve-week project was progressing. A number of local clubs and organizations, such as the arts and crafts section of the Fullerton Ebell Club, made formal visits.<sup>29</sup>

Over a thousand people attended the mural dedication on November 22, 1934, with Kassler speaking on "My Inspiration for Fullerton Union High School Fresco" as part of the program.<sup>30</sup> *Pastoral California* was critically well received. The Santa Ana Register called the mural "one

<sup>22</sup> "Charles Moffatt Kassler II," *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, July 16, 1979, 19-20.

<sup>23</sup> Videotaped Interview with Charles Kassler II, March 10, 1975, San Diego, California, Interviewed by Lydia Modi-Vitale, Santa Clara University de Saisset Museum. Accessed August 26, 2020 [https://archive.org/details/castcdsm\\_000003](https://archive.org/details/castcdsm_000003).

<sup>24</sup> "Charles Moffatt Kassler II," *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, July 16, 1979, 19-20.

<sup>25</sup> "Barbara Kassler" [Obituary], *San Diego Union Tribune*, February 4, 2004.

<sup>26</sup> "Work is Progressing on School Mural," *Fullerton News Tribune*, September 27, 1934.

<sup>27</sup> "Mural Work Halted," *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 1934.

<sup>28</sup> "Work is Progressing on School Mural," *Fullerton News Tribune*, September 27, 1934.

<sup>29</sup> "Section Members in First Session," *Santa Ana Daily Evening Register*, October 4, 1934.

<sup>30</sup> *Pastoral California* Dedication Program, November 22, 1934, 8 P.M. On file, Local History Room, Fullerton Public Library.

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of the most pronounced achievements completed by the Public Works of Arts Program in the United States.”<sup>31</sup> Los Angeles Times art critic Arthur Millier noted “the extra vitality and certainty that denotes full creative intelligence at work.”<sup>32</sup> Notable art critic Merle Armitage wrote “Kassler has adhered not only to the beautiful tradition of pastoral California, but at the same time has also borne in mind the splendid Spanish architecture, and, lastly, created a beautiful fresco of amazing vitality and freshness of viewpoint.”<sup>33</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* featured the mural in an article, with an accompanying photograph, in the November 24, 1934 issue of the newspaper (**Figure 7**).<sup>34</sup> In May 1937, the great Depression-era photographer Dorothea Lange, passing through Fullerton, took a well-known photo of the mural (**Figure 8**).

On August 29, 1939, the five conservative members of the high school and college Board of Trustees—Herbert M. Bergen, Claude Ridgway, Ruth Chapman, Harold E. Hale, and John W. Schiller (**Figure 9**)—voted to overpaint *Pastoral California* in response to complaints from the community. The announcement stunned the art world, with *Art Digest* noting in the October 15, 1939 article “Whitewash!!!” that “whitewash has reared its immaculately ugly head over the Federal Art Project.”<sup>35</sup>

The school board minutes provide no detail as to why the decision was made to paint over the mural. Since the restoration, critics have claimed that the school board members deemed the mural “too ethnic”<sup>36</sup> or endorsed the overpainting because “it celebrated Mexican culture at a time of great racism against Mexicans.”<sup>37</sup> Charles Kassler is also often incorrectly identified as a Mexican muralist. The Fullerton community had embraced the romanticism of early California,<sup>38</sup> and there was no question that the mural was expected to have an early California theme to match the architecture. Kassler’s drawings for the mural, completed in his Los Angeles studio, were also approved by the Board of Trustees.

The artistic style and flamboyant nature of the mural appears to be what most critics of the mural disliked. Jean Launer, who was a FUHS student when the mural was painted, noted that “the mural was hardly completed before public disputes arose over it.” Residents complained that the highly stylized figures were “impossibly grotesque;” others found the fresco vulgar, tasteless, and lurid.<sup>39</sup> In a 1972 interview, Trustee Howard E. Hale, who had seconded the motion by

<sup>31</sup> “1000 Present at Dedication of New Mural,” *Santa Ana Daily Evening Register*, November 23, 1934.

<sup>32</sup> Arthur Millier, “Mural Art as Civic Asset is Theme of Library Display,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 11, 1934.

<sup>33</sup> Louis E. Plummer, *Fullerton Union High School and Fullerton Junior College 1893-1943* (Fullerton: FJC Printing Press, 1949), 160.

<sup>34</sup> “New Deal Results Hailed; North Orange County Throngs Fullerton School for Dedication of Stadium and Mural,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 24, 1934.

<sup>35</sup> “Whitewash!!!” *Art Digest*, October 15, 1939: 13.

<sup>36</sup> Mimi Ko Cruz, “The Renaissance of a Fullerton Mural,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1997.

<sup>37</sup> Jesse La Tour, *The Story of a Mural*, April 12, 2012. Accessed August 23, 2020

<http://jesselatour.blogspot.com/2012/04/story-of-mural.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Ralph E. Brown, “Vision Comes to Fullerton: Would be City Beautiful as Well as Prosperous: Plans Notable Improvements to Carry Out Ideal; New Buildings to Conform to ‘Community Type,’” *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 1919.

<sup>39</sup> Jean Launer, “Art in the Community of Fullerton,” Class Paper, Art 1A, University of California, Los Angeles, January 11, 1940: 24-27. On file, Local History Room, Fullerton Public Library.

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Herbert M. Bergen to whitewash the mural, noted that the mural's campus location had made it a target of vandals, and then added: "I didn't think much of the paintings to begin with. The people did not look like people. They were all distorted."<sup>40</sup>

Another student in the 1938 class, Kendall D. Neisess, recalled that the buxomness of the women was thought to be in bad taste.<sup>41</sup> Two instructors at the time—H. Lynn Sheller and Donald Brunskill—also remembered the "robustness" of the women as a problem, and parents objected to having their impressionable children line up next to the mural before entering the auditorium.<sup>42</sup> For years, rumors swirled that one of the women was bare-breasted. When photographs of the original drawings were obtained from the National Archives in 1971, that notion was proved false. Charles Kassler II's philosophy, "We do not want realism in art, we want the idea of the thing," was also not shared by many. Critics quibbled over details in the mural, stating, for instance, that all the horses should have bridles if they had saddles; others noticed that one of the vaqueros was holding a bridle that did not connect to the bit in the horse's mouth (**Figure 10**).<sup>43</sup> The *Fullerton News Tribune* summed up the decision to overpaint the mural by reporting: "Most occupants of the high school campus will shed no tears over the decision of the board, it was indicated today, as the lurid colors and somewhat grotesque figures have apparently failed to capture popular fancy."<sup>44</sup>

*Pastoral California* was saved from total destruction by Anna "Golde" Rayne (1903-1982),<sup>45</sup> who asked Superintendent Louis E. Plummer to seal the mural with an oil coat to protect it, allowing for the possibility of someday uncovering it still intact.<sup>46</sup> The protective sealing was brushed over the mural before it was coated with high quality beige paint in November 1939. At an unknown date, the Mayan Revival gates that framed the mural were removed.

Years after the mural was painted over, rumors circulated on the high school campus and around the city that the west wall of the FUHS Auditorium had once been graced with a colorful mural. Former students and teachers testified to its existence, and photographs of the fresco could be found in old high school yearbooks (**Figure 11**). The first attempt to restore the mural took place in 1971, when Councilman Duane Winters, Molly McClanahan, and Golde Rayne, then a member of the Fullerton Cultural and Fine Arts Commission, asked the Fullerton City Council for aid in restoration of the mural. Mrs. Rayne served as chairman of the Committee for Mural Restoration. At the time, the project failed to garner the support it needed.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Ray Rhoads, "Fullerton Footnotes," *Fullerton Daily News Tribune*, January 28, 1972.

<sup>41</sup> Mimi Ko Cruz, "Fresco Hidden Since 1939 May Be Restored," *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 1996.

<sup>42</sup> An Interview with Dr. H. Lynn Sheller, Conducted by Anne Riley, 1971, rev. ed. (Fullerton: Fullerton College, Oral History Program, 1971): 16-17; An Interview with Don Brunskill (Fullerton: Oral History Program, Fullerton College, 1986): 9. On file, Fullerton College Library, Special Collections.

<sup>43</sup> Diane Oestreich, *The History of Fullerton Union High School 1893-2011* (St Louis: Reedy Press, 2011), 24-25.

<sup>44</sup> "High School Mural Doomed: Paint It Out Trustees Order," *Fullerton News Tribune*, August 30, 1939.

<sup>45</sup> "Anna Golde Rayne [Obituary]," *Fullerton News Tribune*, July 19, 1982.

<sup>46</sup> "City Unit Seeks Council's Aid in Mural Restoration," *Fullerton News Tribune*, November 8, 1971.

<sup>47</sup> "Restoration of Mural Target of Committee," *Fullerton News Tribune*, March 18, 1971.

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In 1996, Cheri Hansen, a guidance counselor, persuaded the Interact Club of FUHS (sponsored by the Fullerton Rotary Club) to fund a test by art restoration experts Suzanne Friend and Duane Chartier of ConservArt Associates from Culver City to determine if they could find the mural under thirteen layers of paint. Paint layers were scraped off of several small sections of the wall, and each one revealed bright colors under the beige paint. Chartier confirmed that the painting was definitely a fresco, and that despite several layers of paint, the mural was restorable and the paint removable without damage to the fresco itself. There had also been a number of interventions to the wall itself, mostly for seismic stabilization, which resulted in the loss of approximately 180 square feet, which would need to be reconstructed.

The school district approved the restoration of the mural, provided that funds could be raised for the project. Duane Chartier had determined that if a team of professional painters were hired to remove the paint and restore the mural, it would take 5,957 man-hours, and the restoration would last about three years, costing around \$600,000. Chartier proposed a second plan designed around the idea of including the high school student body, college students, and community volunteers working with the professionals in the restoration process. Following this alternate plan, the restoration could be completed in two or three months at a cost of \$33,456. This would include teaching preparation, lectures to restoration volunteers, site supervision, documentation, and insurance.<sup>48</sup>

The Fullerton Redevelopment Agency provided \$15,000; the California Heritage Foundation, \$25,000; and community donors, \$12,000. A fundraising pamphlet was distributed around the community, with potential donors encouraged to purchase one square foot of the mural for \$25 or several blocks to pay for the restoration of a full figure.<sup>49</sup> The final cost for the restoration was about \$50,000. In the summer of 1997, three art teachers—Chris Weber, Mike Thomas, and Ann Gaw—taught art classes while ConservArt staff went over the principles and techniques of conservation. The classroom instruction, combined with the actual hands-on work on the mural, was designed to instill in the students an awareness and history of their community as well as an overall appreciation of historic art and architecture. Hundreds of volunteers came early and stayed late on Thursdays and Saturdays, working under the guidance of Duane Chartier, Suzanne Friend, and other experts of ConservArt Associates, spending many painstaking hours removing the paint layers that hid the fresco's bright colors. The eight-week restoration was a delicate process involving both heavy effort to remove paint layers as well as an extremely light touch accomplished by soft toothbrushes. In-painting was used to brighten areas where the color had faded. The portions of the mural that had been obliterated by the earthquake retrofit during the 1967-72 renovation of FUHS Auditorium were re-frescoed (**Figures 12, 13**).<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Jennifer Talleff, "Fate of Mural Restoration Unknown after Inconclusive Meeting," *Fullerton News Tribune*, February 2, 1995.

<sup>49</sup> Plummer Auditorium: Jewel of the Community; Beneath Its Surface Lies a Hidden Treasure [Fundraising Brochure], 1996. Copy on file, Local History Room, Fullerton Public Library.

<sup>50</sup> Amy M. Jones, Charles Kassler's Pastoral California [Brochure], August 1997. Copy on file, Local History Room, Fullerton Public Library.



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The rusty mural gates, which had been removed after the overpainting, were discovered by historic preservationist David Zenger at La Vista High School in Fullerton. Mike Prunean and David Payne of the FUHS maintenance department spent 400 hours restoring the 300-pound gates (**Figure 14**).<sup>51</sup> A third pair of gates, reproduced to match the original ones, was added to the west side.

A ceremony to re-dedicate the refurbished mural took place on September 6, 1997. Members of the Kassler Family were on hand, along with an exhibit of some of the late artist's works. Montana descendants of Charles Hart, who taught the foundry class that helped produce the decorative iron gates that framed the painting, also attended. From the very beginning of the restoration, there was strong support from city government, the school district, and hundreds of members of the community. Momentum to see the project through was provided by business and civic leaders, school administrators, teachers, students, alumni, historians, preservationists, and local artists. Students who were enrolled when the mural was whitewashed in 1939 also came forward to assist with the restoration. The restoration efforts exemplified the interest and historic value of the mural to the city. The auditorium and *Pastoral California* mural are City of Fullerton Local Landmarks.

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<sup>51</sup> "Kassler Mural Now Restored, Re-dedicated," *Fullerton Union High School Tribe*, October 1997. Copy on file, Local History Room, Fullerton Public Library.



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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  
 previously listed in the National Register  
 previously determined eligible by the National Register  
 designated a National Historic Landmark  
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other

Name of repository: National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland; Archives of American Art New Deal and the Arts Project, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Fullerton College Archives; Fullerton Public Library, Local History Room

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** less than one acre

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 33.874466 Longitude: -117.92043

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundaries of the property begin at the corner of Chapman Avenue and Lemon Street as follows: From the corner go west 123 feet; turn north and go 190 feet; turn east and go 123 feet; turn south and go 190 feet to the point of origin. Lemon Street, in close proximity to the building, forms the east boundary of the property, minus the public sidewalk. Chapman Avenue, approximately twenty feet from the front of the building, not including sidewalk, is the south boundary. The north boundary coincides with the back wall of the historic building. The west boundary goes to the sidewalk on the west side. A lawn area, approximately 85 feet by 225 feet, extends to the west of the sidewalk.

### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary is the footprint plus adjacent lawn of a single building in the southeast corner of a high school campus with several other buildings.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Debora Richey  
organization: Fullerton Heritage  
street & number: 1233 Luanne Avenue  
city or town: Fullerton state: CA zip code: 92831  
e-mail: [drichey@fullerton.edu](mailto:drichey@fullerton.edu)  
telephone: (714) 525-6411  
date: August 2021; Revised September 2021, November 2021

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### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Fullerton Union High School Auditorium  
City or Vicinity: Fullerton  
County: Orange  
State: California  
Photographer: Bob Linnell  
Date Photographed: January 2020, October 2020, August 2021

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 30 South (front) elevation, camera facing north
- 2 of 30 South elevation of tower, camera facing north
- 3 of 30 East elevation, camera facing northwest
- 4 of 30 Partial west elevation, camera facing northeast
- 5 of 30 Partial north elevation, camera facing southwest
- 6 of 30 Close-up of front portico, camera facing north
- 7 of 30 Close-up of decorative element on south (front) façade, camera facing north
- 8 of 30 Close-up of top of front gable, camera facing north
- 9 of 30 Hanging wrought iron lamp under interior of portico, camera facing east
- 10 of 30 Auditorium seating, camera facing south
- 11 of 30 Interior, camera facing northwest
- 12 of 30 Wrought iron chandelier, camera facing north

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- 13 of 30 Decorated trussed beam, camera facing south
- 14 of 30 Composite capital on column, camera facing west
- 15 of 30 Capital face on wall, camera facing east
- 16 of 30 West balconet, camera facing northwest
- 17 of 30 East balconet, camera facing northeast
- 18 of 30 Southern portion of mural behind archway, camera facing northeast
- 19 of 30 Northern portion of mural behind archway, camera facing southeast
- 20 of 30 Vignette of the mural as viewed through archway 1, most northerly, camera facing east
- 21 of 30 Vignette of the mural as viewed through archway 2, camera facing east
- 22 of 30 Vignette of the mural as viewed through archway 3, behind replica wrought iron gates (1997), camera facing east
- 23 of 30 Vignette of the mural as viewed through archway 4, camera facing east
- 24 of 30 Vignette of the mural as viewed through archway 5, camera facing east
- 25 of 30 Vignette of the mural as viewed through archway 6, camera facing east
- 26 of 30 Vignette of the mural as viewed through archway 7, most southerly, camera facing east
- 27 of 30 Mural as viewed at south end of covered walkway, camera facing north
- 28 of 30 Original wrought iron gates, restored and reinstalled at southern end of mural and covered walkway, camera facing north
- 29 of 30 Mural as viewed at northern gates, camera facing south
- 30 of 30 Original wrought iron gates restored and reinstalled at northern end of mural, camera facing south

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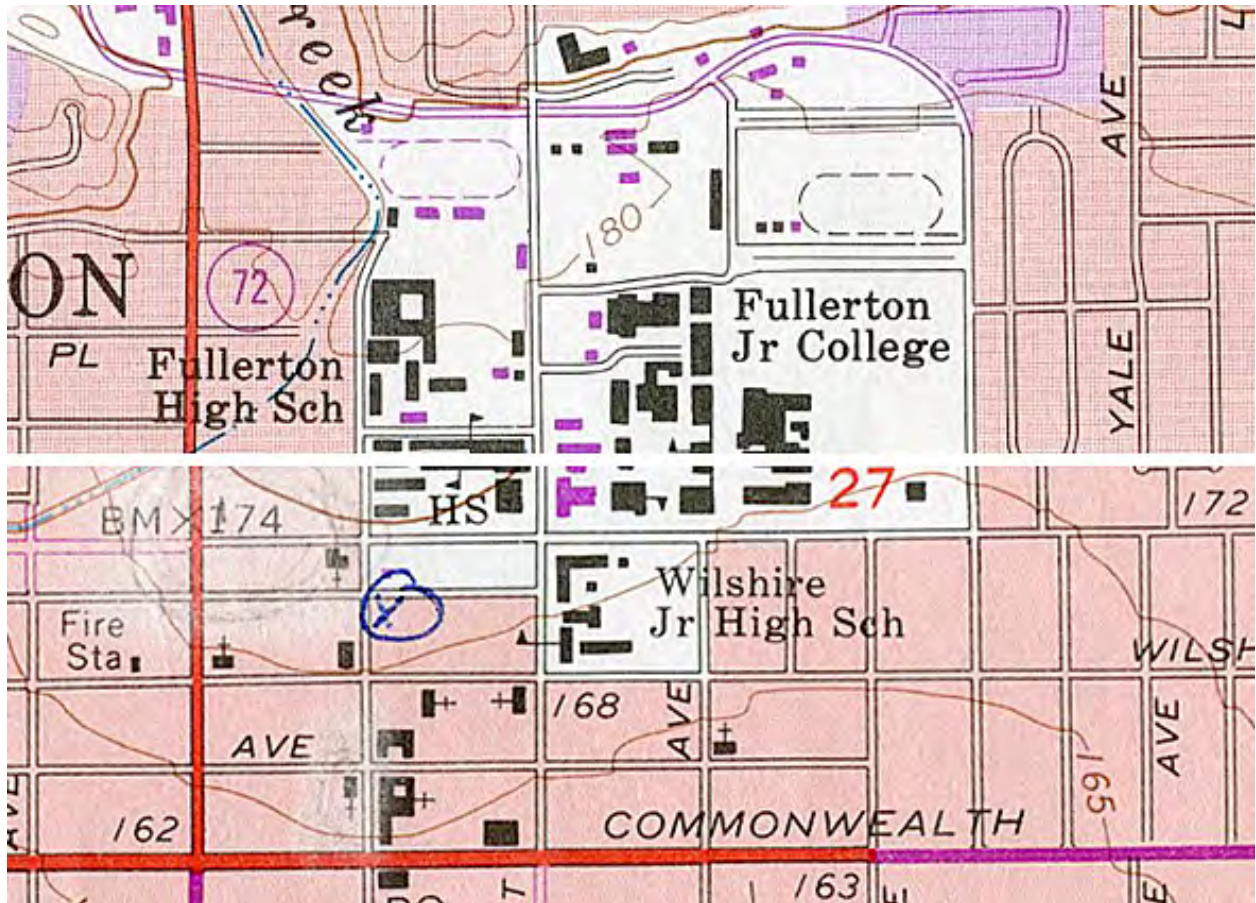
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### Location Map

USGS La Habra/Anaheim Quadrangle Map, revised 1981

Latitude: 33.874466

Longitude: -117.92043

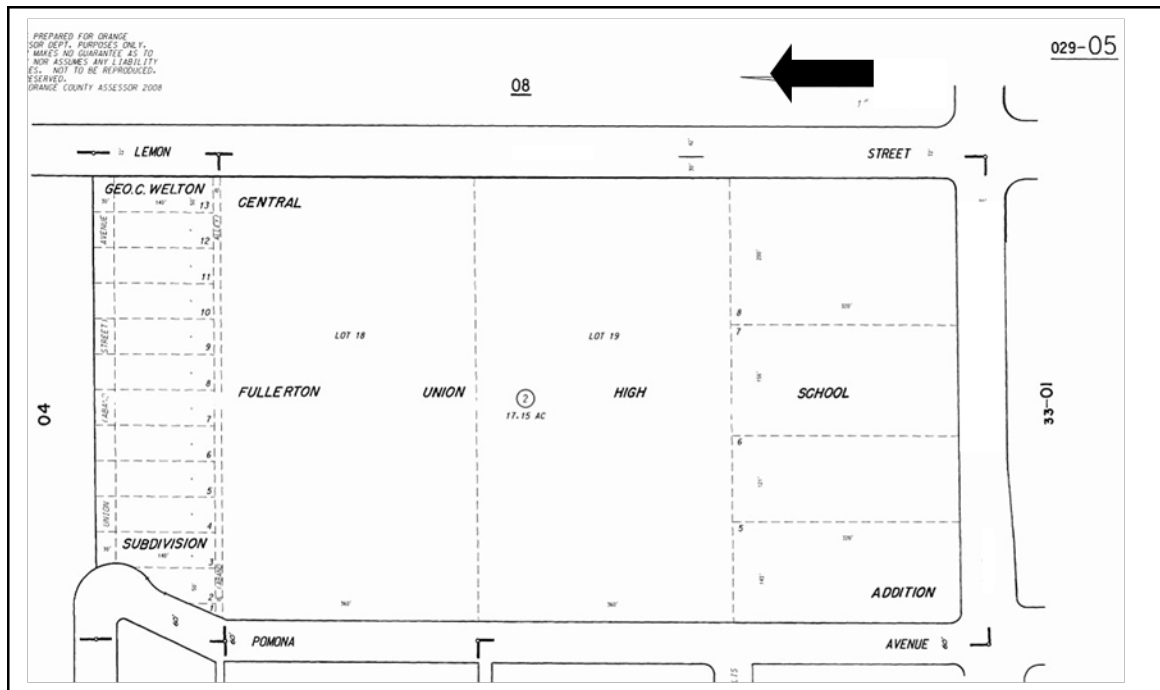


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### Assessor Parcel Map



**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

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### Boundary Map



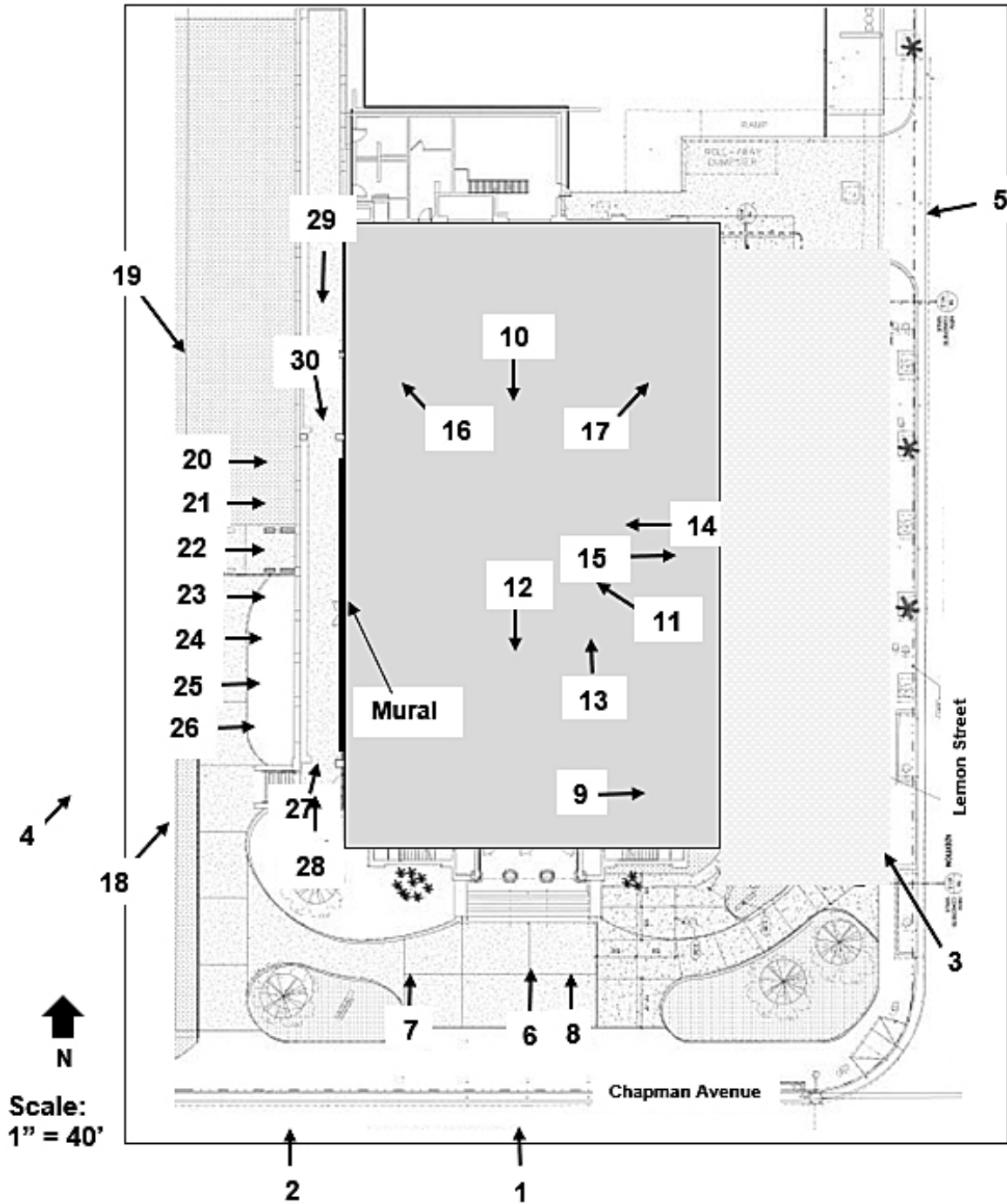
Source: Google Maps, 2020; annotated by Bob Linnell



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### Sketch Map/Photo Key



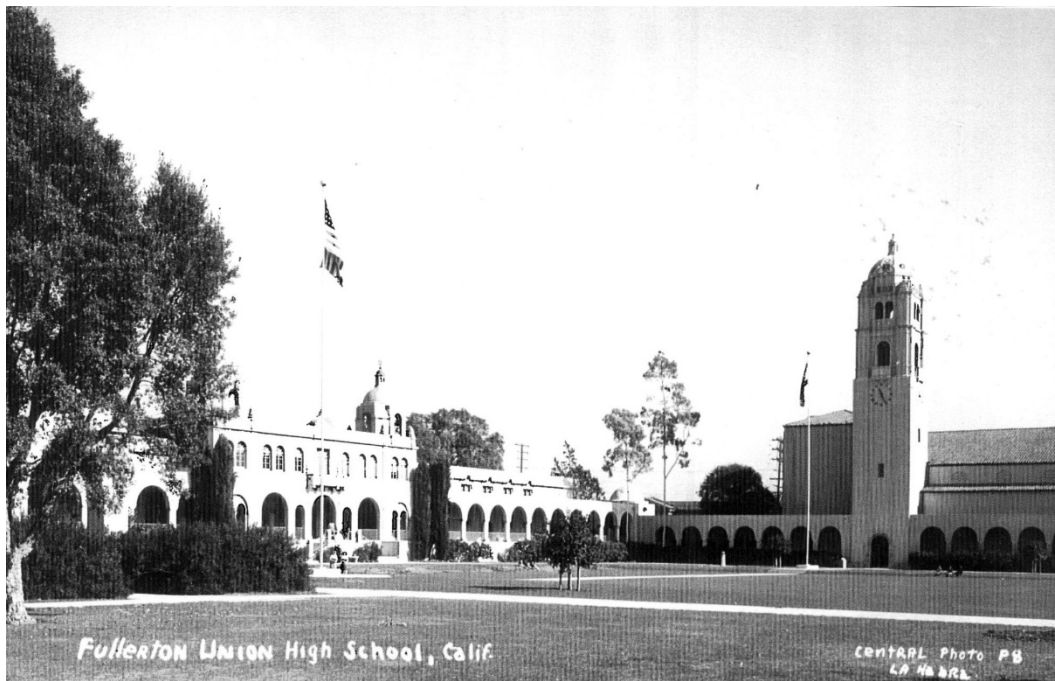
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**Figure 1** Auditorium west elevation, shortly after completion, 1930; Source: Fullerton Public Library, Local History Room



**Figure 2** Fullerton Union High School, early 1930s; Source: Fullerton Public Library, Local History Room



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**Figure 3** Luisa Ronstadt Espinel, circa 1924; Source: Ronstadt Family Archive, University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections



**Figure 4** Charles M. Kassler II, early 1930s; Source: Diane Oestreich, *The History of Fullerton Union High School 1893-2011* (St. Louis: Reedy Press, 2011), 109



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**Figure 5** Modernist painter Andrew Dasburg and Charles Kassler II outdoors, circa 1935;  
Source: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



**Figure 6** *Bison Hunt* mural, Los Angeles Central Library, 1934; Source: UCLA Library, Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library



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**Figure 7** Student Marie Hardy alongside a portion of *Pastoral California*, 1934; Source: “New Deal Results Hailed; North Orange County Throgs Fullerton School for Dedication of Stadium and Mural,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 24, 1934



**Figure 8** *Pastoral California*, May 1937; photograph by Dorothea Lange; Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division; Reproduction on file, Local History Room, Fullerton Public Library





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**Figure 9** Board of Trustees, Fullerton Union High School and Junior College District, 1939-1940, Herbert M. Bergen and Harold E. Hale represented Fullerton; the other Trustees represented La Habra, Buena Park and Yorba Linda; Source: *Pleiades* Yearbook, 1940; Copy on file, Local History Room, Fullerton Public Library



**Figure 10** Bridle not connected to bit, *Pastoral California*, 2019; Source: Fullerton Public Library, Local History Room



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**Figure 11** *Pastoral California* photographs from *Pleiades* high school yearbook, 1935; Source: Fullerton Public Library, Local History Room



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Figure 12 "Hidden History," *Orange County Register*, March 14, 1997

### UNCOVERING FULLERTON'S PAST

An 80-foot-long by 15-foot-tall fresco mural – hidden for more than a half-century under five layers of paint on Plummer Auditorium – once depicted horse lassoing, hen snatching and tortilla throwing. Fullerton Union High School students and community volunteers will work with restoration artists this summer to uncover the historic mural.

#### STEP 1: RESTORATION, PRESERVATION

The mural was painted in 1934. Chunks of wall were removed when steel rebar was installed in 1972.

West wall of Plummer Auditorium.

Steel rebar

Concrete

How a portion of "Pastoral California" will look after restoration.

- 1 STRIP top layers of paint.
- 2 UNCOVER mural using wet rags.
- 3 REPLACE rough plaster installed for seismic retrofitting, prepare new mural surface.

#### STEP 2: REPAIR, RE-CREATION

Fresco murals require fresh plaster to set the colors in the surface, so the artist only applies as much plaster as he can paint before it sets. Each section is called a giornata – Italian for "a day's work."

Source: Duane Chartier and Susanne Friend, ConservArt Associates

- 1 APPLY coarse plaster layer, level wall surface.
- 2 DRAW full-size sketch of illustration on tracing paper. POUND dotted outline of illustration into plaster layer using sketch as guide, dust with chalk.
- 3 APPLY fine plaster layer to work area.
- 4 PAINT pigments onto wet plaster. Colors lock into wall as plaster reacts with air. Mural dries within hour, forms crust.

Muralist Charles Kassler (pictured in 1934).

Graphics reporting: BRADY MacDONALD

MONICA EDWARDS/The Orange County Register



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**Figure 13** Volunteer restoring mural, 1997; Source: Bowen, Warren “A Fresh Look at a 60-Year-old Fresco,” *Fullerton Observer Weekly*, June 1, 1997



CAPTION: This community volunteer is working on restoration of a portion of the original Kassler mural on the west exterior wall of Plummer Auditorium.

**Figure 14** Mike Prunean and David Payne with restored gates, 1997; Source: “Mural’s Magic Moment,” *Fullerton News Tribune*, September 11, 1997



CAPTION: Mike Prunean, left, and David Payne peer through the decorative wrought-iron gates restored to frame the restored Charles Kassler mural, “Pastoral California,” at Plummer Auditorium. The men, who work for the Fullerton Joint Union High School District maintenance department, spent 400 hours bringing the 300-pound sections up to shape. The district honored the men at its September meeting.

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**Photo 1** South (front) elevation, camera facing north



**Photo 2** South elevation of tower, camera facing north





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**Photo 3** East elevation, camera facing northwest



**Photo 4** Partial west elevation, camera facing northeast



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**Photo 5** Partial north elevation, camera facing southwest



**Photo 6** Close-up of front portico, camera facing north





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**Photo 7** Close-up of decorative element on south (front) façade, camera facing north



**Photo 8** Close-up of top of front gable, camera facing north



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**Photo 9** Hanging wrought iron lamp under interior of portico, camera facing east



**Photo 10** Auditorium seating, camera facing south





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**Photo 11** Interior, camera facing northwest



**Photo 12** Wrought iron chandelier, camera facing north





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**Photo 13** Decorated trussed beam, camera facing south



**Photo 14** Composite capital on column, camera facing west





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**Photo 15** Capital face on wall, camera facing east



**Photo 16** West balconet, camera facing northwest



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**Photo 17** East balconet, camera facing northeast



**Photo 18** Southern portion of mural behind archway, camera facing northeast





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**Photo 19** Northern portion of mural behind archway, camera facing southeast



**Photo 20** Vignette of the mural as viewed through archway 1, most northerly, camera facing east



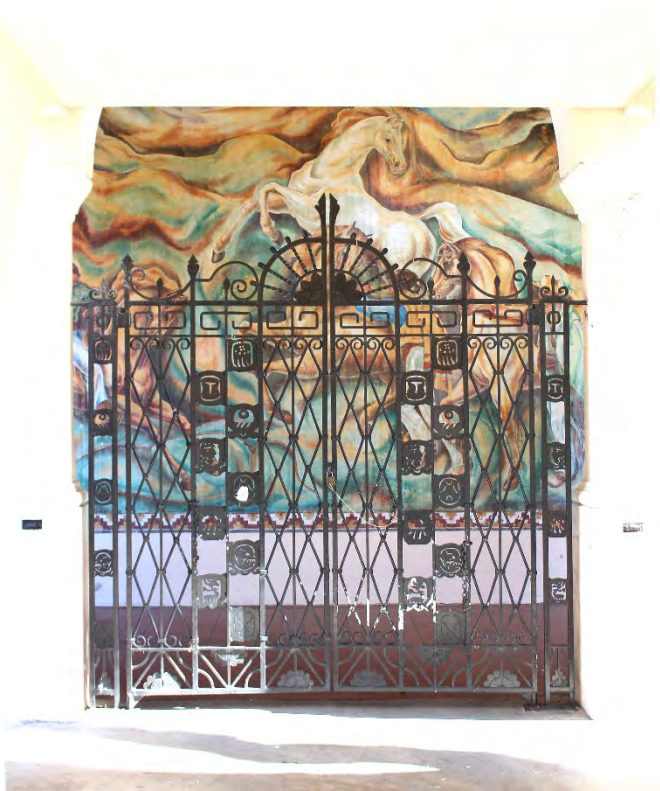
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**Photo 21** Vignette of the mural as viewed through archway 2, camera facing east



**Photo 22** Vignette of the mural as viewed through archway 3, behind replica wrought iron gates (1997), camera facing east





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**Photo 23** Vignette of the mural as viewed through archway 4, camera facing east



**Photo 24** Vignette of the mural as viewed through archway 5, camera facing east



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**Photo 25** Vignette of the mural as viewed through archway 6, camera facing east



**Photo 26** Vignette of the mural as viewed through archway 7, most southerly, camera facing east



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**Photo 27** Mural as viewed at south end of covered walkway, camera facing north



**Photo 28** Original wrought iron gates, restored and reinstalled at southern end of mural and covered walkway, camera facing north





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**Photo 29** Mural as viewed at northern gates, camera facing south



**Photo 30** Original wrought iron gates restored and reinstalled at northern end of mural, camera facing south

