

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 56 Huntington Boulevard Historical District, Fresno County, CA

49. Cella House
3504 E. Huntington Blvd.
APN 461-182-01
1939 (Contributing)

This stately two storied 1939 Italian Renaissance home was designed by famed San Francisco architect, Louis Franceschi, to meet requests of Maria and J. B. Cella. Franceschi, who was a relative of the Cella's, also designed the Marina Building in San Francisco as well as many of its finest bayview mansions. It is asymmetrical; its roof is multi-gabled tile and its footprint leads through a breezeway to the tiled garage. The stuccoed walls have details of quoins, dental cornice and arches above the lower elaborately embellished two story, shuttered, double hung windows. The brick stepped chimney has a belt course at the top. The corner arched entrance has an iron grided balcony and decorative hand carved stucco medallions above. The entrance terrace has Doric columns on both sides. This home has, during its lifetime, been open to many celebrations during the ownership's of the Cellas and now the Ravens. The downstairs of the 6,600 sq. ft. home has all parquet oak floors, multi-paneled Philippine mahogany doors and wide ceiling moldings. The dining room, which seats 40 dinner guests, has wall covered with gold leaf, and the mantle of the marble fireplace in the living room is hand carved plaster. The original floral pattern Aubusson rug is still in the living room. The wide, curving mahogany front staircase leads to a second floor ceiling rotunda and curved landing. The lower level/basement entertainment room has stained knotty pine paneling with hand hewn ceiling rafters, entrance arches, a fireplace, a mahogany bar with professional stainless steel fittings and a wine cellar with a one hundred case storage area.

Our Italian Renaissance home depicts the heritage of its influential Italian family - the Cellas, who came from Piacenza, Italy to America in 1898. J. B. Cella was one of the most important persons, a person well ahead of his time, in the U. S. wine industry. He was former owner of the Roma Wine Co. of Fresno, director and vice president of Schenly Distillers Corp. and also owned Rusconi Wines of Sanger, Arvin Napa Wine Co. near St. Helena, Napa County, and Wahtoke Winery in Reedley. His pet project was the development of grape juice, which was produced in 1952, and selling it in cans in 1954. He was a director of the Petri Cigar Co. of San Francisco. Mr. Cella has been a member of the O. P. A. Wine Industry Advisory Committee, and was the first vice president of the California Wine Institute.

He married Maria Franceschi (whose sister, Bertha Carosso, lived at 3528) and raised three daughters: Ebe Turner (whose husband, Burton, worked with J. B.) who lived at 3406, Alma (Bailey-Yoder) who was considered an opera angel, and Florie Petri (whose husband owned Petri Winery). His sister, Marie Marchesini, lived at 3448. His brother, Lorenzo, came from Italy with him and they were partners in the winery.

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In October, 1972, Penny and Larry Raven and their one year old son, Laurence Tagge Allen Raven moved there. The youngster was the same size as the carved cherub statue on the Italian fountain in the back garden. A second son, Corbyn (in Latin this means "raven") Lance Raven was born in 1973.

The Ravens are well-known both for their business and community activities. They are owners of The Raven Company, a real estate business, and also are subdivision developers and builders in Selma. During the late 1960's they created California's first chain (9) of franchised convenience markets, R Pantry Markets, and 3 Holy Cow Meat Markets. They also had the first self-service gasoline pumps in the San Joaquin Valley. In 1979 they founded The Raven Alcohol Distillery in Selma, which was California's first commercial fuel alcohol distillery. Interestingly enough, during World War II, J. B. Cella had similarly converted some of his brandy stills for the manufacture of alcohol for government use.

Penny is very active in civic organizations and is past president of Fresno Cancer League, Jackson Elementary School PTA and a board member of Women's Symphony League and the Fresno Citizen Participation Commission and achieved the G. S. A. Distinguished Service Award in 1972. She ran unsuccessfully for Lt. Governor for the State of California on the Democratic ticket in 1978. In 1986 she was named Honorary Mayor for the City of Fresno. She appeared with Carol Burnett in the television mini-series "Fresno" and in the box-office hit movie "Pretty Woman" in 1989.

In 1976, to celebrate the nation's bicentennial, the Ravens were instrumental in the planting of 50,000 red, white and blue petunias to line Huntington Boulevard for the nation's largest, private bicentennial exhibit. They began the Huntington Boulevard Homeowners Historical Association and Penny has been elected President for a decade; Larry has always been a member of the board of directors. They spearheaded the re-painting of the decades old lamp posts in the Boulevard median, the largest private improvement ever made to City of Fresno property. In 1985 they organized the first Candlelight Christmas on Huntington Boulevard, featuring a mile of lamp posts transformed into glistening red candles and over 100 homes with festive holiday displays. It attracts hundreds of thousands of viewers and is Fresno's longest running, all volunteer event.