

Paper Mache for 5-1-26 by David Read

I am really enthusiastic about old buildings that have been repurposed as cultural centers, museums and theaters especially. Look at what has happened to our Sutter Theater Center for the Arts over the past 15 years. We're part of that story. It stands as a local example of what's possible. Once a mid-century movie house, it has steadily been transformed into a dynamic performing arts venue complete with flexible spaces like the Black Box Theater with planning well underway for the larger main stage at the rear of the building. Rather than abandoning the old Sutter Theater when there was a threat of turning it into an X-rated movie showcase, key individuals and community leadership came together and saw it as a cultural anchor for the future. The practice is called adaptive reuse. It is a simple idea that calls for building upon instead of erasing history. Some communities have even adopted policies called Adaptive Reuse Ordinances, which have proved that preservation could be economically viable while restoring character to struggling urban cores.

At its best, this approach recognizes that buildings are more than structures. They are repositories of memory, craftsmanship, and identity. And increasingly, communities are discovering that the most sustainable, culturally rich path forward is not to replace the past, but to repurpose it. As preservationists like to say, "the greenest building is the one that is already built."

When I lived in Los Angeles and did some acting in high school and college, I loved my occasional foray to the Western Costume Building on Hollywood Boulevard, once central to Hollywood's golden age, which has since closed and been reborn as residential lofts, allowing a structure tied to film history to remain part of the city's living fabric rather than a static relic.

What unites these examples is a shift in thinking. Buildings are no longer seen as disposable once their original function fades. Instead, they are flexible frameworks capable of evolving alongside the communities they serve. Adaptive reuse preserves architectural heritage, reduces environmental impact, and often costs less than building anew, all while fostering economic and social revitalization. This is especially relevant when restoring a faded, neglected building can help it rise from the ashes like the immortal Phoenix in Greek mythology that regenerates and is born again.

And that brings us to another building waiting for its revival and second act, the long-closed Packard Library in Marysville. Like so many historic structures, it

carries both architectural significance and emotional weight. The question is not whether it has value, it clearly does, but whether we have the vision to unlock it. A Yuba County History Museum, Cultural and Event Center housed within those walls would not just preserve artifacts, it would give the building a renewed civic purpose in an area in much need of reconsideration. It would transform a dormant space into a place of learning, storytelling, and community connection, much like the projects we see in Petaluma and San Luis Obispo where former Carnegie libraries from the early 1900s have been transformed into bustling museums, and cultural centers. The lesson from those cities is clear, the past is not an obstacle to progress. It is the foundation for it. Can we generate enough local support for a project of this magnitude? It won't be easy, but it can be done. All of the elements are in place with our several history-based organizations in town. Anyone interested in helping transform the Packard Library into a Yuba County Museum of History can contact any one of several groups including the Yuba County Historic Resources Commission, the Friends for the Preservation of Yuba County History, or the already established nonprofit, the Yuba County Museum of History.