

To: Steve Mizokami

Senior Planner, City of Santa Monica

From: Christine Lazzaretto; Molly Iker-Johnson

Date: December 6, 2017

RE: 1413 Michigan Avenue

INTRODUCTION

We have evaluated the residence/social hall located at 1413 Michigan Avenue in the City of Santa Monica, California, for historic association with the Japanese American community. HRG's research included review of building permits; historic newspaper articles in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, and *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*; Sanborn Fire Insurance maps from 1909, 1950, and 1957; historic photographs housed at the Santa Monica History Museum; Santa Monica City Directories; and a master's thesis focused on the history of Santa Monica's Japanese American population.

The one-story Santa Monica Nikkei Hall at 1413 Michigan Avenue was designed in 1957 by Y. Tom Makino, and constructed by the Nikei Kai.¹ It continues to serve as the Santa Monica Nikkei Hall (Nikkei Jin Kai). Mention of the building was not found in historic newspapers, nor was it recorded in Sanborn Fire Insurance maps or City Directories. However, historic photographs, building permits, and the master's thesis confirm the property's historic association with the Japanese American community.

¹ City of Santa Monica building permit B21996, June 24, 1957.

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HISTORIC CONTEXT²

Santa Monica's Nikkei³ population "enjoyed a higher level of integration" and experienced less racial intolerance than other minorities in Santa Monica prior to World War II.⁴ Unlike other minorities, Santa Monica's Nikkei population was not relegated to the Pico neighborhood, but rather lived throughout the center part of the city and in Ocean Park, and attended Santa Monica schools.⁵ As a result of their integration in to Santa Monica schools, Nikkei children lacked instruction in Japanese language and culture.

Santa Monica Nikkei pioneer Katsuzo Matsumura began the first Japanese language school (*gakuen*) in his living room in 1924, with eight students. As more children began to attend the *Gakuen*, a larger, central school was constructed (1824 16th Street; demolished). Though primarily utilized as a Japanese language school, the *Gauken* also served as the nucleus of Santa Monica's prewar Nikkei community. It brought families together with traditional cultural events (i.e. Obon festival), picnics, parties, plays, reading and writing contests, and other social events.⁶ The *Gakuen* operated until the beginning of World War II.⁷

With the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, American society suddenly perceived the Nikkei as enemies. Executive Order 9066, issued on February 19, 1942, officially ordered the incarceration of those of Japanese ancestry living on the west coast.⁸

Japanese incarceration during World War II effectively eliminated Santa Monica's Japanese community. Many of Santa Monica's Nikkei were sent to the Manzanar camp in the Owens Valley, while some opted to voluntarily relocate to avoid incarceration.⁹ When the

² Some information in this context was derived from Architectural Resources Group and Historic Resources Group, *Draft Historic Resources Inventory Update: Historic Context Statement*, prepared for the City of Santa Monica, revised June 12, 2017.

³ The term *Nikkei* broadly refers to Japanese emigrants who reside in a foreign country. The first generation of Japanese immigrants are called "Issei," and their children, considered second generation immigrants are called "Nisei."

⁴ Dana Lyn Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement: Japanese Americans In (and Out of) Santa Monica, California, 1899-1960" (Master's thesis, California State University, Fullerton, 2001), 60; Paula A. Scott, *Santa Monica: A History on the Edge* (San Francisco: Arcadia Publishing Co., 2004), 116-117.

⁵ Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement," 41, 44.

⁶ Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement," 48.

⁷ Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement," 47.

⁸ This memo utilizes the preferred terminology in the "Power of Words Handbook." For a complete list of preferred terms and a discussion of euphemistic terminology, see Power of Words II Committee, "Power of Words Handbook: A Guide to Language about Japanese Americans in World War II – Understanding Euphemisms and Preferred Terminology," National Japanese American Citizens League, April 27, 2013, <https://jacl.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Power-of-Words-Rev-Term-Handbook.pdf> (accessed November 2017). Specifically, the preferred terminology for internment is incarceration.

⁹ Scott, *A History on the Edge*, 118.

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detention order was lifted on January 2, 1945, many Nikkei moved to the Midwest or east coast, a trend encouraged by the federal government.

Few families returned to Santa Monica upon release, though some returned after briefly relocating eastward. By April 1945, fewer than 1,300 Japanese Americans had returned to California; by 1946, approximately 161 Japanese Americans had returned to Santa Monica.¹⁰ They faced a severe housing shortage, as Santa Monica's population had increased approximately 25% between 1940 and 1945.¹¹ In 1945, the War Relocation Authority (WRA) and the Federal Public Housing Authority (FPHA) established government-funded housing in converted Army barracks on Pico Boulevard between 24th and 25th Streets, as well as in two hostels, while the *Gakuen* was converted to a housing facility after serving as a military training headquarters during the war.¹²

Rather than rebuilding their prewar community, Santa Monica's Nikkei focused on personal and family survival.¹³ In the aftermath of their incarceration, many Nisei felt discouraged by American society and the federal government to engage in Japanese cultural activities, instead feeling it was more beneficial to "desegregate" during the immediate postwar period.¹⁴

Nikkei Jin Kai

By 1950, Santa Monica's Japanese population had grown to 254, 0.4% of the City's total population.¹⁵ The immediate postwar problems of readjustment and resettlement were no longer as acute, and the Nisei were able to start to focus on rebuilding and unifying the dismantled Japanese American community.¹⁶ At this time, the Santa Monica Nikkei started meeting as a community, often in community members' homes. In 1951, Issei community leaders formed the Santa Monica Nikkei Hall, Inc., and purchased the property at 1413 Michigan Avenue. Due to the restriction of alien land laws, the land was placed in the names of four Nisei officers: Tetsu Ando, Kozuko Asao, Masaru Matsumura, and Jimmy Fukuhara.¹⁷ The group then began to collect money from the Nikkei community to fund the repair of the former *Gakuen* or the construction of the new community hall.

¹⁰ Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement," 134, 139.

¹¹ Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement," 129.

¹² Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement," 141, 146-147.

¹³ Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement," 121.

¹⁴ Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement," 167.

¹⁵ Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement," 176.

¹⁶ Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement," 204.

¹⁷ Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement," 206.

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While collecting funds, the Santa Monica Nikkei Hall, Inc. continued to meet informally for six more years at members' homes, rotating each month. During this time, they discussed whether it was more feasible to repair the former *Gakuen* or to construct a new community building. Upon determining that the former *Gakuen* was in a state of disrepair, and that it would be too costly to upgrade to meet their needs, community leaders decided to build a new community center at 14th Street and Michigan Avenue. The directors initially planned to include a barbershop, beauty shop, and dry cleaner in the community center, but this concept was deemed too ambitious.¹⁸

A modest, one-story community hall, designed by Y. Tom Makino, AIA (1907-1992), was constructed at 1413 Michigan Avenue in 1957.¹⁹ By 1960, many Nikkei lived in the center portion of the City, settling near the former *Gakuen*; the most populous streets included Michigan and Delaware Avenues and 12th, 18th, and 19th Streets. That the Nikkei Jin Kai was located within this radius (and around the corner from the former *Gakuen*) made it a convenient meeting place for Santa Monica's Japanese community during the latter half of the 20th century. At its inception, the Nikkei Jin Kai boasted between 75 and 100 members, primarily Issei and Nisei couples living in Santa Monica.²⁰

The Nikkei Jin Kai served as a place for Nikkei families to gather and socialize. The group organized picnics and assisted families in the event of illnesses or deaths, and the community center was utilized during the holiday season for an annual Christmas party and a traditional Japanese New Year celebration.²¹ In 1965, the Nikkei community began to commemorate Japanese American history, reuniting at the Nikkei Jin Kai annually to honor their predecessors.²² As time wore on, younger generations of the Nikkei community assimilated further into American society, and by 2000, the center was primarily a center for senior citizens, with approximately 80 members.²³

CONCLUSION

Based on historic photographs, building permits, and the master's thesis focused on the history of Santa Monica's Japanese American population, we have confirmed the Santa

¹⁸ Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement," 206.

¹⁹ City of Santa Monica building permit B21996, June 24, 1957. Makino, who had received an American Institute of Architects Award in 1935, received his Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Southern California in 1945, had worked as a Designer-Draftsman for Wurdeman and Becket from 1936 to 1940, and as Associated Architect for W.F. McCaughey and Associates from 1945 to 1951. In addition to the Santa Monica Nikkei Hall, Makino designed alterations to Doris Duke's Falcon Lair house, and the Homba Hongwangi Buddhist temple at 815 E. 1st Street in Los Angeles (1969). Source: "Makino, Y. Tom," *American Architects Directory*, ed. George S. Koyl, FAIA (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1956), 361; "New Buddhist Temple Blends Ancient, New," *Los Angeles Times*, April 27, 1969.

²⁰ Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement," 207.

²¹ Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement," 207.

²² Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement," 218.

²³ Blakemore, "From Settlement to Resettlement," 208.

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Monica Nikkei Hall's historic association with the Japanese American community. Constructed by the Nikei Kai as their community center in 1957, the building at 1413 Michigan Avenue, now known as the Santa Monica Nikkei Hall, maintains its association with the Japanese American community to the present. The potential significance of the property's historic association with the Japanese American community warrants additional investigation.

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PERMIT HISTORY

Date	Owner	Architect/Contractor	Description of Work
6/24/1957	Nikei Kai	Y. Tom Makino	New construction of one story building. Refer to attached drawings (for use as dwelling and social room)
9/15/1969	Nikkei Hall	Womsley Const. Co.	Addition to enlarge meeting room (23 x 26 feet)
7/6/2010	William Brandt/Nikkeijin Kai Corp. (tenant)	Mar Vista Roofing Inc.	Reroof flat built-up cap sheet roof (with cool roof) Class A built-up cap sheet 30 sq tear off existing

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HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH: NIKKEI JIN KAI

Japanese American community members in front of 1413 Michigan Avenue, c. 1960. Source: Santa Monica History Museum.

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HISTORIC NEWSPAPER ARTICLE: Y. TOM MAKINO, AIA



EAST MEETS WEST- -New Buddhist temple under construction in "Little Tokyo" section of Los Angeles will be a blend of oriental and western cultures.

New Buddhist Temple Blends Ancient, New

Ancient tradition and the culture of the Far East have been blended with standards of contemporary California in the design for a new Buddhist temple being built at 815 E. 1st St. in the "Little Tokyo" section.

Located on a two-acre site at the edge of the Civic Center, the 600-seat sanctuary of the Hompa Hongwangi congregation will feature modern gas air-conditioning in an architectural style that is 2,500 years old. Scheduled for completion in August, the \$1 million structure will replace the existing temple at 1st St. and Central Ave.

The temple was designed by architects Y. Tom Makino Toshiaki Miura and will contain 40,000 square feet of space. Landscaping in the Japanese tradition will transform the 250-foot frontage into a shrine of peace and serenity, Makino said. Local building codes have dictated a concrete post and beam construction in-

stead of the traditional heavy wooden timber of Buddhist temples in Japan.

The structure is designed in two levels. The lower floor, about 6 feet below street level, provides space for Sunday school rooms with views of a sunken Japanese garden.

"New Buddhist Temple Blends Ancient, New." *Los Angeles Times*. April 27, 1969.

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