



Historic Context Statement

Revised May 2011

Japantown San Francisco, California

Prepared for
City & County of San Francisco
Planning Department

**DONNA GRAVES and
PAGE & TURNBULL, INC.**
724 Pine Street, San Francisco, California 94108
415.362.5154 / www.page-turnbull.com

SAN FRANCISCO JAPANTOWN HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT

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Prepared for
The San Francisco Planning Department
as part of the
Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan

by

DONNA GRAVES

and

PAGE & TURNBULL, INC.

*Cover Image:
Japantown Businesses along Geary Street, 1910s.
(Collection of National Japanese American Historical Society)*

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PROJECT TEAM

Donna Graves, *Historic and Cultural Preservationist*

Page & Turnbull

Caitlin Harvey, *Architectural Historian*

City of San Francisco

Matt Weintraub, *Planner, Historic Resources Survey Team*

Preservation Working Group of the Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan Steering Committee

Sumi Honnami, *St. Francis Xavier Church*

Karen Kai, *Rosa Parks Middle School*

Ken Kaji, *National Japanese American Historical Society*

Ben Kobashigawa, *San Francisco State University*

Karl Matsushita, *Japanese American National Library*

Sandy Mori, *Kimochi, Inc., Japantown BNP Steering Committee*

Steve Nakajo, *Kimochi, Inc., Japantown BNP Steering Committee*

Paul Osaki, *Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California, Japantown BNP Steering Committee*

Ben Pease, *Pease Press*

Rosalyn Tonai, *National Japanese American Historical Society, Japantown BNP Steering Committee*

Francis Wong, *National Japanese American Historical Society*

INTRODUCTION

San Francisco's Japantown is a distinctive place that is defined in part by its cultural heritage, its social history, and its architectural identity. This historic context statement has been developed in order to inform policies related to preservation of cultural heritage in the Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan (BNP) and to guide identification and assessment of important historic and cultural properties, particularly those associated with the Japanese and Japanese American community. Development of this context statement supports the underlying objectives of the Japantown BNP to recognize, retain and enhance the cultural character of San Francisco's Japantown, which is one of only three historic *Nihonmachi* ("Japantown") communities remaining in California as well as in the United States.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

For the purposes of this historic context statement, the boundaries of the study area are defined by the San Francisco Planning Department's Japantown BNP project area. These boundaries are California Street (north), O'Farrell & Ellis streets (south), Gough Street (east) and Steiner Street (west). The project area contains the historic and current Japantown neighborhood, which was known to extend as far as Fillmore Street to the west, California Street to the north, Octavia Street to the east, and Geary Boulevard to the south. Historically, many Japanese residences and businesses also existed beyond the neighborhood, within the larger Western Addition area that contained Japantown, as well as elsewhere in the city. Still, this ethnically concentrated area was, and is, considered to be Japantown, home to the historical Japanese cultural community in San Francisco. The Japantown BNP project area also encompasses a portion of the Upper Fillmore neighborhood, an area associated with San Francisco's historic African American community in the Western Addition.

The time periods examined by this historic context statement include the early history of Japanese settlements in San Francisco prior to Japantown, as well as the early development of the Western Addition area, from approximately 1880 through 1906. Following that, the context statement documents the historic development of Japantown as the home of the Japanese cultural community during the 20th century, including: the earliest period of Japanese occupancy in the Western Addition area beginning around 1906; growth of the Japanese cultural community that became known to residents as *Nihonjinmachi* ("Japanese people's town") during the early part of the 20th century; the events of World II and the postwar period, including internment, diaspora, and return of *Nikkei* (people of Japanese ancestry) to *Nihonmachi* ("Japantown"); the mid-century period of urban renewal in Japantown and the Western Addition; and the recent period of cultural and community revitalization in Japantown during the latter part of the 20th century.

Themes described in this context statement that relate to the history of the Japantown neighborhood and the development of the cultural community include:

- Early Japanese History in San Francisco, 1880s–1906
- Japanese Settlement in the Western Addition, 1906–1920s
- *Nihonjinmachi* of San Francisco, 1920s–1942
- World War II Internment, 1942–1945
- *Nikkei* Return to Japantown, 1945–1960s
- Redevelopment of Japantown, 1960s–1980s
- Rediscovering *Nihonmachi*, 1980s–Present

A unifying thread in this history is the enduring, ongoing cultural significance of Japantown as a local, regional, and national center of *Nikkei* community. In addition, the Western Addition of San Francisco has historically been home to several other ethnic and cultural communities, including German Jews, African Americans, Filipinos, and Koreans. Japantown’s cultural and social themes, as well as Japantown’s relationships with other communities of the Western Addition, are vital to understanding the historic character of the neighborhood. Themes described in this context statement that relate to the broader history of the Western Addition of San Francisco include:

- Early History of the Western Addition, 1880s–1906
- Citywide Reconstruction, Resettlement & Recovery, 1906–1910s
- San Francisco’s “Little United Nations,” 1910s–1950s
- Redevelopment & Preservation in the Western Addition, 1950s–Present

HISTORIC PROPERTIES IN JAPANTOWN

Several properties located in Japantown are either listed in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as historic resources under Article 10 of the San Francisco Planning Code.¹ In addition, information gathered from a number of sources, including the Planning Department, indicates that many Japantown properties that are not officially recognized as historic nonetheless appear to qualify for listing as historic properties at local, state, or national levels. All of the Japantown properties that are officially designated as historic were recognized for significance acquired before, or occurring apart from the development of Japantown and the historic cultural community. There are currently no properties in Japantown that are officially recognized for historic associations with the Japanese cultural community.

The project area includes three sites that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places: the Fillmore-Pine Building at 1940 Fillmore Street, the Cottage Row Historic District, and an individual structure within Cottage Row. In addition, the City of San Francisco has designated three buildings as Landmarks pursuant to Article 10 of the Planning Code: the Stanyan House at 2006 Bush Street, the Madam C.J. Walker House at 2066 Pine Street, and the Bush Street Temple at 1881 Bush Street (formerly Ohabai Shalom, currently Kokoro

¹ Properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places, as well as properties designated as historic by local governments, are also listed on the California Register of Historical Resources.

Assisted Living). The City has also designated the Mary Ellen Pleasant eucalyptus trees at the intersection of Bush and Octavia streets as a Structure of Merit according to Article 10; the site was also recently added as the “Western Terminus” of the National Park Service’s Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.² Of these properties, only the Bush Street Temple, which was designated as a City Landmark for its significant architecture and its historic role as a Jewish synagogue, is known to be associated with Japanese American heritage.

This historic context statement complements the historic property survey conducted under the comprehensive Japantown BNP, and has been developed to guide identification and assessment of historic properties that connect to the area’s rich history, especially in relation to Japanese and Japanese American community heritage. The historic context statement and historic property survey support the underlying objectives of the Japantown BNP to preserve and enhance the community’s identity as one of three historic Japantowns remaining in the United States.

UNDERSTANDING HISTORIC CONTEXTS IN ETHNIC NEIGHBORHOODS

Urban neighborhoods commonly experience demographic shifts as a continuous process that may accelerate or decelerate at times due to various factors, both economic and social. In the United States, identities associated with ethnicity and patterns of immigration have historically been two of the most powerful of factors affecting demographic composition of urban neighborhoods. Neighborhoods associated with particular ethnic communities, such as Japantowns, are formed and grow through the interplay of many factors including discrimination, political and legal shifts, and the efforts of immigrants and other “minorities” to build a foundation of community support.³

As the concentration of a particular racial or ethnic group increases in a developed urban area, the commercial and institutional composition of an existing neighborhood typically shifts in order to serve the expanding population group. Distinctive changes may include the early emergence of ethnic food suppliers offering foodstuffs required for traditional cuisine, as well as sources for other culturally significant goods, e.g. wedding or funeral

² “S.F. Eye and Ear Hospital Former ‘Voodoo Queen’ Homesite,” *Sights and Sounds*, vol. 1, no.1 (Spring 1958), 1. City and County of San Francisco. Landmark Designation nomination for Mary Ellen Pleasant Trees located at 1661 Octavia Street (2 October 2007.) Minutes of the San Francisco Preservation Advisory Board, May 5 2004 <http://sfgov.org/site/planning_page.asp?id=26376>

³ The following section draws heavily from the “Japantown Historic Context Statement” written by Tim Kelley and Gerald Takano with the Japantown Task Force, October 2003. Categories of race and ethnicity in the United States have been subject to evolving and often hotly contested discussion and debate. Scholars, and some members of the general public, have questioned the utility of these categories and their often fixed association with concepts of culture. For the purposes of this historic context statement, “ethnic” will be used to denote individuals and communities by association with a particular place of origin outside of the United States. Current terminology that is commonly (though not universally) accepted to identify individuals and communities by race and/or ethnicity will be used throughout the document. Identifiers such as “Japanese American” and “African American” represent contemporary labels that follow upon a sequence of shifting terms. Previous terms such as “Negro,” or historically derogatory words such as “Jap,” appear in the document only in quotations from historic sources.

accouterments. Culturally supportive social institutions may be commercial, such as hotels, beauty salons and barbershops, cafes, bars, and pool halls, or non-commercial, such as churches, cultural organizations, or language schools. In addition, businesses serving a broader clientele, e.g. restaurants, drug stores, hardware stores, tobacconists, etc., may come under ownership by members of ethnic groups, and by virtue of linguistic and cultural affinities may develop a specialized ethnic patronage.

At some point in this process, a neighborhood may come to be experienced as the home of a new cultural group—an enclave where members of the group can most fully experience their cultural identity. This perception may or may not be shared by other groups, either from outside the enclave, or even within. In many cases, the true makeup of an area that is perceived as racially or ethnically uniform is actually diverse. In dense urban environments, the granular structure of cultural neighborhoods may be very fine – on a block-by-block scale or often even smaller. Given this structure, it can be difficult to determine historic community boundaries from standard or commonly available sources. Intensive research with primary sources, requiring much time and effort, is often necessary in order to obtain comprehensive historical information regarding ethnic neighborhoods.

For instance, the historic records of the U.S. Census, gathered over many decades, include address-by-address information for individual residents, including age, occupation, household type, family size, ancestry, and native language, during various periods of time. These detailed, hand-written census records from past decades allow for demographic tabulations at the individual property level and can provide the basis for documentation of social, cultural, and ethnic patterns within neighborhoods. These property-specific census records are made available to the public 70 years after the Census year for which they were gathered; therefore, this information is currently available for decades up to and including 1930, with information from 1940 becoming available in 2010. Census information that is available from decades within the past 70 years is based on much broader areas such as Census Tracts, which are less useful for detailed demographic analyses. However, research of historical property-specific census records was beyond the scope of this context statement. Cross (or “reverse”) directories (listings of occupants and businesses by address as well as by telephone number) were helpful in gathering historical information on neighborhood composition and character for this project. Cross directories were produced for San Francisco beginning in 1953. In addition, prewar and postwar annual directories published by the Japanese immigrant newspapers in San Francisco provide useful data for reconstructing areas of ethnic concentration by street and block on the basis of addresses of Japanese residents, businesses, and institutions.⁴

Occupancy of a developed urban area by a new group may involve few outward changes to the existing built environment of an urban neighborhood. In many cases, the most prominent will be the addition of signage associated with the group, sometimes in the native language of that group. More extensive alterations may take place inside buildings, with reconfiguration of spaces to suit new requirements, expectations and values. Eventually, purpose-built institutional structures may be designed or altered to reflect architectural or

⁴ Some extant copies include *Nichibei Shimbunsha* Directory: 1915, 1926, and 1941; *Shin Seikai Adoresu Bukku* (Address Book): 1923, 1927; and *Shin Sekai Asahi Nenkan* (Yearbook): 1940, 1941.

ceremonial traditions of the cultural group, though local building codes can limit such expressions.

If an ethnic neighborhood becomes attractive to others in the larger society, whether for cuisine, special goods, entertainment, or general ambiance, more extensive changes or additions may be made to the built environment in order to enhance marketability. Often departing from actual cultural traditions, these changes may signal a shift away from the formation of an ethnic enclave whose purpose is to provide a home for the cultural group and toward the creation of a marketplace that trades commercially on the notion of exoticism. In addition, the cultural composition of an ethnic neighborhood may shift again when new cultural groups join or displace the earlier group, or when the earlier group disperses or becomes culturally assimilated.

This historic context statement for San Francisco's Japantown describes the ethnic neighborhood and its origins, physical development, cultural and social character, and continuing importance as the center for Japanese and Japanese American community in San Francisco. Recognition of Japantown as a *Nikkei* ethnic neighborhood is complementary to recognition of the area, and of individual properties, as important to the cultural and architectural heritage of other groups as well.

THE WESTERN ADDITION OF SAN FRANCISCO: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE WESTERN ADDITION

Japantown is part of a larger area of San Francisco known as the Western Addition, which was developed primarily during the later part of the 19th century. Through a series of legislative acts, the newly incorporated City of San Francisco filed claims with the United States Land Commission to extend its western boundaries from the first City limit line established in 1851 at Larkin Street (east of Japantown) to Divisadero Street in 1852 (west of Japantown) and ultimately to the Pacific Ocean, adding new sections such as the Western Addition, which lay north of Market and between Larkin and Divisadero streets.

One of the oldest houses in San Francisco, the Stanyan House at 2006 Bush Street, dates from the earliest period of development in the Western Addition and reflects the simple structures that first appeared in the neighborhood. This prefabricated wooden building was shipped by sea from Boston sometime between 1852 and 1854. Supervisor Charles Stanyan, for whom Stanyan Street is named, purchased the building shortly after it was erected and lived in the house for many years, adding apartments for his extended family on each side in 1885.⁵

⁵ "San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board-Final Case Report on Stanyan House" (September 4, 1974.) Susan Dinkelspeil Cerny, *An Architectural Guidebook to San Francisco and the Bay Area* (Salt Lake; Gibbs Smith Publishers, 2007), 71.

The Van Ness Ordinance of 1855-56 determined the expansion of the downtown street grid through the Western Addition and reserved lands for public use, including eleven public squares.⁶ The expansion offered by these new lands coincided with the most sustained population growth in San Francisco's history during the second half of the 19th century; for instance, from 1860 to 1870, the city experienced a phenomenal growth rate of over 160%, from 56,802 to 149,473 people. As a consequence, housing development from 1870 through the turn of the 20th century filled the newly platted blocks of the Western Addition with houses decorated elaborately in styles typical of the "Victorian" era, such as Italianate, Stick/Eastlake, and Queen Anne. For example, a row of Italianate houses built by The Real Estate Associates (TREA) in 1875 at 2115-2125 Bush Street exemplifies the exuberant design of speculative builders from the era. Also exemplary is Cottage Row, a smaller 1882 development of Eastlake-style houses built by the same developer, located in an adjacent alley.⁷ In the fifteen years after its founding in 1866 by William Hollis, TREA reportedly built more than one-thousand houses in San Francisco, including many in the Western Addition, based on pattern books and using mass production techniques.⁸ During the 1890s, ornately embellished Queen Anne style houses added to the variety of residential architecture in the area.

STREETCAR SUBURBS OF THE WESTERN ADDITION

Over the last decades of the 19th century, as speculative housing was constructed by firms such as TREA, the Western Addition evolved into a neighborhood described by San Francisco historians Issel and Cherny (1986) as "largely upper-middle-class and upper-class, home to businessmen and professionals." In contrast to the working-class neighborhoods south of Market Street, which were connected to employment in the industrial and waterfront areas, residents of the Western Addition had direct connection via streetcar lines to jobs and shopping in the downtown retail and commercial area. By 1900, the area's predominately white-collar and merchant population was mostly native-born, with three-quarters born to immigrant parents. The families that occupied the Western Addition's mostly two- and three-story houses typically had roots in European countries such as Germany, Austria, Ireland, England, Scotland, and France. According to Issel and Cherny's analysis of census data, the very few non-European residents of this area before the turn of the 20th century were employed as domestics.⁹ Japanese "schoolboys" were known to be afforded room and board in houses where they were employed as servants.

⁶ Anne Vernez Moudon, *Built for Change: Neighborhood Architecture in San Francisco* (MIT Press, 1985), 26. Alan Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area: A Metropolis in Perspective*, second edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 42-43. Hamilton Square is the closest of these historic public lands to the Better Neighborhood Plan project area, lying just west, across Steiner Street.

⁷ Cherny, 67-71.

⁸ Noe Hill in San Francisco. "Historic Sites in San Francisco." National Register #85000705: The Real Estate Associates (TREA) Houses. <<http://www.noehill.com/sf/landmarks>>

⁹ William Issel and Robert W. Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865-1932: Politics, Power and Urban Development* (University of California, 1986), 66.

A notable exception to the area's primarily European ancestry at that time was Mary Ellen Pleasant (1814-1904), prominent African American businesswoman and civil rights leader.¹⁰ Pleasant lived at the southwest corner of Bush and Octavia streets in the home of Thomas and Teresa Bell, a wealthy couple whose 30-room mansion she shared. Born in Philadelphia, Pleasant arrived in San Francisco in 1850 and quickly made a name for herself as a shrewd businesswoman, socialite, and ardent advocate for civil rights. She successfully sued a San Francisco railroad company for discriminatory treatment and was a leader of the Underground Railroad in the West. Pleasant helped a number of fugitive ex-slaves secure legal papers and was a correspondent and financial supporter of abolitionist John Brown. The location of the Bell's mansion later became the site of the Green Eye Hospital, which was built in 1929. A row of six eucalyptus trees reportedly planted by Mary Ellen Pleasant still stand on Octavia Street south of Bush Street.

By the late 1880s, a commercial strip had emerged in the 1900-2100 blocks of Fillmore Street to serve the surrounding neighborhood. Groceries and dry goods stores, bakeries and a few restaurants, shoe stores and dressmakers, hardware stores, locksmiths and carpenters operated out of storefronts concentrated between Sacramento and Bush streets. The Fillmore-Pine building at 1940-46 Fillmore Street reflects the thriving economy of the neighborhood, as well as its strong German heritage. An early example of a mixed-use building containing residential units and neighborhood-serving retail space, the Fillmore-Pine building was designed by German architect Wildrich Winterhalter and constructed at the southwest corner of Pine and Fillmore streets in 1882. The building's developer, German immigrant Jonas Schoenfeld, imported and sold tobacco and cigars. Schoenfeld rented one storefront to Julius Heyman for a shoe store and Nathan M. Jacobs rented the other for his "fancy goods shop" while living in quarters upstairs.¹¹

Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. maps from the 1890s show a late 19th century neighborhood characterized primarily by single-family dwellings shaped by the narrow frontage, long-lot pattern of the day, as well as by mass-production techniques that had come to proliferate in residential construction. In addition to single-family homes, multi-family residential buildings containing "flats" appeared on Geary, Post, Webster, Pine and Bush streets. These residential blocks were punctuated by scattered commercial structures ranging in size from large establishments such as livery stables, to small buildings such as a machine shop at Buchanan and Geary streets. Smaller storefront businesses, including several "Chinese Laundries," were found along Geary and Fillmore streets. Franklin Hall, at 1859 Fillmore Street, offered a gathering space on the 1800 block of Fillmore Street. A notable collection of churches appeared as well, including Plymouth Congregational Church on Post Street between Webster and Buchanan streets, First New Jerusalem Church at 1620 O'Farrell Street, and Hamilton Square Baptist Church on Post Street between Steiner and Fillmore streets. Two synagogues were also present by 1899, Beth Israel Synagogue on the south side

¹⁰ Other place-based historical references locate African Americans in 19th century-San Francisco's downtown area. Elizabeth L. Parker and James Abajian, *A Walking Tour of the Black Presence in San Francisco During the Nineteenth Century* (San Francisco: San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society, 1974).

¹¹ Bloomfield, Anne, Fillmore-Pine Building: National Register of Historic Places Nomination, 1980.

of Geary Street between Octavia and Laguna streets, and the synagogue of Congregation Ohabai Shalom at 1831 Bush Street.¹²

JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE WESTERN ADDITION

As the presence of the synagogues implies, many of the German-Austrian residents of the Western Addition were Jewish. Like many other Jews who arrived in California during and after the Gold Rush, they enjoyed what historians Ava Kahn and Marc Dollinger have described as the unique qualities of life for Jewish immigrants in the Western United States and San Francisco in particular. With little obvious anti-Semitism and ready access to political power, San Francisco's historic Jewish population rose in stature as well as numbers after the first waves of "forty-niners" arrived to seek their fortune and a new life in California. By the 1870s, San Francisco's Jewish residents made up 7 to 8 percent of the total population, representing the highest percentage in any urban area west of New York.¹³

Wives and families, rabbis, and culturally specific foods and goods followed as the Gold Rush's bachelor culture shifted to an urban setting. Jewish merchants were among those who bought homes and built businesses in the Western Addition during the last quarter of the 19th century. Simon Koshland, a founding partner of the wool merchant firm Koshland Bros., purchased a new home from The Real Estate Association at 1848 Pine Street in 1875.¹⁴ Other Jewish names associated with the area and prominent in San Francisco history include Philip N. Lilienthal and Mortimer Fleishacker, respectively founder and president of the Anglo-California Bank, who owned a large building at the intersection of Fillmore and Geary streets.¹⁵ These and other leading San Francisco figures were rarely publicly associated with their Jewish roots, but most were connected to San Francisco's historic synagogues.

San Francisco featured four pioneer Jewish congregations. In 1851, devout immigrant Jews formed two Orthodox congregations in San Francisco; Emanu-El and Sherith Israel.¹⁶ In 1860, another group of conservative Jews organized a third congregation, Beth-Israel. Shortly thereafter, Congregation Emanu-El came to embrace the Jewish Reform Movement, and in reaction some of its more conservative members left Emanu-El to form a fourth congregation, Ohabai Shalom, in 1862. Although all four congregations were initially located downtown or South of Market, within fifty years of setting down spiritual roots, three of San Francisco's four pioneer Jewish congregations had built new synagogues in the Western Addition-Fillmore neighborhood. The first was Congregation Ohabai Shalom which in 1895 built a grand temple at 1881 Bush Street to house its congregation. Designed by architect Moses J. Lyon, the Bush Street Temple's eclectic style is described by historian David Kaufman as meant to create a "Jewish" architecture by recalling the Moorish and Eastern

¹² Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. San Francisco, 1893 and 1899.

¹³ Ava Kahn "Joining the Gold Rush." Ava Kahn and Marc Dollinger, *California Jews*, (Lebanon, New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 30.

¹⁴ Bloomfield, Anne and Aurthur Bloomfield, *Gables and Fables: A Portrait of San Francisco's Pacific Heights* (Berkeley, California: Heyday Books, 2007), 315.

¹⁵ Issel and Cherny, 40-41.

¹⁶ Ibid., 31.

European roots of the Jewish diaspora. This structure, which played an important role in the existence of several cultural communities who eventually settled in the Western Addition, is one of only three 19th-century synagogues remaining in California.¹⁷



**Temple Ohabai Shalom, 1895.
(Collection of San Francisco Public Library)**

Perhaps at the suggestion of longtime rabbi Jack Nieto who lived on the 1700 block of Bush Street,¹⁸ Congregation Sherith Israel moved from a Gothic Revival-styled building at Post and Taylor streets to a new building at 2266 California Street, in the Western Addition, in 1904. The sanctuary still holds a large stained glass window depicting Moses carrying the Ten Commandments from El Capitan into Yosemite Valley. Historian Ava Kahn describes this image as an emblem of Jewish San Francisco's faith in the vision of the Golden State as a

¹⁷ David Kaufman, "Early Synagogue Architecture." Ava Kahn and Marc Dollinger, *California Jews*, (Lebanon, New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 53-54.

¹⁸ Issel and Cherny, 67.

Promised Land.¹⁹ Often described as a long-time rival to the wealthier Temple Emanu-El, Sherith Israel's congregation selected Ecole de Beaux Arts-trained architect Albert Pissis to design their new home. Architect of landmarks such as the Hibernia Bank and Flood Building, Pissis designed a grand neoclassical edifice for Sherith Israel with a large central dome. One of the few large buildings left standing after the great earthquake and fires of 1906, Sherith Israel served as the San Francisco Hall of Justice while the Civic Center was rebuilt.²⁰

Congregation Beth-Israel constructed a new building on Geary Street near Fillmore Street after the 1906 disaster destroyed their earlier place of worship. Beth Israel had moved from its earlier quarters on Sutter Street near Stockton Street to an interim home a few blocks east on Geary Street. With help from the wealthier Temple Emanu-El, the congregation rebuilt on the new site by 1908 and used the Western Addition facility until 1948.²¹ Later, the Jim Jones' People's Temple used the building (prior to the infamous events that occurred in Guyana), and it was demolished by the Redevelopment Agency in the 1980s.

THE WESTERN ADDITION AFTER THE 1906 EARTHQUAKE AND FIRES

The demographics of the Western Addition had begun to shift by the turn of the 20th century, but it was the consequences of the 1906 earthquake and fires that transformed the neighborhood into what more recent chroniclers have called San Francisco's "Little United Nations."²² Following the disaster, much of the city's former residential sectors located in Downtown and South of Market were rebuilt as commercial, industrial, or fireproof high-density residential properties, resulting in widespread displacement of the working and poorer classes. In the aftermath of the 1906 disaster, the Western Addition-Fillmore area provided temporary refuge at first, and then new permanent homes, for many San Franciscans. Because the neighborhood was largely intact after the quake, many governmental and commercial services shifted to the area. The first streetcar route to operate after the 1906 disaster ran along Fillmore Street. Shortly after the disaster, City Hall, several department stores, and newspapers operated from Fillmore Street and the surrounding blocks. Local boosters hoped to sustain Fillmore Street's new position as a major commercial district, and in 1907 installed a series of illuminated iron arches over fourteen intersections on the bustling thoroughfare. However, within a few years it was clear that the area's commercial enterprises would be largely neighborhood-oriented and would not replace the recovered Market Street or Union Square as San Francisco's main shopping center.²³ The government offices also moved out of the Fillmore area as the Civic Center was rebuilt.

¹⁹ Kahn and Dollinger, 1.

²⁰ Congregation Sherith Israel. (2003) <<http://www.sherithisrael.org/main.php/home/index.html>>

²¹ Congregation Beth Israel Judea, "Our History" (2009) <<http://bij.org/about/history.html>>

²² PBS/KQED, "The Fillmore," *Neighborhoods: The Hidden Cities of San Francisco*, documentary film, 2001.

²³ Pepin and Watts, *Harlem of the West: The San Francisco Fillmore Jazz Era* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006), 30. Robert F. Oaks, *San Francisco's Fillmore District* (San Francisco: Arcadia Press, 2005), 37.



**Fillmore Street looking north toward Sutter Street, ca. 1916.
(Collection of the San Francisco Public Library)**

Like other residential neighborhoods that survived the 1906 earthquake and fires, the Western Addition was developed intensely in the years that followed as those who had been uprooted staked their claims to homes and jobs in surviving areas. Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. maps from the 1910s show the post-disaster neighborhood fully built-out with multi-unit apartment buildings sharing blocks with older single-family residences and flats. Fillmore Street and adjacent blocks held theaters, a department store, photo studio, shops, liquor stores and restaurants, while smaller concentrations of stores and services appeared on Geary, Post and Sutter streets. The Majestic Hall, built in 1910 at the southwest corner of Geary and Fillmore streets by Emma Gates Butler and her daughters, joined Fillmore Street's popular Franklin Hall. James W. and Merritt Reid, well-known San Francisco architects who designed the Majestic (later known as the Fillmore Auditorium), also designed a five story mixed-use building across Fillmore Street that was constructed in 1911.²⁴

Many of the neighborhood's stately pre-disaster buildings, which had previously functioned as single-family dwellings, were divided into flats and rooms and let to boarders to satisfy the acute housing shortage. As the neighborhood became more densely occupied, it also grew more racially and ethnically diverse and more working class in character. In addition to the Japanese population formerly of Chinatown and South Park who sought new homes in the Western Addition neighborhood, the Jewish population grew, and Mexican Americans, African Americans, Filipinos and other ethnic groups also gravitated to the Western

²⁴ The Reid Brothers were responsible for designing a number of San Francisco landmarks such as the Fairmount Hotel and the First Congregational Church, Pepin and Watts, 30. Fillmore Plaza Apartments Historic Resources Inventory, (Sacramento: California Department of Parks and Recreation, Office of Historic Preservation, 1990).

Addition-Fillmore area. Although the Majestic (Fillmore) Auditorium was segregated up to the 1950s, by the 1920s, Dreamland Auditorium at Post and Steiner streets hosted sumo wrestling matches and Franklin Hall held Saturday night dances attended by Filipinos.²⁵ The area became one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the Western United States.²⁶ Raphael Weill School at 1501 O'Farrell Street, along with Pacific Heights Elementary School at 2340 Jackson Street, served most children in the Japantown area. Named for a prominent merchant and philanthropist, the Raphael Weill School's student body reflected the diversity of the multi-ethnic neighborhood, which Dorothea Lange called "the so-called international district" when she captured now-iconic images of the school's Japanese American students just days before they were forced to leave San Francisco with their families to go to World War II internment camps.



**Rafael Weill School students, 1933.
(Collection of Hatsuaro Aizawa)**

While numerous accounts refer to the many ethnic/racial groups who called the Western Addition-Fillmore area home, the ability to find records that document their history has varied. For example, the Ellen Ford Home for Women, operated by the Japanese Mission, on Pine Street between Laguna and Buchanan streets is known to have sheltered single mothers and orphans from the Japanese community, as well as Korean refugee children, yet no other references to pre-WWII Korean presence was found.²⁷ Also, the Sanchez Delicatessen on Steiner Street made tamales and tortillas and accounts of Latino students at Raphael Weill School attest to the presence of Mexican Americans in the neighborhood, but

²⁵ Issel and Cherny, 68. Oakes, 51. Leonard Austin, *Around the World in San Francisco* (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University, 1940)

²⁶ PBS/KQED. Pepin and Watts, 30.

²⁷ The Ford Home is briefly described in Diane Yen-Mei Wong, ed., *Generations: A Japanese American Community Portrait* (San Francisco: Japanese Community and Cultural Center, 2000), 29. Japantown activist and historian, Karen Kai, shared the fact that the home was administered by the Japanese Mission.

more detailed information was not located.²⁸ A closer review of city directories, census records, and interviews would be needed to fully explore these and other less-understood dimensions of neighborhood history. Along with Japanese and Japanese Americans, whose cultural community is described in this document, the history of African American presence in the area, and to a lesser extent the Filipino presence, was more readily documented.

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE WESTERN ADDITION-FILLMORE AREA BEFORE WWII

Even as Los Angeles' African American population surpassed that of San Francisco in 1900, San Francisco's African American community was notable for providing social, cultural and economic leadership across California. San Francisco's reputation as an "open, egalitarian town" survived, in no small part, due to African American struggles during the 19th century to ride on public transport, secure integrated public schools, obtain the right to vote, serve on juries and testify in court.²⁹ However, the lives of African Americans in San Francisco were fundamentally affected by general racism as well as San Francisco's "closed shop" labor policies and discriminatory unions. For these reasons, the city's African American population did not grow as quickly as in other cities. San Francisco's African American population remained stable but small through the first decades of the 20th century, never climbing to more than 1% of the total population, while cities such as Oakland, which could offer newcomers industrial jobs, saw a large increase in African American residents.

According to Albert Broussard (1993), from 1900 to 1930 legal restrictions on housing were not widely applied to African American residents in San Francisco. Broussard argues that this was because their relatively small numbers did not threaten majority populations in the same way as the larger minority population of Chinese immigrants, whose housing options were severely limited. Despite San Francisco's wider residential opportunities in comparison to those in many Eastern cities, African American enclaves developed in the downtown, North Beach, South of Market and the Western Addition neighborhoods during the early 20th century.³⁰ After the 1906 disaster, African Americans moved to "the roughhouses and flats along Bush, Pine, Sutter and Post, [and] rooms above stores on Divisadero and Fillmore."³¹ As San Francisco's African American population grew after World War I and during the 1920s, the community coalesced around the Western Addition, which became its residential, cultural and economic center. By 1930, nearly fifty percent of San Francisco's African American population lived in the Western Addition, and the stretch of Fillmore Street from McAllister to Sutter Streets and between Divisadero and Webster Streets "became the focal point of Black activity."³²

²⁸ Jerry Flamm, *Good Life in Hard Times* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1977), 73. Al Robles, interview by the author, January 2008, San Francisco.

²⁹ Albert Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas, 1993), 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

³¹ Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1990), 101.

³² *Ibid.*, 31.

Industrial and manufacturing work available to African Americans in other cities was made off-limits to African Americans, Asians, and other people of color by the discriminatory policies of unions, who wielded exceptional power in San Francisco's "closed-shop" workplaces. Except in very rare instances, avenues to employment in civil service and professional jobs were closed to African Americans. The majority of African American men and women made their living in domestic service during the 1920s and '30s.³³ Middle-class African Americans in the Western Addition-Fillmore area were primarily ministers, attorneys, musicians, doctors and nurses whose clientele were drawn from their own community. Likewise, small, service-oriented businesses such as barbershops, beauty salons, tobacco stores and billiard halls established by African American entrepreneurs were rarely in competition for customers with the larger markets that served other ethnic populations. An exception was the Butler Funeral Home, located at Sutter and Fillmore streets, which served African American, Japanese and Chinese residents. Founded by John Howard Butler in 1923, the funeral home was the only African American mortuary in San Francisco and the most profitable African American-owned enterprise in the city before 1930.³⁴

Broussard writes in *Black San Francisco* that up until the post-WWII period, African Americans in the Bay Area had to rely on their own churches, lodges, women's clubs and fraternal orders to serve all community needs. Churches were a foundation for African American social and spiritual life. Three major congregations were founded in the 1850s: Bethel African Methodist Episcopal, Third Baptist Church, and First African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion. Of these, only First A.M.E. Zion Church at 1669 Geary Street was located in the Western Addition.³⁵ Outside of church activities, the entire African American community gathered for sporting events, particularly games played by the Bay Area "colored baseball league."³⁶ Working-class African Americans congregated in the barbershops and beauty salons, pool halls and street corners along Fillmore Street to share news and socialize. Elite African American men and women formed organizations such as the Cosmos Club and the exclusive "Committee of Fifty," a Bay Area-wide women's organization founded by Alice Butler, wife of Butler Funeral Home director, John Howard Butler. Middle-class African Americans also formed clubs that organized dances, bridge parties and dramatic performances. Male and female members of the Kalendar Club, which met in the Western Addition's Booker T. Washington Center, combined social activities with a welfare committee that provided funds for community causes.³⁷

Because African Americans were denied access to many of San Francisco's institutions, community leaders developed their own recreational and social services programs and facilities. The Booker T. Washington Community Center, named for the famed Tuskegee Institute founder, was started in 1919 by African American women dismayed at the lack of social services offered to their families and youth.³⁸ The center began operations out of a

³³ Broussard, 44, 47.

³⁴ Ibid., 56.

³⁵ Ruth Hendricks Willard, et al., *Sacred Places of San Francisco* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1985), 79.

³⁶ Broussard, 72.

³⁷ Ibid., 64, 67.

³⁸ California Office of Historic Preservation, *Five Views: An Ethnic Site Survey for California*, (California Department of Parks & Recreation, 1998.)

Geary Boulevard basement in the 1920s and, as demand for its youth activities grew, the community raised funds to purchase property at 1433 Divisadero Street. The Western Addition Improvement Association, a group of ethnically European property-owners that formed in response to the neighborhood's increasing racial diversity, opposed the sale of the building to African Americans. Claiming that African American and Asian residents reduced property values, the Association held public meetings and hired an attorney, but was ultimately unsuccessful in thwarting the construction of the new community center. African American ministers and women's clubs, along with doorbell ringing volunteers, both African American and European American, raised contributions toward the cost of the structure.³⁹ Under the leadership of African American social worker, Ethel Riley Clark, the center offered educational, social and recreational programs to youth and adults from the late 1920s through the Depression.⁴⁰ The Booker T. Washington Center still serves the Western Addition community from its current home at 800 Presidio Avenue.

Organizations of African American women were critical to the social life of the African American community and the development of an infrastructure of care for its members. Elite African American women formed clubs that sponsored social events such as teas, formal dances and cultural programs. Covered by the African American press, these gatherings reinforced social distinctions within the community and refuted stereotypes about African American culture. Perhaps influenced by their *Nikkei* neighbors in the Western Addition, as well as by the three-acre Japanese tea gardens and pavilions displayed at that year's Panama Pacific Exposition, the San Francisco Colored Women's Club organized a gala program in 1915 with a Japanese theme and prizes for the best Japanese costume. Yet these clubwomen also felt a moral imperative to support African American San Franciscans with greater struggles. A few years after holding its Japanese-themed event, the San Francisco Colored Women's Club started an employment bureau for African American job seekers. One of the city's most active and prominent women's club leaders, Irene Bell Ruggles, served as President of the California State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs from 1923-24. Ruggles had been instrumental in founding another African American women's business, literary, and social club in 1919. Like the Booker T. Washington Center, the Walker Club was named in honor of a national African American figure, in this case entrepreneur Mme. C.J. Walker, who died in 1919 and whose Midwestern-based cosmetics company made her the first female African American woman millionaire.⁴¹ Two years later Ruggles, along with Mildred Dennis and Tulip Jones, expanded the club's charitable work by opening the Mme. C.J. Walker Home for Girls at 2066 Pine Street. According to the 1999 City Landmark designation report for the Walker Home, the structure had housed a Japanese family named Kikuchi earlier in the century.⁴²

³⁹ Broussard, 33-34.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴¹ Harlem 1900-1940. "Exhibition: Madame C.J. Walker (Sarah Breedlove) (1867-1919)" <www.si.umich.edu/chico/Harlem/text/cjwalker.html>

⁴² "Brief History of Home," (San Francisco Planning Department files.) "Landmark Designation for Madame C.J. Walker Home for Girls and Women, 2066 Pine Street," June 1999, 6. (San Francisco Planning Department files.)



**Meeting of the Beautician's Club at the Mme. C.J. Walker Home, 1930s.
(Collection of San Francisco Public Library)**

An account of the Walker Home's activities, written circa 1920, described the need for the facility as: "There being no colored Y.W.C.A. in the city, the Home must perform to some extent the duties of a 'Y.'" Japanese and Chinese YWCA branches had been established in the 1910s to serve the relatively large populations of those ethnic groups, but the small number of African American women in San Francisco did not receive a dedicated YWCA branch, as did those in Oakland and Los Angeles.⁴³ Single African American women new to San Francisco found lodgings and job referrals at the Walker Home. In addition to providing social services, the house's social hall and large kitchen allowed for community gatherings. The Walker Club sponsored an annual Christmas event "at which time the block is roped off so that the children may safely enjoy the games dancing and music."⁴⁴ The Home was the site for meetings of the Mme. C.J. Walker Club, fundraising events and community gatherings. From 1921 to 1972 the Home provided shelter, recreation and community ties for African American women and children until it relocated to a new facility on Hayes Street.⁴⁵

African American political and civil rights organizations were formed during the same era by many of the same individuals who established the social clubs. The Bay Area branch of the NAACP was established in 1915 with headquarters in the more populous African American community of Oakland. But community leaders around the Bay worked together on common protest campaigns, with San Francisco leadership provided by John Howard Butler. NAACP members focused on local issues, such as discriminatory housing and service

⁴³ YWCA of Greater Los Angeles. "Historical Info" (2004) <http://www.ywcagla.org/topic_about_us.asp>

⁴⁴ "Brief History of Home."

⁴⁵ "Landmark Designation for Madame C.J. Walker Home for Girls and Women, 2066 Pine Street."

in public establishments, but also joined in national efforts such as anti-lynching crusades and the Scottsboro Boys defense from the 1910s through the 1930s. A separate San Francisco branch of the organization was established in 1923.⁴⁶ New organizations to complement the NAACP's focus on civil rights were organized during the 1930s. John Howard Butler founded the Colored Citizens Committee, a political advocacy group, and the California State Colored Republicans League, with headquarters at 1898 Sutter Street, was established in 1932.⁴⁷ Reverend J.J. Byers, pastor of the First A.M.E. Zion Church, led the drive to form a Bay Area branch of the Urban League in 1926, and helped establish an inter-racial fact finding committee to determine the need for a permanent employment and social services agency. Ultimately blocked by perceptions that San Francisco's small, non-industrial African American community was not the highest priority, the Urban League's national secretary, Arnold T. Hill, and leaders on the inter-racial committee withdrew their support for a San Francisco Urban League. Not until 1946 would the national office recognize that the African American community of San Francisco merited its own Urban League.⁴⁸

FILIPINOS IN THE JAPANTOWN-FILLMORE AREA

Most of San Francisco's Filipino immigrants historically lived in Manilatown, a ten-block area just east of Chinatown, on and around Kearny Street. As these immigrants set down roots, many moved to the Japantown-Fillmore neighborhood in search of housing that could accommodate their growing families. The historic co-location of these Asian immigrant groups -- Filipino, Chinese and Japanese -- is a pattern found in many California towns and cities; the pattern was shaped by a combination of factors that included socio-economic grouping, urban geography, and racial discrimination. However, unlike Chinese and Japanese immigrants, who began arriving in the United States in the 19th century, Filipinos did not come to California in large numbers until the 1920s.

The American occupation of the Philippines, beginning in 1898, set the stage for Filipino immigration to the U.S. This migration began with small groups of upper-class *pensionados* who traveled for higher education, followed by much larger numbers of working-class laborers who immigrated for employment on Hawaiian plantations. Many *manongs*, as first generation Filipino immigrants are known, immigrated once again to the mainland as demand for "stoop labor" in Western agricultural states grew. By the time of the 1930 U.S. Census, California had over 30,000 Filipino residents. Filipino immigrants occupied a particularly tenuous position in the United States; like the Japanese they were "aliens ineligible for citizenship," and, because the Philippines was occupied by the U.S., had no government to act on their behalf when necessary.

Most *manongs* lived in rural areas, but by 1930 "Manilatown" had formed in San Francisco, Stockton and Los Angeles.⁴⁹ Like Chinese and Japanese immigrants before them, early Filipino enclaves were primarily populated by single men. Their "bachelor society" centered

⁴⁶ Broussard, 75-85.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 95.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 87-89.

⁴⁹ Fred Cordova, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1983), 17.

on pool halls, barbershops, gambling rooms and dance halls. San Francisco's Manilatown shared the transient, male character of enclaves found throughout the West Coast and acted as a point of embarkation for *manongs* who joined the seasonal migrant labor pool in California fields, and canneries in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest. Even as late as 1930, the male-to-female ratio for Filipinos in the U.S. was nearly fifteen to one.⁵⁰

For Filipinos who married and started families, lodging in the hotels and rooming houses around Chinatown proved less than ideal, and new Filipino communities began in the South Park area below Market Street and in the Japantown-Fillmore area. *Pinoy*s (Filipino Americans) were drawn to the Japantown-Fillmore area during the 1930s for the same reasons many other households and businesses were established there – they found relatively affordable building stock in a multiracial neighborhood where they could build families and community. One 1940 account of San Francisco's ethnic neighborhoods described Filipino “families liv[ing] along Geary and O’Farrell streets from Laguna to Webster” and commented on the number of “mestizo families, Tagalog-Spanish and Tagalog-Chinese.”⁵¹ Armando Rendon and Sugar Pie deSanto described growing up in such mixed-race families in *Harlem of the West: The San Francisco Fillmore Jazz Era*. Rendon's father emigrated from the Philippines in the early 1920s; his mother arrived in the U.S. from Guatemala in 1929. After meeting and marrying in the Fillmore district, they had their first child, Armando, in a house at Bush and Octavia streets. Famed blues singer, DeSanto, recalled her pre-WWII childhood home at Buchanan and Webster streets where her Filipino father and African American mother raised ten children.⁵²

While there is scant secondary literature describing Filipino history in the Japantown-Fillmore area, interviews with Filipino Americans who grew up in the neighborhood during the 1930-50s sketch a vibrant community of *Pinoy*-owned businesses, community groups and strong connections to local churches.⁵³ Joe Julian remembered: “There were a number of Filipino Americans who lived in that neighborhood. The Estrella family lived at Webster and Bush. The Kopico family lived on Bush between Webster and Buchanan. The Anolin family lived at Laguna and Bush. The Anolins owned a restaurant in the neighborhood.” For the primarily Catholic Filipino community, the church and parochial schools were centers for family and community life. Joe Julian fondly recalled his confirmation at St. Francis Xavier Church (1801 Octavia Street) and his years at Morning Star School (1715 Octavia Street), where he attended grade school and middle school in classes that reflected the neighborhood diversity in a student body of Filipino, African American, Japanese American, Latino and European American children. Julian remembered that youth in need of guidance were invited for lunch at the Sisters Home around the corner at 1911 Pine Street. Although most of the neighborhood's Filipinos were Roman Catholic, a small congregation formed the First

⁵⁰ Michel S. Laguerre, *The Global Ethnopolis: Chinatown, Japantown and Manilatown in American Society*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 79.

⁵¹ Austin.

⁵² Pepin and Watts, 39, 37.

⁵³ Telephone interviews were conducted by the author with Janet Alvarado, Emil de Guzman, Joe Julian and Al Robles in January 2008.

Filipino Christian Church, a few blocks west at 2012 Pine Street, next to the Nichiren Buddhist Church.⁵⁴

Al Robles recalled over a dozen Filipino-owned grocery stores, barber shops, pool halls, clubs and restaurants in the neighborhood. Most were on Geary Boulevard between Fillmore and Laguna streets. A *manong* named Ralph Yngojo reportedly owned three businesses on Webster Street between Post Street and Geary Boulevard: the Yngojo Grocery, a pool hall and a Gulf gas station.⁵⁵ A barbershop and pool hall provided vivid memories for many Filipino American men. Armando Rendon recalled in *Harlem of the West*: “The place I recall the most was a Filipino barbershop and a pool hall, located on Geary Boulevard near Buchanan Street, and in spaces that were side by side, but with a door cut into the wall, so that people could go back and forth. As a teen, I would go get my haircut and then go play pool with my friends. The crowd was mainly Filipino.”⁵⁶

Benevolent associations and organizations of immigrants from the same town or region of the Philippines were an important part of community life. The Japantown-Fillmore area had clubs named for the towns of Cardona and Pangasinan, as well as a branch of the Knights of Dimas-Alang, whose headquarters were in Manilatown.⁵⁷ Joe Julian recalled the annual picnics organized by the local Cardona Club that alternated between San Francisco and the agricultural town of Santa Maria – underscoring ties between urban and rural Filipino communities. The Iloilo Circle – the only one of these organizations still housed in Japantown today and located at 1809 Sutter Street – has reportedly operated in the neighborhood since the 1930s and was known for organizing celebrations for the entire *Pinoy* community from the 1930s to the 1950s. Saturday night dances at the Franklin Hall were another favorite social event for Filipinos in the neighborhood. Photographer Ricardo Alvaraz, part of the first wave of Filipino immigrants, documented scenes of community celebration during the 1940s and ‘50s in the Japantown-Fillmore area. Alvarez created a remarkable photographic record of urban and rural scenes of *Pinoy* community life, as well as images of the lively music scene around him in the Fillmore neighborhood where he lived. His archive, curated by his daughter Janet Alvarez, became the subject for the Smithsonian Institution’s first exhibit to highlight Filipino American life.⁵⁸

The war years meant new job opportunities for Filipino Americans, but at the same time many encountered increased racial discrimination when they were mistakenly identified as Japanese. Filipino families moved into quarters left vacant by the interned Japanese. As Emil de Guzman described it “When the Japanese were evacuated, Filipinos moved in. They

⁵⁴ According to Al Robles, the First Filipino Church was active from before WWII until the Redevelopment era. The current building used by Japanese Community Youth Council at this address is the same structure with a remodeled façade.

⁵⁵ Robles interview.

⁵⁶ de Guzman, Julian and Robles all brought up these businesses in their interviews. Pepin and Watts, 37.

⁵⁷ Austin states that the Knights of Dimas-Alang was located at 1717 Sutter Street. Japantown activist and historian, Karen Kai, stated that a Filipino women’s organization, Pearls of the Orient, held meetings in the Japanese YWCA building on Sutter Street during the 1950s.

⁵⁸ Susan Mandel, “Memories of the Manong,” *Washington Post*, January 6, 2002. <www.thealvaradoproject.org> and <www.sites.si.edu/exhibitions/exhibits/father/main.htm>

wanted to expand out of the Kearny Street area.” In 1946, the Julians had to move from their home at 1812 Bush Street when a *Nikkei* dentist returned to reclaim his house. The year 1946 was critical for the entire Filipino community as a second wave of immigrants who had fought in the U.S. military during WWII arrived in San Francisco. The Filipino community in the Japantown-Fillmore neighborhood persisted during the post-war period until federally funded urban renewal resulted in demolition of many of their homes in both Manilatown and the Japantown-Fillmore neighborhood. A guide to the Filipino community published in the early 1970s described San Francisco’s 12,327 *Pinoy*s as being scattered throughout the city with concentrations in the South of Market and Mission Districts. It listed no Filipino businesses in the Japantown-Fillmore neighborhood.⁵⁹

JAPANESE IN SAN FRANCISCO: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

EARLY JAPANESE IMMIGRATION TO CALIFORNIA AND SAN FRANCISCO

The historic Japanese community of San Francisco, centered for the past century in Japantown, is the first and oldest urban community of its kind in the continental United States.⁶⁰ Japanese began to arrive in California in 1869, when a handful of men and women migrated to San Francisco. Most of these initial immigrants made their way inland to the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony in El Dorado County, the earliest chapter in the long intertwined history of Japanese settlement and agriculture in the Golden State. The U.S. Census of 1870 showed 55 Japanese in the United States; 33 were in California, with 22 based near the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm. The census of ten years later demonstrated a slight increase to 86 Japanese in California, with a total of 148 nationally. After Japan liberalized emigration restrictions in the mid-1880s, the number of Japanese coming to the United States climbed more rapidly as young men sought to leave sparse economic opportunities in their home country. By 1890, 2,038 Japanese lived in the United States, with 1,114 residing in California.⁶¹

As Yuji Ichioka wrote in his study *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924*, first-generation Japanese immigrants, or *Issei*, occupied a tenuous position in the United States. While Congress had granted citizenship status to African Americans, “Japanese immigrants, being neither white nor black, were classified as ‘aliens ineligible for citizenship,’ without the right of naturalization.”⁶² These legal restrictions, and underlying racism, shaped the lives of Japanese immigrants and their descendants for many decades. Ichioka divides Japanese immigration into two major periods: 1885 to 1907 and 1908 to 1925. The first period brought *dekasegi* laborers who, like many European immigrants, intended to return eventually to their native country – hopefully with new wealth in hand.

⁵⁹ Rodolfo I. Necesito, *The Filipino Guide to San Francisco* (San Francisco: Technomedia, ca. 1978)

⁶⁰ Japanese immigration to Hawaii predates immigration to the continental U.S. and California.

⁶¹ “A History of Japanese in California” by Isami Arifuku Waugh, Alex Yamamoto and Raymond Y. Okamura in California Office of Historic Preservation, *Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey for California*.

⁶² Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924* (New York: The Free Press, 1998) 1, 51-52.

However, unlike European immigrants who could journey as families, restrictive policies and custom meant that the first immigrants from Japan were overwhelmingly male.

Starting in the late 1860s, the Japanese Meiji government's political and economic policies fueled emigration out of financial and employment needs, as well as desires to escape political and social boundaries. Initially, Japanese immigrants to the U.S. were male students who arrived directly from Japan to attend American universities and to work. However, U.S. worker protests in 1900, which were aimed at restricting Chinese worker immigration, also resulted in curtailing direct immigration of Japanese to California. Consequently, the next few years were characterized primarily by immigration of Japanese peasants and laborers through Hawaii.

The second broad period of immigration identified by Ichioka began around 1908 and continued until 1924. The "Gentleman's Agreement" of 1907 between nations established restrictions on the emigration of Japanese laborers to the United States. During this period, Japanese immigrants to the U.S. were typically distinguished from laborers by education, skills, or affluence. In California, they set down roots in rural agricultural communities and in cities like San Francisco (the primary immigrant gateway to the Western U.S.), Sacramento and Los Angeles. Also under the Gentleman's Agreement, the Japanese government's regulations allowed businessmen and farmers to arrange for wives to emigrate from Japan. Encouraged by community leaders to make an economic stake in their new land, Japanese families established their permanent homes in the Golden State.⁶³

SAN FRANCISCO'S EARLY JAPANESE COMMUNITIES

Until 1906, San Francisco, chief port of entry for Asian immigration, had the largest *Nikkei* population of any mainland American city. Numerous social, economic, and political organizations originated in the city, including several churches, such as the Japanese Reformed & Evangelical churches, the Buddhist Church of San Francisco, the Buddhist Churches of America, the Japanese Presbyterian Mission, the Japanese Young Women's Christian Association and Young Men's Christian Association, the Japanese Salvation Army, and civic organizations such as Japanese Benevolent Society, Japanese Association of America, and the Japanese American Citizens League.

The first Japanese immigrants arrived in San Francisco in 1869. Their numbers were small, and consisted mainly of young men. Within a year, the first Japanese Consulate in the United States was established in San Francisco.⁶⁴ As immigrant ranks gradually increased, social institutions arose to serve them. In 1877, the *Fukuin Kai* (Japanese Gospel Society) believed to be the first Japanese organization in the U.S., began meeting at the Chinese Methodist Mission in Chinatown. In the late 19th century several more Japanese Christian organizations were founded and grew in San Francisco, subsequently spreading to a number of other Japanese communities on the West Coast, and in the Central Valley, Pacific Northwest,

⁶³ Ibid., 4-5.

⁶⁴ Kenji Murase, "Timeline of *Nikkei* in San Francisco, 1850-1942" *Nikkei Heritage* v. XII, no. 3 (Summer 2000), 11.

Midwest, and South. By 1898, San Francisco was also the location for the headquarters of Buddhist churches and social organizations that had branches throughout the West. Other important institutions included prefectural associations, or *kenjin-kai*, and Japanese American newspapers.

By the turn of the 20th century, as the size of the Japanese population continued to increase, racist opposition to Japanese immigration began to coalesce, led by San Francisco Mayor and later California Senator James D. Phelan, and involving existing labor unions. Hostility towards Japanese immigrants worsened after Japan's victory in the 1905 Russo-Japanese War raised awareness of Japanese military power. However, much of the animus resulted from economic rivalry between Japanese immigrants and surrounding communities. San Francisco, with significant Japanese immigrant population, was a center for this antipathy. Following the 1906 disaster, the San Francisco Board of Education adopted a policy intended, for the first time, to restrict Japanese students to the segregated school previously established for Chinese American students. When the Japanese government protested, an international dispute arose. President Theodore Roosevelt intervened to urge that the policy be rescinded, and the school board agreed in return for a promise by Roosevelt to stem Japanese immigration. In response, Roosevelt negotiated the 1907 "Gentlemen's Agreement" between the United States and Japan, by which further immigration of Japanese laborers was drastically reduced. Some immigration, most importantly that of Japanese women, continued until the passing of the Immigration Act of 1924, which completely curtailed immigration from Japan until 1952.⁶⁵

In 1913, California law, in the form of the Heney-Webb Alien Land Act, forbade property ownership by "aliens ineligible for citizenship."⁶⁶ (At the time, immigrants from Asia were not permitted to become naturalized citizens.) Given the population of California at the time, this restriction applied almost exclusively to Japanese immigrants, and remained in effect until 1952. The Japanese American community was further restricted by anti-miscegenation laws, which prevailed through the 1960s and prohibited interracial marriages. The Gentlemen's Agreement, however, did provide a few exceptions to the restrictive legislation. It permitted the immigration of Japanese women whose husbands were already living in the U.S., including "picture brides," who may never have met their husbands prior to immigrating. This provision marked an important shift in the nature of the Japanese community in San Francisco, by facilitating the establishment of families and a *Nisei* (second) generation who were citizens by birth and thus legally able to own property. Institutions to serve this changing community quickly arose, including Japanese language schools and pre-schools for the rapidly Americanizing *Nisei*. So, although immigration was limited and civil rights restricted, the existing Japanese American community continued to grow socially and culturally.

Early Japanese immigrants to San Francisco had settled in Chinatown. This co-location of Asian immigrants fit a pattern that was replicated across the Western United States during

⁶⁵ "A History of Japanese in California" by Isami Arifuku Waugh, Alex Yamamoto, Raymond Y. Okamura in California Office of Historic Preservation, *Five Views: An Ethnic Site Survey for California*.

⁶⁶ Federal law, since 1790, had limited naturalization to "free white persons". However, due to ambiguities over the definition of "white" some 400 Japanese immigrants had been naturalized over the years prior to 1910.

the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Communities of Japanese and Chinese immigrants have distinctive but related histories shaped by immigration policies, changing demands for cheap labor, restrictions on land ownership, and racial animus. Chinese immigrants pioneered many of the occupations and neighborhoods in which Japanese immigrants later settled. They also shared a marginalized status as non-citizens, as represented in the physical separation of the residential enclaves they created with fellow countrymen. Areas of town already inhabited by Chinese immigrants, who began arriving in the California during the Gold Rush, were often the only neighborhoods that permitted the first waves of Japanese immigrant men to find residences and set up small businesses.

By 1900, there existed a second cluster of Japanese people and commercial establishments South of Market, along Jessie and Stevenson streets, between 5th and 7th streets. When both of these areas were destroyed in the earthquake and fires of 1906, the majority of the Japanese community relocated to the present Japantown area in the Western Addition. Another smaller Japanese enclave was established in the rebuilt South Park, a unique neighborhood originally designed for the wealthy elite in the South of Market area. The latter location was convenient to piers then in use by Japanese shipping companies, as well as to the railroad station, a point of entry for the large rural Japanese population. There, a collection of hotels, baths, and other establishments came into being to serve travelers. However, the 1924 Immigration Act, which blocked further immigration from Japan, and the 1933 relocation of the Japanese shipping companies to the northern waterfront meant the end of the South Park Japanese neighborhood.



South Park Japantown, 1910s.
(Collection of Japanese American Historical Archive)

SAN FRANCISCO'S JAPANTOWN: HISTORY OF A CULTURAL COMMUNITY

The Western Addition, site of the present Japantown, was an established Victorian-era neighborhood, home to a mix of European immigrants and their native-born offspring, before becoming a Japanese American enclave. The 1900 Census shows a concentration of residents born in German-speaking parts of Europe, the second most prevalent national group in San Francisco. A large proportion of these residents were Jewish, and the area still includes a number of synagogues or former synagogues and other Jewish institutions. There were no Japanese households in the area at the turn of the century.⁶⁷ However, immediately after the 1906 disaster, San Francisco's Japanese population relocated here in significant numbers. This process was recorded and encouraged by editorials in *Shin-Sekai* (*The New World* newspaper, originally a publication of the Japanese YMCA until it split off in 1897), which predicted that rents in the area would soon be forced down as ruined parts of the city were rebuilt. The publication encouraged Japanese to establish a new and permanent community in the Western Addition.

By the time of the 1910 Census, the core area of Japantown, bounded approximately by Bush Street (north), Geary Street (south), Webster Street (west), and Laguna Street (east), was home to more than 50 Japanese-owned commercial establishments, and to most of the 4,700 Japanese residing in the city⁶⁸. The commercial infrastructure included ethnic mainstays such as Japanese grocery stores, importers, and restaurants. Support for the still largely single male population was visible in several Japanese pool halls, residence hotels, and employment agencies. The growing presence of families was reflected in a Japanese kindergarten, a dressmaker, and several midwives. However, property records from the same time show no Japanese owners in the area⁶⁹, even though the Alien Land Law restricting Asian immigrants from owning property did not occur until 1913. Rather, Japanese Americans at that time typically lacked the accumulated capital to purchase property. Later, when the Alien Land Law did restrict Asian immigrants to three-year leases on property, the practice of recording property ownership in legal trust under the name of a cooperative (non-Asian) partner who could legally own property became common.

The Japantown community prospered through the 1920s and '30s. By 1940, the Japanese population of the area, although by then second in size to Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, numbered over 5,000—with more than 200 Japanese-owned businesses.⁷⁰ Japanese names

⁶⁷ Census analysis was conducted by Tim Kelley and Gerald Takano for "Japantown Historic Context Statement," 2003. Twelfth Census of the United States (1900), Population Schedules, Enumeration Districts 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209 & 210.

⁶⁸ Thirteenth Census of the United States (1910), Population Schedules, Enumeration Districts 181, 186, 187, 188, 194, 243, 244, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 256.

⁶⁹ San Francisco Block Book, 1910.

⁷⁰ Sixteenth Census of the United States (1940), Census Tracts J-2, J-3, J-6, J-7 and J-8 (bounded by Gough, Eddy, Steiner, Fulton, Geary, Fillmore, Baker, & California streets) Although these Tracts together encompass an area slightly larger than that defined as the Japantown Core, it is not possible to break the census data into more precise increments, and it may be assumed that the non-"white", non-"Negro" population of these Tracts was concentrated in the Core.

began to appear as property owners in the area in the 1920s, as the *Nisei* generation took ownership of their family homes and businesses. By 1930, at least 55 parcels were Japanese-owned. Prior to American entry into World War II, this number had more than doubled to 122.⁷¹ While some Japanese purchased property and recorded it in the name of their American-born children, many continued to use the convention of land trusts with cooperative partners because of the ongoing political agitation against the Japanese, which included efforts to divest American-born children of Japanese descent of their U.S. citizenship.



Japantown Businesses along Geary Street, 1910s.
(Collection of National Japanese American Historical Society)

GROWTH OF NIHONMACHI'S COMMERCIAL SECTOR

San Francisco's first Japanese entrepreneurs established businesses that addressed the needs of migrant laborers who passed through the city. One of the most prominent early immigrants from Japan, Kyutaro Abiko, operated a restaurant and laundry that served his fellow countrymen from 1885 to 1906. Abiko was the president of the *Nichibei Kangyosha* (Japanese American Industrial Corporation), a labor contracting company which supplied Japanese immigrant labor to the Utah Sugar Company, Union Pacific Coal Company, and various railway companies in the Western U.S. He was also the founder and head of the *Beikoku Shokusan Kaisha* (The American Land and Produce Company), an agricultural land holding company established for the benefit of Japanese immigrant farmers. Abiko set the vision for Japanese immigrants to permanently settle in the U.S. and was instrumental in promoting the Yamato and Cortez colonies in Central California. Abiko also founded and

⁷¹ San Francisco Assessor's data was analyzed by Tim Kelley and Gerald Takano for "Japantown Historic Context Statement," 2003. City and County of San Francisco Assessor's Sales Ledgers, Blocks 649, 659, 651, 652, 653, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 685, 686, 687, 688, 697, 699, 700, 701, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712.

published the period's most influential *Nikkei* daily newspaper, *Nichibei Shimbun* (Japanese American News) in San Francisco from 1899 to 1942.⁷²

Boarding houses, restaurants, pool halls and barbershops served the first permanent residents of the early Japanese enclaves in Chinatown and South Park. San Francisco's current Japantown was born of the trauma and dislocation wreaked by the 1906 earthquake and fires. Japanese immigrants joined in the rush to find a more hospitable neighborhood for their homes and businesses in the Western Addition. Michel Laguerre credits the 1906 disaster with providing Japanese an opportunity for upward residential mobility that would not have occurred in a more stable period. Property owners of European ancestry rented to Japanese disaster refugees, which prompted the *San Francisco Chronicle* to publish an alarmist piece on March 24, 1907 titled "A Greater San Francisco or Lesser Nagasaki – Which?" about the Japanese "invasion" of the Western Addition.⁷³

Within four short years of the 1906 disaster, *Nihonmachi* housed dozens of businesses and Japanese community organizations primarily between Sutter and Geary, and Webster and Octavia streets, with secondary concentrations around the intersections of Pine Street with Fillmore and Gough streets. More than twenty hotels and boarding houses, and a number of employment agencies attest to the continued role of San Francisco *Nihonmachi* as an immigrant gateway and a stopping-off place for migrant laborers. Despite these patterns of immigrant bachelor culture, a handful of midwiferies indicate that immigrant families were forming in Japantown by this date. Some establishments such as the Teikoku and Hashimoto Hospitals, as well as shipping companies and insurance agents provided culturally-sensitive services that no doubt drew immigrants from smaller Japanese communities around the Bay Area along with patrons from Japantown itself. Two Japanese newspapers, the *New World* on Geary Street, and *Japanese American News* on Laguna Street, connected San Francisco's Japantown with *Nikkei* communities across Northern California.⁷⁴ Yet many Japantown businesses such as restaurants, shoe stores, laundries and art good stores presumably drew their clientele from the non-*Nikkei* communities as well as fellow immigrants.⁷⁵ These businesses often operated out of small storefronts added to the fronts of 19th century residences.⁷⁶

As the community grew in subsequent decades, older businesses begun in the wake of the 1906 disaster moved to more favorable locations in the area, making way for newer establishments. These transitions reflected the general growth of the area and its neighborhood-serving businesses, as well as the impermanence that resulted from the inability of most *Nikkei* to own the properties from which they ran their businesses. For instance, by 1925, the Uoki K. Sakai Fish Market had moved from its original location on

⁷² Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1989), 194-95. Brian Niiya, ed., *Japanese American History: An A-to-Z Reference from 1868 to the Present* (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 94-95.

⁷³ Michel Laguerre, *The Global Ethnopolis: Chinatown, Japantown and Manilatown in American Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 64-65.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁷⁵ Ben Pease, 1910: San Francisco's Japantown Relocates after the Earthquake and Fire (map) (San Francisco: Pease Press, 2006.)

⁷⁶ The Japantown Task Force, Inc., *San Francisco's Japantown* (San Francisco: Arcadia 2005), 22.

Geary Boulevard, where it had operated near several *Nikkei* hotels, groceries and the Benkyo-do Confectionery, to a property at 1684 Post Street. The Sakai family also moved their residence to a large house across the street at 1628 Post Street that could accommodate their nine children in upstairs quarters.⁷⁷ Uoki K. Sakai Fish Market shared its new block on the north side of Post Street between Buchanan and Laguna streets with the Nippon Drugstore, Namiye Murayama Kinmon Maternity Hospital, and Gosha-do Books and Stationery store; all established by the late 1920s.⁷⁸ The drugstore down the block at 1609 Post Street, run by a Mrs. Misawa, was the first Japanese pharmacy registered in San Francisco.⁷⁹ Prominent and longtime establishments, the Aki Hotel and Nichibei Bussan dry goods store, were located on the south side of Post Street. As Harry L. Kitano noted, “by 1924, next to agriculture, the major occupation of the Japanese was in small shops and businesses.”⁸⁰



Gosha-do Books and Stationery, 1698 Post Street, 1928.
(Collection of Hatsuho Aizawa)

Although Los Angeles’s Little Tokyo exceeded San Francisco’s Japantown in size by 1907, the thriving community in San Francisco supported connections to *Nikkei* throughout the city, the Northern California region, and in Japan. Within San Francisco, *Nihonmachi* businesses were tied to *Nikkei* establishments in other areas of the City, such as the

⁷⁷ Wong, 17.

⁷⁸ Ben Pease, Western Addition and Japantown, 1920s (map) (San Francisco: Pease Press, n.d.). Japantown Task Force, Inc., *San Francisco’s Japantown*, 39.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 40.

⁸⁰ Harry H.L. Kitano, *Japanese Americans: the Evolution of a Subculture* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1969), 21.

California Flower Market in the South of Market area, and Japanese art goods stores in Chinatown. Nippon Gold Fish at 1919 Bush Street shipped its fish to out-of-town customers via rail. Some businesses had related operations in other Japantowns, like Mizuhara Bros., which sold and repaired antiques and arts from a shop at 1823 Sutter Street, and also operated a second establishment in Berkeley's Japantown at 1538 Parker Street.⁸¹ *Nikkei* newspapers and banks headquartered in San Francisco had branches and agents in smaller Japantowns across the state.

As the largest Japantown in Northern California, and one conveniently located in a port city, San Francisco's *Nihonmachi* continued to draw *Nikkei* from smaller communities to its businesses and services. Shipping and importing concerns maintained the flow of Japanese goods to *Nikkei* customers in the United States and American goods and profits back to families in the home country. Activities in Japantown were heightened when ships from Japan came into port every two weeks. Local hotels garnered business from *Nikkei* who came from out-of-town to greet arrivals or get passports and visas before departing, as well as newcomers who stayed in San Francisco before moving on to other locations.⁸²

Hard work, frugality, and a largely family-based labor pool allowed Japantown businesses to weather the Depression. *Nikkei* shops and restaurants were community gathering places, as well as sites for economic transaction; Hatsuo Aizawa recalled that the business where his father was manager, Goshado Books and Stationery, was a place where people browsed and played cards, even when they had no money to buy owner Shoroku Ono's merchandise.⁸³ By 1940, Japantown boasted more than 200 Japanese-owned businesses and a population of over 5,000. The thriving community included its own professionals – doctors, dentists and lawyers – as well as *Nisei* architect Gentoko “George” Shimamoto, whose practice at 1534 Geary Boulevard had designed Buddhist churches in San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose. There were stores to fill every need – dry goods, groceries, books, bicycles and hardware. Hungry diners had choices of American-style soda fountains, sushi and chop suey restaurants and freshly made *manju*. *Nikkei* auto mechanics, plumbers and cobblers worked on cars, houses, and shoes. It was not uncommon to find a diverse, multi-racial group of patrons eating side-by-side at the family-run businesses such as the Mikado Cafeteria, which served hot dogs and ham-and-egg sandwiches, as well as its popular fried noodles.⁸⁴ Japantown of 1940 was part of the web of modern American commerce, but still featured four traditional *sentos*, or public bathhouses. Employment agencies still helped *Issei* newcomers find connections to prospective employers.⁸⁵

Even as *Nihonmachi* grew in population, prominence and complexity, restrictions on property ownership meant that most *Nikkei* businesses were operated out of buildings that had been constructed and altered by others and often were originally intended for other uses. These structures, like most found in early 20th century urban ethnic enclaves, did not announce the identities of their immigrant residents – they did not “look Japanese.” Yet historic

⁸¹ Ibid, 23.

⁸² “Japantown in the 20s and 30s,” *Nikkei Heritage*, v. XII, no. 3 (Summer 2000), 14.

⁸³ PBS/KQED.

⁸⁴ Wong, 20-21.

⁸⁵ *Japanese American News Directory* (San Francisco: Japanese American News, Inc., 1941), 1-26.

photographs indicate that some Japantown businesses, like the Mikado Cafeteria and Hotel on Post Street, featured architectural flourishes meant to communicate the Japanese heritage of their proprietors and nature of their goods and services. However, few purpose-built structures from the pre-war period exist that reflect Japanese American development and design – those that do were investments in the community’s social and spiritual life.



Mikado Hotel and Cafeteria on Post Street, 1930s.
(Reproduced in *Generations*)

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE OF NIHONMACHI

Japantown residents were supported by social, religious, cultural and political organizations that fostered and protected the close-knit community. Christian churches, Buddhist temples, and Japanese language schools, or *gakuen*, served as the primary gathering places where Japanese immigrants and their children passed on and preserved traditional cultural practices. In addition to their fundamental significance as cultural institutions to all Japantowns before Executive Order 9066 (which ordered the wartime internment of West Coast Japanese and Japanese Americans), these institutions played a central role during and after the wartime internment. Throughout California, these facilities often stored belongings for interned *Nikkei*, and rapidly converted into hostels to shelter those returning from internment camps who had lost their homes.

The 1941 *Japanese American News* directory lists over forty churches and religious organizations, and seventeen schools and kindergartens in San Francisco, nearly all of them in the Western Addition's Japantown.⁸⁶ Japanese Christian churches outnumbered Buddhist temples in most pre-war Japantowns for several reasons; most prominent being that non-Asian Christian missionaries eagerly proselytized to new immigrants from Japan and established missions in many *Nihonmachi* that developed into full-fledged churches. Various Christian sects, most commonly Methodist and Presbyterian, each developed their own institutional bases and the buildings to house them. Although several Buddhist traditions were present in California, the Jodo Shinshu or Shin sect, under the San Francisco-based leadership of Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) was by far the most dominant. Therefore, most *Nikkei* communities housed only one Buddhist temple, and the number of Buddhist churches was smaller than Japanese Christian churches of varying denominations. A typical pre-war California Japantown featured two or three Christian churches representing various denominations, with one Buddhist church under the BCA umbrella, as well as traditional religions such as Konko and Shinto.

San Francisco is notable for the variety of Japanese American religious institutions and as the place where major *Nikkei* spiritual traditions were first established in the continental U.S. According to the *The Eighty-fifth Anniversary of Protestant Work Among Japanese in North America*, "When Kanichi Miyami was baptized by Dr. Gibson in San Francisco in 1877, he became the first Japanese Christian in America."⁸⁷ Methodist and Presbyterian congregations, the most common denominations throughout California Japantowns, are represented in San Francisco, as well as Episcopal and Evangelical. The Japanese Methodist Episcopal Church (later Pine United Methodist Church) and Japanese Presbyterian Church date back to the 1880s, with Christ Church (Episcopal) formed in 1895. By the 1910s, the First Reformed Church (later First Evangelical and Reformed Church) had moved into a large building vacated by Plymouth Congregational Church at 1760 Post Street and adjoining its community hall at 1746 Post Street (later, the *Hokubei Mainichi* building).⁸⁸ San Francisco's Japantown also included a more unusual example of a Catholic *Nikkei* Church. St. Francis Xavier Mission, a Catholic order named for the first Jesuit missionary in Japan, was founded in a small Buchanan Street building in 1912. By 1939, the Church had moved to its present location at Octavia and Pine streets and was housed in a new edifice designed by architect H.A. Minton to reflect the church's Eastern and Western connections.

Just down the hill sat the church's Morning Star School, a similarly imposing blend of Asian and Mission Revival styles that began serving kindergarten through sixth grade in 1929.⁸⁹ The pastor and congregation of St. Francis Xavier Mission were involved with the private school's construction, which included a multi-purpose auditorium "built for the staging of Japanese plays."⁹⁰ In addition to the regular curriculum, Japanese language classes were held

⁸⁶ Ibid., 2-3.

⁸⁷ *The Eighty-fifth Anniversary of Protestant Work Among Japanese in North America, 1877-1962* (Los Angeles, 1964), 51.

⁸⁸ The Japantown Task Force, Inc, *San Francisco's Japantown*, 51. The *Hokubei Mainichi* building at 1746 Post Street was demolished in 2008.

⁸⁹ Willard, 185.

⁹⁰ Alex Yamato, Morning Star School (Gyosei Gakko) Historic Resources Inventory Form (Sacramento: California Office of Historic Preservation, 1979.)

at Morning Star for elementary and high school students from public schools. Following World War II, the student body of Morning Star School became multi-ethnic when African American and Filipino American children began to attend.



**First Evangelical Church on 1760 Post Street, 1934.
(Collection of Hatsuho Aizawa)**

Even with the strong presence of Christian churches, more than three-quarters of Japanese Americans were Buddhist prior to World War II. The United States' major Japanese Buddhist institution grew from the Young Men's Buddhist Association formed in San Francisco in 1898. Officially titled the Buddhist Church of San Francisco in 1905, the church served Japantown first from a building at 1617 Gough Street, and since 1914 from its current location at 1881 Pine Street. The year 1914 was also when San Francisco became the location of the headquarters for the Buddhist Mission of North America, which administered all Jodo Shinshu (Pure Land) Buddhist churches and temples, the predominant form of Buddhism practiced by Japanese in the U.S. In 1935, the San Francisco Church and Buddhist Mission decided to construct a new temple with funds raised from districts outside of San Francisco, as well as local members. The San Francisco Japanese Carpenter's Association carried out a design by local architect, Gentoko Shimamoto, which included a large dome, or stupa, holding relics of the Buddha gifted by the King of Siam.⁹¹

⁹¹ Willard, 163-65.



**Buddhist Church of San Francisco.
(SFPL historic photograph collection)**

San Francisco's Japantown also included the Konko-kyo Church founded in 1930, and smaller Buddhist sects such as Tenrikyo, Soto Zen and Nichiren Buddhist churches. The Tenrikyo Church, which stood at 1440 O'Farrell Street, is no longer extant, but the Nichiren Church still resides in a large Classical Revival style house at 2016 Pine Street. The Sokoji Zen Center remains active in a post-war Japanese-style building at 1691 Laguna Street. In 1934, the Soto Zen *sangha* (congregation) bought the former Ohabai Shalom temple at 1881 Bush Street when dwindling membership and the neighborhood's changing demographics caused the Jewish congregation to leave. For over forty years, the building housed the Japanese Zen community and was the place where Shunryu Suzuki introduced Zen Buddhism to many non-*Nikkei* in the 1960s and '70s. Japanese Buddhism in the U.S. had adopted a number of customs from Christian churches, such as pew seating, which the new students of traditional *zazen* (sitting meditation) wanted to change. George Hagiwara, a Sokoji member whose family was revered in San Francisco's Japantown for their role in the creation of the Japanese Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park, helped organize the purchase of tatami mats and meditation cushions for the non-*Nikkei* students. But as the predominately non-Asian San Francisco Zen Center grew under Suzuki Roshi's leadership, the Japanese members of the *sangha* decided to withdraw in the 1970s and build new quarters nearby.⁹²

Christian affiliated groups were responsible for some of the most impressive building efforts in pre-war Japantown. The Salvation Army, YMCA and YWCA all built community facilities

⁹² San Francisco Japantown Task Force, Data Sheet: 1881 Post Street (Kokoro Assisted Living), (2004.) David Chadwick, *Crooked Cucumber: The Life and Zen Teachings of Shunryu Suzuki* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999), 258-9, 178-9.

that still stand as landmarks in Japantown today. The Japanese Division of the American Salvation Army was formed in 1919 under the leadership of Major Masasuke Kobayashi, who led its mission to serve the elderly, widows and orphans. Kobayashi spearheaded a fundraising drive in both the U.S. and Japan to raise money for a dedicated building, which was initiated with a \$5,000 donation from the Emperor of Japan and completed at the corner of Geary Boulevard and Laguna Street in 1937.⁹³ One year earlier, the Japanese Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) dedicated a new building one block to the west. Founded in 1886, the Japanese YMCA had operated out of several locations until 1926, when it moved into a 19th century house at 1409 Sutter Street, which still stands today. By the late 1920s, the need for space to accommodate recreational and social activities for growing numbers of *Nisei* members led to fund-raising campaign for a purpose-built YMCA. The \$25,000 raised within San Francisco's Japantown community was matched by approximately \$15,000 donated by supporters in Japan. The new building at 1530 Buchanan Street was dedicated in 1936 and boasted meetings rooms, a small chapel and a gymnasium, along with Y-sponsored football and baseball teams and a summer camp program for Japanese American youth.⁹⁴



Left: Original home of the Japantown YMCA at 1409 Sutter Street, 1930.
(Collection of National Japanese American Historical Society)
Right: Buchanan Street YMCA, 1964. (Collection of San Francisco Public Library)

Japantown's Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) building is a rare public emblem of the struggles and accomplishments of *Issei* women in the United States. Barred by segregationist policies from use of key facilities in the main YWCA chapter, especially the residence hall, the *Issei* women formed an independent Japanese Young Women's Christian Association in 1912 to address social and service needs of *Nikkei* women and children. The organization was briefly located on Gough Street, then moved to 1826 Sutter Street in the 1920s and ultimately to its home at 1830 Sutter Street. Although other cities had Japanese YWCA organizations, San Francisco's Japantown YWCA, built in 1932, appears to be the

⁹³ Alex Yamato, Japanese Salvation Army Building Historic Resources Inventory Form (Sacramento: California Office of Historic Preservation, 1979.)

⁹⁴ Interpretive exhibit at Buchanan YMCA (2007.) Alex Yamato, Buchanan YMCA Historic Resources Inventory Form (Sacramento: California Office of Historic Preservation, 1979.)

only structure purpose-built by and for *Issei* women in the United States.⁹⁵ Designed by noted architect Julia Morgan, whose many YWCA projects also included San Francisco's Chinatown YWCA, the building was funded by money raised within the Japantown community, as well as donations from the National and San Francisco YWCAs.⁹⁶ Because the Alien Land Law prevented *Issei* from owning property, the San Francisco YWCA held the property in trust for the *Nikkei* community.⁹⁷ In addition to dormitory occupancy for ten, the building held classrooms and meeting rooms, a library and an office.



Japantown YWCA Building Fund, late 1920s campaign.
(Reproduced in *Generations*)

Along with the Japanese Salvation Army, YMCA and YWCA, the Kinmon Gakuen (Golden Gate School) is one of four community facilities created through organization and fundraising by residents of the pre-war *Nihonmachi*. Kinmon Gakuen first enrolled students in 1911 and by 1926 was housed in a purpose-built building at 2031 Bush Street. Children enrolled at Kinmon Gakuen studied culturally relevant subjects such as ikebana, Japanese musical instruments, and etiquette, as well as Japanese language.⁹⁸ Japanese language schools allowed *Issei* parents to educate their children in the language and customs of their home country, with the additional benefit that the youth would be prepared should the family decide to return to Japan.⁹⁹ The first recorded *gakuen* in California was San Francisco's Shogakko, established in 1902.¹⁰⁰ Japanese schools flourished throughout the state as *Nisei*

⁹⁵ Communication between Karen Kai and author, January 2008.

⁹⁶ Alexander Yamato, Western Addition YWCA Historic Resources Inventory Form (Sacramento: California Office of Historic Preservation, 1979.)

⁹⁷ Discover *Nikkei*. "The Japanese YWCA in San Francisco." (10 November 2005)

<www.discoverNikkei.org/wiki/index.php/Japanese_YWCA_SFO> provides an account of the struggle to reclaim the Japantown YWCA between 1996 to 2002.

⁹⁸ San Francisco Japantown Task Force, Data Sheet: Kinmon Gakuen Building – Japanese Language School, 2004.

⁹⁹ Brian Niiya, ed., *Japanese American History: An A-to-Z Reference from 1868 to the Present* (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 189-90.

¹⁰⁰ California Office of Historic Preservation, *Five Views: An Ethnic Site Survey for California*.

children grew in numbers and age. Similar to Japantowns across California, San Francisco had a variety of language schools sponsored by Buddhist and Christian churches, as well as independent organizations. The Sano School was established in 1906 as part of the community's response to the Board of Education's policy toward segregated schools. *Issei* parents formed the school as a boycott measure. It was located at 1761-65 Post Street, now the site of the national JACL headquarters.¹⁰¹ In 1912, the Japanese Association of America countered attacks on Japanese schools as promoting "Emperor worship" by described their purpose as inculcating Japanese character and American spirit to develop permanent U.S. residents.¹⁰²

San Francisco's Japantown relied on numerous organizations to weave the community together and to advocate for its interests. *Kenjinkai*, associations of immigrants from various prefectures in Japan, played both economic and social roles for *Nikkei*. Shared identities and connections were reinforced at annual picnics, dinners, and other social functions; *Issei* would also pool their funds to help a fellow *kenjinkai* associate in need.¹⁰³ Even though the allegiance to prefectural associations shrank as ties to the home country diminished, *kenjinkai* flourished up until WWII. The 1941 *Japanese American News* directory lists over a dozen *kenjinkai* in San Francisco's Japantown.

The leading economic and political organization for early Japanese immigrants was established in San Francisco in 1900. Begun as the Japanese Deliberative Council of America, the organization sought to "expand the rights of Imperial subjects in America and to maintain the Japanese national image" in the face of growing anti-Japanese activism. By 1908, a consortium of local councils was formed and overseen by the Japanese Association headquarters in San Francisco. In addition to fighting the anti-Japanese crusade, the Japanese Association was given bureaucratic functions by the Japanese government, which treated the Association as its representative in many areas. Just prior to WWII, the San Francisco Japanese Association, Japanese Association of America, and the Japanese Benevolent Society all shared quarters at 1619 Laguna Street.¹⁰⁴

The Japanese American Citizen's League (JACL) also was established in San Francisco. Founded in 1918 by a small group of *Nisei* students as the American Loyalty League, within a decade chapters of the renamed Japanese American's Citizens League were active across the West, promoting citizenship, loyalty, and patriotism to the United States. In 1935, the JACL focused on a pair of issues that affected not only American *Nikkei* but any aliens ineligible for citizenship; the repeal of the Cable Act, and the granting of citizenship status to Asian aliens (including *Issei*) who served in World War I. In 1941, the organization's offices were located at 1623 Webster Street. The JACL's cooperation with the U.S. government as the events of WWII internment unfolded resulted in some controversy regarding the organization's place in Japanese American history at that time. The organization, whose national headquarters are located at 1765 Sutter Street, is the largest and most prominent

¹⁰¹ The Japantown Task Force, Inc., *San Francisco's Japantown*, 26.

¹⁰² Alexander Yamato, Golden Gate Institute (Kinmon Gakuen) Historic Resources Inventory Form (Sacramento: California Office of Historic Preservation, 1979.)

¹⁰³ Niiya, 200-01.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 187. *Japanese American News* Directory, 1.

national Japanese American political organization. JACL played an instrumental role in obtaining redress for Japanese American internees and in advocating for other Asian American civil rights issues.¹⁰⁵



Japanese American Citizen's League, 1929.
(Collection of Japanese American National Library)

WORLD WAR II AND INTERNMENT¹⁰⁶

The Japanese Navy's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941 abruptly ended the prosperity established by Japanese immigrants in the Western U.S. In *Nihonmachi* throughout California and the West, including San Francisco's Japantown, prominent Japanese American businessmen, Japanese clergy, and school teachers declared by the U.S. government to be "enemy aliens" were collected in FBI sweeps and detained in jail and eventually in Department of Justice internment camps. Ichiro Kataoka, owner of the Aki Hotel, was among the first arrested; guests in the hotel's banquet room attending a gathering of the Hiroshima Kenjinkai were held that night and questioned for hours. Japantown residents were scrutinized by automobiles filled with curious outsiders who drove through the streets

¹⁰⁵ Niiya, 182-84. *Japanese American News Directory*, 2

¹⁰⁶ The term *internment* generally refers to imprisonment of enemy aliens during wartime. However, approximately two-thirds of persons of Japanese ancestry who were "interned" by the federal government during World War II were U.S. citizens (and therefore not "aliens"). Nonetheless, *internment* remains the commonly used term for the historical events.

of *Nihonmachi*. “They just kept coming and coming....staring at us,” remembered Yo Hironaka.¹⁰⁷

After initial appeals for fair treatment of resident Japanese Americans, anti-Japanese hysteria in San Francisco intensified with American entry into World War II, fanned by editorials in San Francisco newspapers and by nativist and agricultural interest groups. Under the authority of Executive Order 9066 signed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in February 1942, General John L. DeWitt issued a series of military proclamations from the headquarters of the Western Defense Command at the Presidio of San Francisco. The proclamations first established restricted military zones on the West Coast within which “all enemy aliens and all persons of Japanese ancestry” were subject to military regulation. By late March 1942, DeWitt began issuing Civilian Exclusion Orders expelling “all persons of Japanese ancestry, including aliens and non-aliens” from the West Coast military zones. In a little over 4 months, more than 120,000 Americans of Japanese Ancestry were forced from their homes and interned by the government under the guise of national security. Forty years later, after extensive research and testimony, the Congressional Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians would find that Executive Order 9066 and the internment of Japanese Americans was “a grave injustice” arising from “race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership.”¹⁰⁸



**Japantown residents registering at Kinmon Gakuen, 1942.
(Collection of Bancroft Library)**

¹⁰⁷ Wong, p39.

¹⁰⁸ Personal Justice Denied, Report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (December 1982), 18.

The entire Japanese community of San Francisco, both citizens and foreign-born, was ordered to register and eventually report for processing to various sites throughout San Francisco including the *Kinmon Gakuen* building on Bush Street, the YMCA Building on Buchanan Street, and Raphael Weill School (now Rosa Parks Elementary), from which the last busloads of Japanese Americans departed the City. By April, they were sent to various “Assembly” centers, like Tanforan, a hastily and poorly converted racetrack in San Bruno that was used as a temporary detention camp. From there, they were shipped out to permanent internment camps in rural areas throughout the Western U.S., where they lived under armed guard in temporary housing and surrounded by barbed wire. Most San Francisco residents were relocated to a camp known as Topaz, located near Delta, Utah. Without charges, hearings, or trials (and despite that two-thirds of the interned were U.S. citizens), many *Nikkei* families remained in the camps until 1945.

Against such treatment and obstacles, Japanese Americans showed courage, fortitude, and resilience. Japanese Americans demonstrated their commitment to American principles and values despite living under harsh conditions. Many American *Nisei* complied with the draft, from which they had been excluded until 1944,¹⁰⁹ and agreed to fight for the United States Armed Forces, or to support the American war effort in tangible ways. The famed Japanese American 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team, which fought in Europe and assumed tremendous casualties, became the most decorated unit in American military history. Others served as soldier linguists in the Pacific Theater as members of the Military Intelligence Service (MIS). Building 640 in the San Francisco Presidio served as the Military Intelligence Service Language School and was the birthplace of the Defense Language Institute, where Japanese American enlisted men secretly started training one month prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Eventually, the MIS language students served in the US Army, attached to every unit in the Pacific Theater. They served as linguist soldiers: translating, decoding documents, interrogating Japanese prisoners, and interpreting commands, which ultimately resulted in hastening the War’s end.

Others challenged government policies by answering “no” to so-called “loyalty questionnaire” administered by the War Relocation Authority in February 1943. Asked whether they were willing to serve in the U.S. armed forces and to swear allegiance to the U.S. government, some *Nisei* found that “no” was the only answer they could honestly give consistent with American values of equal justice under the law they had absorbed during childhood. *Issei*, who were not eligible to attain citizenship, found themselves in the impossible position of forswearing allegiance to Japan and swearing allegiance to the United States, a position that left them potentially stateless. *Nisei* who refused the draft on the basis that the government violated their rights and freedoms with the incarceration of their families served up to three years in federal penitentiaries, and at war’s end, President Truman granted them pardons. *Nisei* Mitsuye Endo, Gordon Hirabayashi, Fred Korematsu and Minoru Yasui each pursued legal action challenging the constitutionality of wartime incarceration; their cases were rejected by the U.S. Supreme Court (although Endo’s petition

¹⁰⁹ tenBroek, Jacobus et al., *Prejudice, War and the Constitution*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1954), 166.

for release of “loyal” internees was granted over a year after programs that released camp residents for work, education and military service had been in effect).

During the war, the Japanese Salvation Army, the Buddhist Church, and the Reformed and Evangelical Church facilities in San Francisco’s Japantown were used to store family belongings and personal property. Other non-Japanese groups, notably the American Friends Service Committee and the Booker T. Washington Center, cared for the possessions of internees and operated hostels after the war. The Devolet Brothers, proprietors of a furniture store on Geary Boulevard, also stored Japanese families’ items for the duration of the war. Unfortunately, a number of storage sites that could not be secured were raided or vandalized by looters. The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco also took responsibility for the oversight of real estate belonging to some of those who were in the camps. Not all Japanese American property ownership was able to be maintained, however. Thirteen properties in the core of Japantown passed from Japanese to non-Japanese ownership during the war, as well as three other properties that were taken over by the Alien Property Department of the federal government.¹¹⁰

JAPANTOWN WITHOUT NIKKEI

Non-Japanese residents of the Japantown-Fillmore neighborhood felt the impact of evacuation. Joe Julian recalled the departure of fellow students at Morning Star School as one of his saddest childhood memories. Others described the surprisingly abrupt change to a thriving neighborhood. Reverend Wilbur Hamilton echoed many who witnessed the evacuation when he said, “One day they were there – and the next day they were gone.” Maya Angelou commented that none of her friends and no member of her household on Post Street mentioned the absence of the former *Nikkei* neighbors. However, her celebrated memoir, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, described the changes in the Western Addition wrought by WWII as a “visible revolution.... The Japanese shops which sold products to *Nisei* customers were taken over by enterprising Negro businessmen, and in less than a year became permanent homes away from home for the newly arrived Southern Blacks. Where the odors of tempura, raw fish and *cha* had dominated, the aroma of chitlings, greens and ham hocks now prevailed.”¹¹¹

African Americans found new opportunities during the war years, but apart from the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, San Francisco’s organized labor unions continued the discriminatory policies that had kept people of color out of permanent industrial jobs.¹¹² As an example, the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, the largest union representing shipyard workers, fought admission of African Americans bitterly, and finally set up separate and unequal “Jim Crow” auxiliary unions. These policies meant that, even as jobs were plentiful, they did not lay the foundation for African American workers to climb the economic ladder when the war ended. Wartime migrants to the Bay Area found that housing was as scarce as employment was abundant. San Francisco’s “small but

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, (New York: Random House, 1969), 203-204.

¹¹² Broussard, 153-58.

established” African American population in the Western Addition-Fillmore area, along with increasing residential segregation throughout the rest of San Francisco, made the neighborhood a logical magnet for incoming African American migrants participating in what many historians have called “California’s second gold rush.”¹¹³ The American Friends Service Committee used the newly vacated Japantown YMCA as a site to assist African American newcomers, as well as displaced German and Austrian Jewish refugees.¹¹⁴



Mayor Rossi visiting new residents in Japantown, 1943.
(Collection of San Francisco Public Library)

The acute housing shortage felt by tens of thousands of workers who flooded in from the South and Midwest for defense jobs was partially met under federal programs by homes made vacant by Japanese internment. However, a 1943 hearing before the House Naval Affairs Committee raised alarms about the extreme overcrowding in the Western Addition, one of the few neighborhoods where African American San Franciscans could find housing. The City’s Director of Public Health, Dr. C.J. Geiger, referred to supposed deficiencies in African American newcomers’ “careless housekeeping” of already dilapidated structures.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Watts and Pepin, 32.

¹¹⁴ Josephine Whitney Duveneck, *Life on Two Levels: An Autobiography* (Los Altos, CA: W. Kaufman, 1978), 227.

¹¹⁵ Scott, 254.

In contrast, the African American press argued that people who worked “all day for the maintenance of democracy” faced intolerable housing conditions.¹¹⁶

San Francisco’s African American population increased during WWII by 600%, with most of the 43,000 African American residents living in the Fillmore district.¹¹⁷ Prominent African American sociologist Charles S. Johnson led a pioneering study of San Francisco’s African American population in 1943, which concluded that “Black migrants were ambitious, enterprising, and industrious young men and women in the prime of life.”¹¹⁸ The increased population and disposable income granted by relatively well-paying defense jobs brought with it need for recreation and services that were soon supplied by restaurants, shops, and clubs that made the Western Addition-Fillmore neighborhood a hub for Black culture throughout the Bay Area.



1944 advertisement for the California Theatre Restaurant, formerly the Cherryland Sukiyaki Restaurant. (Reproduced in *Harlem of the West*)

From this energetic new community, charismatic African American leadership emerged. Physician Carleton B. Goodlett arrived in San Francisco in 1945 and began his involvement with two leading African American newspapers based in the Fillmore; the weekly *San Francisco Reporter* and the *Sun-Reporter*.¹¹⁹ Influential minister Reverend Hamilton Boswell was Pastor at Jones Memorial Church, which began out of a storefront at 1901 Bush Street in 1943 and moved to its current location at 1975 Post Street with over 300 members just two years later.¹²⁰ Internationally acclaimed theologian, Howard Thurman, arrived from the East Coast and founded the nation’s first inter-racial congregation, the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples, whose first home was in the Japanese Presbyterian Church at 1500 Post

¹¹⁶ Broussard, 174.

¹¹⁷ Jill Stoner and Michael Willis, *Digging in the Fillmore: The Search for the Soul of a San Francisco Street*, Report for the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, 1996.

¹¹⁸ Broussard, 138.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 182.

¹²⁰ Jones Memorial United Methodist Church, “Church History,” <www.jonesumc.org/jones_history.html>

Street.¹²¹ Additionally, Thurman's wife, Sue Bailey Thurman, organized a local chapter of the National Council of Negro Women.

During the first half of the 20th century, African Americans, like most other San Franciscans, especially working-class immigrants, made do with existing structures to create the physical landscape of their community. Residential and commercial buildings designed and developed by others were reinhabited and, in some instances, repurposed, to meet the burgeoning African American population's need for shelter, space for commerce, and entertainment venues. Not surprisingly, given wartime restrictions and lack of access to capital, no purpose-built structures reflect this thriving community during the war. Post-war urban renewal also removed many of the sites that held the history of San Francisco's "Harlem of the West." Yet, the Western Addition-Fillmore area still holds structures that embody this complex history. For instance, an Art Deco commercial structure at 1843-47 Fillmore Street held the Yokohama Art Goods Store before World War II and the offices of African American dentist, Lloyd Dickey, in the 1950s. Traces of African American community life also include a modest storefront at 1902 Fillmore that held Roberta's Millinery. Minnie's Can-Do Club, which opened in a former radio shop in 1940, had the longest run in one location of any of the Fillmore jazz clubs.¹²² The club closed in 1974, but its former home at 1915 Fillmore Street still stands, as do the structures that housed the Blue Willow Inn and Restaurant at Bush and Buchanan, and the Binford Hotel and Town Club at 1961-69 Sutter Street.

RESETTLEMENT AND RENEWAL

NIKKEI RETURN TO JAPANTOWN

Following the war, many Japanese Americans returned to Japantown, which had largely become occupied by wartime defense industry workers. Starting over was a particular hardship for most Japanese American families who did not own property, as temporary housing was often full. Re-entry into society was met with hostility and mistrust. The experiences of Japanese Americans in the decade after WWII has only recently become the subject of attention, most prominently in the *RE:generations* oral history project that has documented post-war resettlement in San Diego, Los Angeles, San Jose and Chicago.¹²³ Few scholars have explored resettlement in San Francisco's Japantown in detail; San Francisco State University Professor Ben Kobashigawa is currently researching post-WWII resettlement in the San Francisco Bay Area and Reid Yoshio Yokoyama wrote an undergraduate thesis on Japanese American resettlement in San Francisco in 2007.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Willard, 221.

¹²² Pepin and Watts, 83.

¹²³ *RE:generations* was a collaborative project with the Japanese American National Museum, the Chicago Japanese American Historical Society, Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego and the Japanese American resource Center/Museum of San Jose.

¹²⁴ Reid Yoshio Yokoyama, *Return, Rebuild and Redevelop: Japanese American Resettlement in San Francisco, 1945-1958* (undergraduate honors thesis, Stanford University, May 2007.)

Former evacuees held complex, and often ambivalent, feelings about returning to the communities from which they'd been forcibly uprooted. *Nisei* journalist, Bill Hosokawa, argued, in a *Pacific Citizen* editorial that moving eastward “offered unexpected possibilities for advancement and social assimilation...in the long run, the integration and acceptance of Japanese Americans would be speeded by widespread dispersal.”¹²⁵ Given vituperative pronouncements against *Nikkei* returning to California by organizations such as the American Legion and Native Sons of the Golden West, this perspective is understandable. Following a 1944 tour of San Francisco’s Japantown to assess post-war prospects, Japanese American Citizens’ league (JACL) president Saburo Kido identified four major areas of concern – housing, jobs, labor union antipathy, and potentially difficult relations with the many African Americans who had moved into the neighborhood. “Since they occupy the former Japanese residential district, they will resent being displaced by returning evacuees,” Kido wrote.¹²⁶

The federal War Relocation Authority (WRA), the Committee on Resettlement of Japanese Americans, and the American Friends Service Committee were the most active forces outside the community involved with resettling Japanese Americans during the war and at its close. In part, their policies, designed to disperse Japanese students and workers across the U.S., were based on the notion that this would prevent the reestablishment of “Little Tokyos” and “Little Osakas”, and would assist with a broader assimilation into mainstream American society. Proponents of dispersal overlooked the loss of cultural continuity and community structure that such policies entailed. Yet, despite these policies, and a fear of violence that was born out of sporadic incidents across California, former Japantown residents longed to return to their homes and *Nikkei* from other communities also desired to relocate to San Francisco based on the former strength of its Japanese American community.

The War Relocation Authority coordinated formal resettlement of San Francisco’s Japantown after Proclamation 21 of December 18, 1944 rescinded the West Coast ban on persons of Japanese ancestry. From its San Francisco base, the Northern California WRA office oversaw resettlement of evacuees from San Jose to Santa Rosa up until May of 1946, when the WRA regional office in San Francisco closed. The WRA, the American Friends Service Committee, and local civic groups such as the Council for Civic Unity organized support to ease the transition, but it was still a difficult and painful process for most.¹²⁷ Approximately 2,500 Japanese resettled in San Francisco in the first months of 1946, nearly half of the pre-war population, and almost two-thirds had arrived by October of that year to begin the complex task of rebuilding individual lives, businesses and community organizations.¹²⁸

Within two years, San Francisco’s *Nikkei* population was back to its pre-war size; however, other California communities, such as Fresno, Berkeley and San Jose, saw their Japanese

¹²⁵ Yokoyama, 13, 100.

¹²⁶ Saburo Kido to Members and Friends, Bulletin #33, November 14, 1944, 1. Box 35, JA Relocation – Non-Printed Matter, John W. Nason Papers, Hoover Institution Archives cited in Yokoyama, 58.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 55.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 105.

American population rise beyond pre-war numbers.¹²⁹ Professor Kobashigawa's current research indicates that the post-war population of *Nikkei* consisted predominately of newcomers to San Francisco. Kobashigawa's analysis of residential listings from 1948 and 1952 in directories published by the *Nichi Bei Times* and *Hokubei Mainichi* newspapers show that though San Francisco's listings of *Nikkei* doubled in those four years, only about one-third of the 1952 listings were names of people who had been residents prior to the war. While many of these people were new to San Francisco, they found the Japantown neighborhood to be the most amenable for resettlement. Nearly 75 percent of all of the post-war listings Kobashigawa found for *Nikkei* were for addresses in the Western Addition, with most of those located in Japantown.¹³⁰

The post-war housing shortage was extreme throughout the Bay Area, and many *Nikkei* lived in hostels while they scrambled to find more permanent lodgings. Sturge Memorial Hall at 1516 Post Street offered housing under the auspices of the Japanese Presbyterian Church next door.¹³¹ The Church was able to regain its property from the Church of Fellowship of All Peoples. Portions of the Pine Street Buddhist Church and the Evangelical and Reformed Church on Post Street also served as hostels into 1946. Even the Booker T. Washington Hotel at 1540 Ellis Street reserved space for returning *Nikkei*.¹³² The Booker T. Washington Center, which moved into the Kinmon Gakuen building during the war, and the AFSC established a men's hostel for returnees in that building. Some apartments were made available in defense housing, so that over 150 *Nikkei* families lived in the Hunter's Point area project in 1946. But this too was only temporary as most of the structures built for war workers were intended to be demolished when the war ended.

Finding jobs was an equally daunting task for returning *Nikkei*. Potential employers told WRA job counselors that current employees would never accept working alongside "a Jap,"¹³³ an argument similar to that heard just three years earlier about African American workers in defense industries. San Francisco's largest post-war employer of *Nikkei* was reportedly the Simmons Mattress Company, which employed over 150 *Issei* and *Nisei* laborers.¹³⁴ Yet, most older *Issei* found it impossible to restart the businesses they had built before incarceration and many of them turned to work as gardeners and domestic servants. Lily's Employment Agency at Steiner and Post Streets helped *Nikkei* find work as window washers, seamstresses, domestic servants, and gardeners. A handful of small businesses, such as the Sugaya family's Pine Street Laundry, Honnami Taieido art goods store, the Uoki Sakai market, and the Benkyo-do confectionary, were reestablished quickly. The Honnami family's possessions had been safeguarded and returned by their African American landlord.¹³⁵ But

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ben Kobashigawa, "San Francisco Returnees and Newcomers Map," August 2006.

¹³¹ Yokoyama, 82.

¹³² Buddhist Churches of America BCA Centennial History Project Committee. *Buddhist Churches of America: A Legacy of the First 100 Years* (San Francisco, California: Buddhist Churches of America, 1998), 306. Rosalyn Tonai, "Memo to Japantown Task Force Regarding the Evangelical and reformed Church: San Francisco Japantown's Japanese Christian Church and Dormitory and its relevance to the former Hokubei Mainichi Building site" (April 23, 2006.) Yokoyama, 82.

¹³³ Ibid., 79.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 83, 105.

¹³⁵ Wong, 55.

for others, reclaiming space and clientele took great effort. Goshado Bookstore reopened in 1947 at 1705 Post Street; their former site at 1698 Post Street became the home of Soko Hardware. The Matsumoto family also struggled to purchase the property at 1919 Fillmore Street that had housed their dry cleaning shop and residence before wartime evacuation. The family persisted, however, and was able to move back into the building and reestablish the California Cleaners.¹³⁶



Pine Street Laundry, 1946.
(Reproduced in *Generations*)

By 1949, Japantown had regained a lively, if reduced, commercial sector centered at Post and Buchanan streets. A 1948 Evacuation-Resettlement Directory published by the *Nichi Bei Times* listed over 150 *Nikkei* businesses and services, down from pre-war listings of more than 400 businesses.¹³⁷ Some pre-war establishments, such as the Ota Sewing Machine Co. at 1932 Buchanan Street and the Suzuki Apartments at 1802 Laguna Street, were revived. New businesses were opened by longtime residents such as Hatsuto Yamada, a former partner in the pre-war Nippon Drugstore, who founded Jim's Drug Company at 1698 Sutter Street.¹³⁸ The Takahashi Trading Company opened in 1947 at 1661 Post Street. Some landmarks of *Nikkei* commerce, such as the Azumaya Tofu Factory, Nippon Goldfish, and the Aki Hotel, resumed operations in their former locations. Japanese-run hotels also thrived and included the Annex Hotel at 1612 Fillmore Street and the Anglo Hotel Apartments (over the Anglo California Bank) at the corner of Fillmore Street and Geary Boulevard.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ PBS/KQED.

¹³⁷ Yokoyama, 107.

¹³⁸ Japantown Task Force, *San Francisco's Japantown*, 74.

¹³⁹ Yokoyama, 107.

Nikkei community institutions were also reclaimed and revived. The Japanese YMCA, which had been rented to the USO to serve African American troops, was returned to the Japanese American community under the leadership of newly elected President Fred Hoshiyama and renamed the Buchanan YMCA.¹⁴⁰ On the other hand, the YWCA parent organization told returning *Nikkei* women that an integration policy instated during the war prohibited “single-race” chapters. The AFSC, which was using the building at 1830 Sutter Street, allowed *Nikkei* women to organize activities in the building, which also provided shelter to returning women. But the Japanese YWCA was not reformed and instead joined with the Buchanan YMCA to create the first joint YWCA/YMCA in the nation.¹⁴¹ Most of the *Nikkei* churches were able to resume services within a year of the community’s return, although several had to negotiate reuse of their spaces with the African American congregations that had come to occupy the facilities in their absence. An inter-denominational organization, *Shukyoka Konwakai*, was formed in 1948 “to foster communication, understanding, and better relationships among religious leaders in the community.”¹⁴² By 1949, language schools at the Buddhist Church and St. Francis Xavier Church, as well as Kinmon Gakuen, had reopened. *Nisei* social life thrived as Boy Scout Troops resumed, athletic teams were formed and dances were hosted in community spaces such as the Buchanan YMCA.



The “Arbees,” a *Nisei* women’s bowling team, 1953.
(Reproduced in *Generations*)

Nikkei political organizations were renewed and began campaigns to address discriminatory legislation. The JACL and *Nikkei* newspapers worked to promote the Japanese American cause in 1946 when Proposition 15 threatened to increase enforcement of the Alien Land Law. The proposition was soundly defeated, but the law was not completely repealed until

¹⁴⁰ Interpretive exhibit at Buchanan YMCA.

¹⁴¹ Karen Kai; information is also incorporated in one of the San Francisco Japantown History walk panels.

¹⁴² Japantown Task Force, Data Sheet: Japanese American Religious Federation. (2004)

1956. A new Anti-Discrimination Committee was also formed by the JACL to fight restrictive covenants and barriers against *Issei* citizenship.¹⁴³ Japanese and other Asian immigrants were finally able to become naturalized citizens after passage of the Walter-McCarran Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. San Francisco's City Hall hosted naturalization ceremonies for hundreds of *Issei* over the following months.¹⁴⁴

Nikkei were rebuilding the Japantown community within a neighborhood that had witnessed a dramatic transformation during the war years. The area was still multi-racial, but was now widely known for its African American population, and especially a thriving nightlife supported by Black jazz and blues clubs. Nightclubs such as Jimbo's Bop City on Post Street, and Club Flamingo and Minnie's Can-Do Club on Fillmore Street formed a "Harlem of the West" that coexisted with the shops and restaurants of revitalized Japantown. By the time of the 1950 Census, although the *Nikkei* population in the Japantown area was nearly back to pre-war levels, other ethnic groups far outnumbered them.¹⁴⁵



Jimbo's Bop City and Uoki Sakai Co. on Post Street.
(Collection of National Japanese American Historical Society)

Although tension over critical resources such as housing and jobs was probably not uncommon, the communities coexisted and many recall the post-war years as a thriving, polyglot era. Judy Hamaguchi described post-war *Nihonmachi* as a "great neighborhood for a

¹⁴³ Yokoyama, 112-13.

¹⁴⁴ San Francisco Japantown Task Force, *San Francisco's Japantown*, 76.

¹⁴⁵ Census analysis was conducted by Tim Kelley and Gerald Takano for "Japantown Historic Context Statement," 2003. Seventeenth Census of the United States (1950), Census Tracts J-2, J-3, J-6, J-7 and J-8 (bounded by Gough, Eddy, Steiner, Fulton, Geary, Baker, & California streets) The population of these Tracts included 14,716 "Whites," 14,652 "Blacks," and 4,820 other "non-whites," who, it may be assumed were almost all Japanese. These tracts together encompass an area larger than that defined as the Japantown core. Census data is not yet available for more precise increments.

child to grow up,” despite living in a cramped subdivided Victorian flat on Post Street, Hamaguchi poignantly recalled the nights that next-door neighbor Jim Edwards, owner of famed Jimbo’s Bop City, shepherded Judy and her three-year-old brother to find their mother as she waitressed across the street at the Miyako restaurant.¹⁴⁶ In 1947, the Buchanan YMCA and the Japantown YWCA inaugurated an interracial youth program to serve African American and Japanese American children and teens.¹⁴⁷ Steve Nakajo recalled the 1950s neighborhood of his youth; “I had a mixed group of friends. Japanese. Filipino. Black. Mixed, like the neighborhood. We had the J-town walk. The J-town feel. When we got down to the Fillmore, we’d check everyone out and they’d check us out, because you had to know who your rivals were. The Fillmore was tough, but happenin’.”¹⁴⁸

REDEVELOPMENT IN THE WESTERN ADDITION

As early as 1942, while many of its residents were being interned, Japantown was being targeted for “slum clearance.” In April of that year, the *San Francisco News* announced that civic and business leaders “went all out to find a suitable plan that will prevent the Japanese district from turning into the worst slum in the history of the city.” Without legislation allowing a “slum clearance project” plans to clear the area were put on hold during the war, and an influx of African American war workers kept the area from abandonment.¹⁴⁹ However, in 1948, a portion of San Francisco’s Western Addition including much of Japantown was selected as one of the first large-scale urban renewal projects in the nation. The National Housing Act of 1949 set forth federal policies designed to address areas of “urban blight,” which were defined as neighborhoods with major influxes of new residents, overcrowding, cases of tuberculosis, and populations other than those of European descent—all characteristics of the Japantown-Fillmore area. San Francisco’s Planning Department had already begun establishing a case for rebuilding older neighborhoods with maps of blighted areas and a pilot study of redevelopment possibilities for the Western Addition.¹⁵⁰ One survey of the blocks between California, O’Farrell, Buchanan and Laguna Streets documented overcrowded homes, many without utilities, and some with sleeping quarters and cooking areas contained within the same room – a code violation and indicator of poverty conditions. A 1947 city map produced to promote the public health benefits of urban renewal compared the city’s costs in the Western Addition and the Marina districts. Not surprisingly, the number of County hospital cases and associated cost to the city posed by more affluent Marina district residents was a fraction of that in the Western Addition.

San Francisco’s political and business elite sought to position their city for economic growth, especially in relationship to the Bay Area’s booming suburbs.¹⁵¹ The Western Addition fit the needs of city planners and downtown developers, who saw the neighborhood as the best site

¹⁴⁶ Judy Hamaguchi, “Japantown, The Way We Were.” *Nikkei Heritage*, v. XII, no. 4 (Fall 2000/Winter 2001), 5.

¹⁴⁷ Interpretive exhibit at Buchanan YMCA

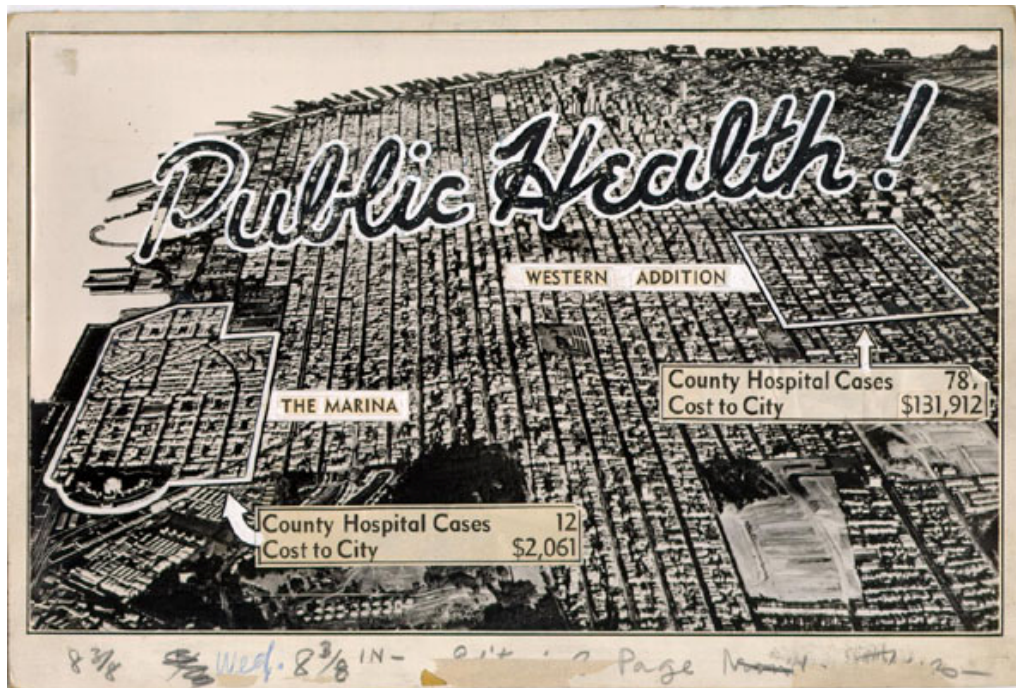
¹⁴⁸ Pepin and Watts, 40.

¹⁴⁹ “Slum Danger in ‘Jap Town’ Under Study; Civic Leaders Seek Suitable Plan for Evacuated Region,” *San Francisco News*, April 13, 1942.

¹⁵⁰ Scott, 288.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

for new commercial and housing developments that would increase tax revenues and provide new vehicle access through the city, connecting downtown with the middle-class neighborhoods of the Richmond and Sunset districts. By cataloguing the Western Addition's "substandard and slum housing conditions, overcrowding, lack of recreational space and intermixture of deleterious influences,"¹⁵² eligibility for federal redevelopment funds was established, and economic and social arguments were made for removing the businesses, residences and residents of the neighborhood.



Graphic argument for public health as an urban renewal issue, 1947.
(Courtesy of San Francisco Public Library)

From its inception, leaders of the ethnic communities that now called the neighborhood home were alarmed and worked to rally opposition to the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency's (SFRA) plans. In July 1948, the Buchanan Street YMCA hosted a meeting of over 300 residents, who heard NAACP President and publisher of the *Sun-Reporter*, Dr. Carleton Goodlett, speak about the threats posed by urban renewal. *Progressive News* publisher, Michi Onuma, cautioned the gathered throng that "no guarantees have been provided that new housing built in the area will not be priced out of the range of the average worker living there" and that "scores of small businessmen would be wiped out by the plan." The Council for Civic Unity organized a meeting of Japanese American property owners and pledged to fight for "protection of minority groups in redevelopment plans."¹⁵³ The JACL expressed its acute concern about redevelopment impacts and demanded that the SFRA incorporate several points into its plan to protect the rights of residents and small business owners:

¹⁵² San Francisco Redevelopment Agency. "The Tentative Plan for the Redevelopment of Western Addition Project Area Number One and Related Documents." (September 1952.)

¹⁵³ Pepin and Watts, 166-67. Yokoyama, 115.

- Despite these prophetic voices, and years of delay caused by lawsuits and the complications of developing a plan for relocating residents, the SFRA began acquiring properties in the late 1950s and mass clearance of much of the neighborhood through the use of eminent domain was accomplished within ten years. This undertaking was conducted in two project areas: A-1 and A-2.¹⁵⁵

This is a detailed street map of a residential area in San Francisco. The map shows a grid of streets with a large yellow-shaded area in the center. The yellow area is bounded by Garden, Post, and Scott streets on the west, Ellis and O'Farrell streets on the south, and Sutter and Sycamore streets on the east. The map includes numerous street names such as Garden, Post, Scott, Ellis, O'Farrell, Sutter, Sycamore, and many others. The yellow area is a large, irregularly shaped block of land.

Donna Graves
Page & Turnbull, Inc.

(SFRA map, altered by Page & Turnbull)

The A-1 redevelopment area encompassed an irregular area of 27 blocks, including much of Japantown south of Post Street. The SFRA's Western Addition Project Office was established in the Buchanan YMCA building in 1958. Project Area evictions were non-negotiable and there was no precedent established for relocation assistance for residents and businesses in this area. In addition, some business owners believed that the SFRA had a strategy for driving their purchase prices down. Vernon Thornton's thriving bowling alley on Fillmore Street lost its clientele as buildings around it fell to the wrecking ball. By the time the SFRA made an offer on his property, Thornton calculated that he received a fraction of its former worth.¹⁵⁶



Demolition for the Geary Expressway, 1960.
(Collection of San Francisco Public Library)

Eight thousand residents were evicted by the A-1 phase of redevelopment, displacing the neighborhood's multi-ethnic populace without a comprehensive plan for finding new homes. Nearly all of the area's residents rented or leased their homes and commercial establishments before urban renewal and thus received no relocation assistance or compensation. Additionally, only 686 units of the 2,014 new housing units constructed under the SFRA plan were offered at low to moderate rental prices, making it almost impossible for most previous tenants to return to the neighborhood.¹⁵⁷ The demolition of single- and two-family residences and the construction of large, low-income, multi-family complexes south of Geary Boulevard changed the mix and fabric of the community as well. Loss of housing and urban decentralization led Japanese American families who could afford to move to relocate elsewhere. The gradual lessening of restrictive covenants allowed some *Nikkei* to move to

¹⁵⁶ John H. Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 182-83.

¹⁵⁷ Shizue Siegel, "Nihonmachi and Urban Renewal," *Nikkei Heritage*, v. XIII, n. 4 (Fall/Winter 2000-2001), 20-21.

the outer suburbs of the Richmond and Sunset districts of San Francisco and to the East Bay cities of Oakland, Berkeley, Richmond, and El Cerrito. African Americans, however, found fewer options for relocation as racial discrimination continued to shape their housing opportunities. By 1960, African Americans represented 50 percent of Western Addition residents, up from 34 percent ten years earlier. The number of *Nikkei* dropped from 5,383 to 3,914 in the same decade, but due to the neighborhood's overall population decline, their percentage of the total population remained at about twelve to thirteen percent.¹⁵⁸

Many people were displaced numerous times as they moved from homes in the A-1 area. Yayoi Tsukahara described being evicted, with her husband Taro and young son, Michael, at least six times during the urban renewal period. The Tsukaharas were among the few that finally gained a permanent residence in one of the few affordable housing projects that were built. Taro Tsukahara was a member of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union and a trusted associate of ILWU leader Louis Goldblatt, who spearheaded the establishment of the St. Francis Square Cooperative Apartments.¹⁵⁹ SFRA had assembled three blocks south of Geary Boulevard to be developed for low- and moderate-income families. Through a competition to select a developer/designer team, the partnership of the ILWU and Pacific Maritime Association, with the architectural firm of Marquis and Stoller, and landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, were chosen to provide 300 units of affordable and safe housing that would retain families who were "fleeing to the suburbs."¹⁶⁰ The progressive policies of ILWU leadership addressed the multi-ethnic neighborhood's needs through a mandated policy of racially integrated housing. The original formula for tenants was to be 50 percent European ancestry, 27 percent African American, 21 percent Asian, and 2 percent other ethnicities. However, as the first president of the Cooperative Association, Taro Tsukahara was instrumental in shifting the percentages to equal numbers of residents of the three largest ethnic groups; Japanese Americans, African Americans and European Americans. Yayoi Tsukahara remembered seeking out *Nikkei* friends who had lost homes in *Nihonmachi* and inviting them to join them at St. Francis Square: "We were so happy to be able to tell them 'no more evictions'."¹⁶¹ The 300 units were completely sold out within six months of announcement of sale in March 1963 and were occupied by February 1964.

St. Francis Square was not only the first racially integrated housing cooperative on the West Coast, it pioneered an equity model of ownership that allowed residents to stay in their units, with increased payments, if their income rose above FHA limitations.¹⁶² This led to a remarkably stable residential profile, and a waiting list that has been lengthy since the project was completed. The project is also notable for its design, which has been widely lauded as a model for high-density, low-rise family housing. Breaking the street grid prevented through traffic from entering the housing development and created an interior environment of generous, well-designed open spaces for pedestrians.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 9.

¹⁵⁹ Yayoi Tsukahara, interview by the author, November 2007, by telephone.

¹⁶⁰ University of Buffalo. The Libraries: Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence Digital Archive. "Rudy Bruner Award Application: St. Francis Square, 1987." <<http://libweb.lib.buffalo.edu/bruner/>>

¹⁶¹ Tsukahara.

¹⁶² University of Buffalo.

¹⁶³ The designers hoped that partnerships with the adjacent YMCA and Rafaell Weill School would provide community facilities and offset the relatively small units. These never seem to have been realized but the



St. Francis Square Co-operative Apartments.
(Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence Digital Archive)

From the neighborhood perspective, St. Francis Square is one of the more successful stories of urban redevelopment. By 1960, about half of Japantown's core had been razed, displacing at least 1,500 residents and more than 60 small Japanese American businesses. At least 38 parcels passed from Japanese ownership to the SFRA during this period.¹⁶⁴ Within ten years, the demolished structures were replaced by the eight-lane Geary Expressway, the Japan Cultural and Trade Center, and towering housing complexes such as The Sequoias, a retirement home housed in a 25-story, 300-unit, pre-cast concrete tower built in 1969.¹⁶⁵ All of these developments exemplify aspects of urban planning and design under post-WWII urban renewal policies, including an auto-centric environment and massive, single use developments far exceeding the historic scale of the neighborhood.

Funds from the federal highway program created the new Geary Expressway, which sliced through what had historically been the Japantown-Fillmore neighborhood with its southern border along O'Farrell Street. Hence, the Geary Expressway became a physical and psychological dividing line between the African American community to the south, where public housing projects intended for low-income populations were built, and the more affluent communities of European ancestry to the north, with Japanese Americans located at

complex received a Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence in 1987 and has been a beloved home for generations.

¹⁶⁴ San Francisco Assessor's Sales Ledgers

¹⁶⁵ David Gebhard, Eric Sandweiss and Robert Winter, eds., *The Guide to Architecture in San Francisco and Northern California* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985), 92.

what Doris Matsumoto described as the “grey area in the middle.”¹⁶⁶ A prominent feature of SFRA’s redevelopment plan for the area was the Japanese Cultural and Trade Center. The first major project undertaken by SFRA director, Justin Herman, the Center was designed to solicit investment from Japan and to create a retail destination that would appeal to San Francisco’s tourists. National-Braemar, a firm backed by investors from San Francisco and Hawaii, was selected by SFRA to be the master developer for the large mall complex, with the Center’s structures to be operated by four different entities upon completion. In 1962, National-Braemar brought Kintetsu Enterprises Company of America, a new investment arm formed by Japan’s Kinki Nippon Railway, into the project. The Center’s design, like its funding, was a bi-national project. *Nisei* architect Minoru Yamasaki served as the primary designer, the local firm of Van Bourg/Nakamura (VBN) drafted the plans, and Osaka architecture professor Dr. Yoshiro Taniguchi contributed the design for the Peace Plaza and Pagoda, which was a gift to San Francisco from the people of the city of Osaka, Japan.¹⁶⁷ The architecture of the Center was influenced by traditional Japanese features interpreted in contemporary forms and materials.



Miyako Hotel from Peace Plaza.
(Collection of San Francisco Public Library)

Construction began in 1965 and was completed in 1968. By 1970, the mall complex was known simply as Japan Center. The complex included major tenants such as: Hitachi; Nissan and Mitsubishi, who introduced Japanese electronics and cars to American consumers; the

¹⁶⁶ PBS/KQED

¹⁶⁷ Laguerre, 112.

up-scale Miyako Hotel; and Kinokuniya Bookstore, a subsidiary of Japan's largest bookstore chain.¹⁶⁸ By the mid-1970s, however; the large Japanese corporations no longer needed the Center's showrooms to win U.S. market share, and the Center became populated by a new generation of small-scale independent retail shops, primarily operated by Japanese nationals who were later joined by Korean immigrants

The Japan Center exemplifies important and influential aspects of urban planning and design trends during the post-war period and is unique in the neighborhood for its scale as an ensemble of large buildings and open space covering three full blocks, as well as its architectural styling. In "The Difficult Legacy of Urban Renewal," Richard Longstreth argues that sites such as the Japan Center should be approached as representative landscapes of a contentious but important period of urban history.¹⁶⁹

WESTERN ADDITION PROJECT AREA A-2

Planning for the A-2 phase of redevelopment began even before ground was broken on Japan Center, and encompassed an even larger area of seventy blocks and 277 acres surrounding the A-1 area and extending from Bush to Grove streets and from Broderick Street to Van Ness Avenue. As the SFRA announced plans for the launching of the A-2 phase, community members who had witnessed the ongoing mass evictions and clearance of the neighboring A-1 area became concerned and alarmed at the possibility of the same occurring in the remainder of Japantown. SFRA director, Justin Herman, stated his commitment to preserving existing buildings in the project area "as much as possible."¹⁷⁰ In part at the urging of the SFRA, the United Committee for the Japantown Community (UCJC) was formed in 1962 with over 200 members. The group's "Statement of Policy" included retention of Japanese American residents and businesses as the highest priority. After negotiations with the SFRA, the UCJC formed the *Nihonmachi* Community Development Corporation (NCDC) in 1964, which became responsible for "allocating development sites to its members, undertaking the financing and development of shared facilities, [and] coordinating community interests" with the Agency. "*Nihonmachi*" became the formal designation for the four-block area bounded by Webster, Sutter, Bush and Laguna streets.¹⁷¹

The architectural team of Rai Y. Okamoto and Van Bourg/Nakamura, was selected by the SFRA from a list of consultants drafted by the UCJC to prepare concept plans envisioning a new "village-scale" development and a community center for *Nihonmachi*.¹⁷² Okamoto and Van Bourg/Nakamura's urban design study for *Nihonmachi* describes "the wishes of the local citizens" for an environment characterized by an "intimate scale of buildings and spaces."

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 113

¹⁶⁹ Richard Longstreth, "The Difficult Legacy of Urban Renewal," in *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship*, v. 3, n. 1, (Winter 2006.)

¹⁷⁰ Seigel.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁷² "History and Progress of the Nihonmachi Revitalization in the Western Addition A-2," (San Francisco Planning Department files.)

These objectives were clearly a response to the massive scale of Japan Center and its erasure of historic Japantown. The report devoted several pages to discussing the implications of the SFRA and UCJC's expressed desire that "ethnic character" be encouraged wherever possible. Rather than propose that particular eras or styles of Japanese design be the model for a new *Nihonmachi*, the authors listed aspects of traditional and contemporary design in Japan as "critical areas where sensitivity and good judgment should be applied." Attention to Japanese use of materials, structure, space, modularity, roofs and gardens by "gifted architects and landscape architects" would "serve the special needs of a *Nihonmachi*."¹⁷³

Not surprisingly, Buchanan Mall, the central component of the A-2 phase, designed by Okamoto's firm in the 1970s and completed in 1976, reflected these qualities. The central plaza was framed by two-story commercial structures that referred to traditional Japanese villages through scale, massing and decorative patterns on the facades. Okamoto invited sculptor Ruth Asawa to create two fountains that punctuated Okamoto's "cobblestone river" as it meandered from a decorative gate at Sutter Street through the center of the Buchanan Mall and into the Peace Plaza of Japan Center across Post Street. Asawa's *Origami Fountains*, like the architecture surrounding them, echoed Japanese cultural traditions in modernist form. Asawa also added bas-reliefs to cast concrete benches along the mall – the panels, created with local children, depicted figures and scenes from Japanese folk tales.¹⁷⁴



Buchanan Mall Looking toward Japan Center.
(Collection of San Francisco Redevelopment Agency)

¹⁷³ Van Bourg/Nakamura & Rai Y. Okamoto, "Nihonmachi: An Urban Design Study in the Western Addition Area A-2," (San Francisco Redevelopment Agency: San Francisco, 1963), 17-18.

¹⁷⁴ Originally fabricated of corten steel, Asawa's Origami Fountains were recast in bronze by the artist in 1999. Japantown Task Force, Data Sheet: Rai Okamoto's Rock River and Ruth Asawa's Origami Fountains. (2004)

Van Bourg/Nakamura and Okamoto advised that “the retention of existing commercial enterprises together with selected new activities” would create the optimum mix for achieving neighborhood and SFRA goals.¹⁷⁵ Ultimately, redevelopment dramatically raised property values, and increased rents prevented many small businesses that previously served the neighborhood from returning to Japantown after being displaced for construction. Newspapers at that time reported property taxes tripling in areas adjacent to the new Japan Cultural and Trade Center. As more and more affordable housing and small family businesses were removed to make way for hotels and larger businesses, the tightly woven historic fabric of the neighborhood was further unraveled.

At the behest of progressive ministers, the Western Addition Community Organization (WACO) was formed in 1967 with a largely African American membership but also including Japanese American leaders such as Yori Wada of the Buchanan YMCA and Kathy Reyes of Christ United Presbyterian Church.¹⁷⁶ Led by Mary Rodgers and Hannibal Williams and formed to fight displacement and the destruction of the neighborhood, WACO organized residents, picketed the SFRA, and blocked bulldozers. In 1967, WACO filed an injunction that eventually succeeded in halting A-2 activities until the SFRA submitted a federally certified plan for the relocation of displaced residents as required by law.¹⁷⁷ All this activity slowed the SFRA’s activities and shortly afterwards the SFRA hired a Western Addition minister, Reverend Wilbur Hamilton, to become the director of the A-2 project area. Ironically, Hamilton’s tenure with the Agency included overseeing the demolition of the church where his father had served as pastor.

In 1968, Housing and Urban Development (HUD) began to require Project Area Committees be formed to review SFRA activities in the Western Addition. Shortly thereafter, the Western Addition Project Area Committee (WAPAC) was formed with representatives from 40 diverse Western Addition groups, many of whom were nominated by WACO.¹⁷⁸ In addition to reviewing the SFRA’s activities, WAPAC also began securing SFRA jobs for its members, some of whom formed the Fillmore Economic Development Corporation. After WAPAC was founded however, WACO saw less of a need to address housing and displacement issues, and turned to providing surplus food to needy area residents.¹⁷⁹ Even with the increased community involvement, over 4,500 households and 1,145 businesses were removed by the A-2 phase, and 5,000 low-rent housing units were destroyed. Al Robles recalled coming home to his apartment at 1905 Bush Street to find the building partially demolished. The wrecking crew explained that they had “hit the wrong building,” but were tearing it down anyway since it was slated for redevelopment. Robles and his friends had to scramble through the night to remove his belongings before the building was razed the next morning.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ Van Bourg/Nakamura & Rai Y. Okamoto, 7-8.

¹⁷⁶ Seigle, 23. PBS, “Fillmore Timeline 1860-2001,” <<http://www.pbs.org/kqed/fillmore/learning/time.html>>

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Okita, David, “Redevelopment of San Francisco Japantown.” (Thesis, California State University, Hayward, 1980.), 44.

¹⁷⁹ Mollenkopf, 196.

¹⁸⁰ Robles.

Despite the mass demolition during the A-2 phase, historic buildings were retained. A survey of structures with “aesthetic, historic and cultural values” in the A-2 area was organized in 1961 by the San Francisco Conservation Committee; a group of planners, architects, and heritage advocates. Architectural historian, John Woodbridge, led the effort in consultation with staff from SFRA, which resulted in a 32-page report listing dozens of structures. Despite the nod to historic and cultural values, buildings considered to merit preservation were determined solely by evaluating architectural character and integrity, with emphasis on 19th century properties. In his report to the San Francisco Conservation Committee, Woodbridge argued that the area was not favored with numerous structures of great architectural significance, but that the buildings “as a group...constitute an extremely valuable resource for the rehabilitation of the area. Properly integrated with new construction, they can provide a time dimension, which an all-new redevelopment painfully lacks. Their rich detail can provide a kind of visual interest that it is virtually impossible to provide in new construction, and it is hoped that their rehabilitation will be less costly than new construction.”¹⁸¹



Relocating a 19th century house in the Western Addition.

The successful movement to preserve from demolition and often relocate the Western Addition’s architecturally significant buildings was one of the catalysts for the founding of the Foundation for San Francisco Architectural Heritage and the establishment of the San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board. In the fall of 1974, San Francisco

¹⁸¹ “Western Addition Area Two Survey of Structures with Visual and Historical Merit.” n.d. (San Francisco Planning Department files.) John Woodbridge, “Architectural Conservation in Western Addition Area Two: A Report to the San Francisco Conservation Committee,” (January 11, 1962) San Francisco Planning Department files.

Architectural Heritage and the SFRA moved thirteen 19th-century residences across the Western Addition to Biedeman Place between Ellis and O'Farrell streets.¹⁸² Another collection of 19th-century structures was formed at the corner of Sutter and Fillmore streets in the late 1970s. Named "Victorian Village," the commercial development was conceived by WAPAC and SFRA staff to house retail shops, offices and residences. According to the May 1978 Western Addition News: A-2 Report, the plan involved moving six structures from various locations in the project area to join five buildings that remained *en situ*. One of the relocated structures, now home to Marcus Books at 1712 Fillmore Street, was the former Jimbo's Bop City Club that had been located at 1690 Post Street.¹⁸³

Between 1966 and 1967, the SFRA's residential rehabilitation program, managed by Enid Sales, preserved more than 350 19th century houses. Some owners were able to take advantage of the low-cost rehabilitation loans offered by SFRA, but many buildings were auctioned off to the highest bidder.¹⁸⁴ In July 1975, the SFRA mailed a circular announcing the sale of five 19th century houses on Bush, Sutter, Laguna and McAllister streets. The Soto Zen Mission (formerly the temple of Congregation Ohabai Shalom) was also for sale with a minimum bid price of \$39,600. The announcement specified that bids from "holders of Residential Certificates of Preference," those property-owners who had lost their buildings to eminent domain and received certificates granting priority to return to the neighborhood, would be considered as buyers over others.¹⁸⁵ It is not clear how many former residents were able to take advantage of their Certificates of Preference, but later accounts indicate that the numbers were very small as rising property values priced former residents and businesspeople out of the area.¹⁸⁶

The lives of many *Sansei* (third-generation Japanese Americans) "resonated with the political ferment and racial destabilization of the 1960s."¹⁸⁷ The creation of ethnic studies programs at San Francisco State University and UC Berkeley and the beginning of the Asian American movement in the late 1960s, led to new forms of activism and community development in Japantown that promoted social justice and the ethnic identity of Japanese Americans. In 1969, one year after the student-led strike for an ethnic studies program at San Francisco State, *Sansei* created the Japanese Community Youth Council (JCYC) to respond to needs of *Nikkei* children and youth. The first community-based organization, the JCYC was housed in Japantown in an SFRA-owned building at 1808A Sutter Street, a heavily remodeled 19th century residence, which was rented by the group for one dollar a year. Many other newly established Japanese American organizations also rented old, 19th century buildings owned by the SFRA. In 1971, Kimochi, Inc. was formed to address the needs of the elderly *Issei*, who were not being served by the mainstream service organizations due to cultural and language barriers. Subsequently, other Japantown-based, non-profit organizations grew, such as *Nihonmachi* Little Friends, *Nobiru-kai*, the Japanese Community and Cultural Center of

¹⁸² Dave Weinstein, "Urban Renewal: Enid Sales helped save San Francisco's Victorian homes and never backed away from a preservation fight." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 January 2008.

¹⁸³ Pepin and Watts, 138.

¹⁸⁴ Weinstein.

¹⁸⁵ "SFRA Offers Buildings for Sale," brochure, 1975. San Francisco Planning Department files.

¹⁸⁶ Venise Wagner, "Western Addition Residents," *San Francisco Examiner*, April 21, 1998.

¹⁸⁷ Jere Takahashi, *Nisei, Sansei: Shifting Japanese American Identities and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 169.

Northern California (JCCCNC), the Japanese American National Library, the Japantown Arts and Media Workshop, Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach (formerly *Nihonmachi* Legal Outreach), and the National Japanese American Historical Society (NJAHS). All of these organizations were created as alternative, ethnically based organizations to serve the needs of the Japantown residents and the Japanese American community to fill the service void existing in mainstream institutions.



Citizens Against *Nihonmachi* Evictions, ca. 1974.
(Japanese American National Library)

With redevelopment in full swing, the Committee Against *Nihonmachi* Evictions (CANE) emerged in 1973 to address the needs of residents and small businesses. A grassroots activist group, CANE “squatted” in an SFRA-owned property at 1858 Sutter Street, which later became the site for the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California, according to long-time Japantown activist, Mike Tsukahara.¹⁸⁸ One of CANE’s first actions was to support the Japanese American Religious Federation’s housing project for affordable housing in Japantown. *Sansei* like Carole Hayashino, a member of CANE’s coordinating committee, were motivated by the evictions of *Issei* and *Nisei* who had rebuilt lives shattered by WWII internment.¹⁸⁹ CANE’s increasing membership, which swelled to over 300, revealed widespread discontent with redevelopment and tensions within the Japanese American community over NCDC’s role as the Agency-appointed community representative. CANE members felt that the community’s interests were being ignored by the SFRA, while merchant leaders of NCDC believed there was room to align the Agency’s

¹⁸⁸ Mike Tsukahara. Interview by the author, April 8, 2008, by telephone.

¹⁸⁹ Wong, 75.

plans with their view of the community's economic interests. A CANE banner depicting women holding back a wrecking ball labeled "RDA" with the slogan "Low Rent Housing – Not Tourism," summarized CANE's oppositional stance toward the Agency.¹⁹⁰ Through protests, editorials, and education, CANE was able to make itself heard and joined in other neighborhood struggles, such as the fight to save the International Hotel in Manilatown. Yet the Redevelopment Agency rarely acted on or responded directly to CANE concerns.¹⁹¹

CANE and other community organizations drew explicit parallels between destructive government actions during WWII and those of urban renewal. One CANE placard proclaimed "Evacuation in 1942: Eviction in 1974."¹⁹² San Francisco attorney and activist, Edison Uno, was among the first to publicly call for redress for those unjustly incarcerated during WWII, a cause that captured the imaginations and energies of *Nikkei* across the nation. Another prominent San Francisco activist, Clifford Uyeda, led the JACL's National Redress Campaign, which initially focused on gaining community "block grants," but revised its goal to individual monetary reparations under pressure from *Nikkei*.

In the Bay Area, calls for reparations were made at the inaugural "Day of Remembrance" event in 1979 at Tanforan Shopping Center (on the site of the former Tanforan Racetrack assembly center), when over one thousand people gathered to remember signing of Executive Order 9066. The Japanese American Citizens League spearheaded legislative strategy for creating the U.S. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC). Two years later, San Francisco was among the cities where CWRIC hearings enabled Japanese Americans to finally, publicly testify to the injustice, loss, and endurance of their WWII legacy.¹⁹³ The power of these personal stories furthered arguments for individual monetary reparations, which had been a central goal for the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations (NCR), whose San Francisco representatives drew from the Japanese Community Progressive Alliance and other activist groups. Local activists like Sox Kitashima organized letter-writing campaigns that deluged the White House and Congress with calls for redress.¹⁹⁴

As San Franciscans engaged in the broader redress movement, local *Nikkei* were also involved with the important effort to overturn the wartime convictions of three *Nikkei* -- Fred Korematsu, Gordon Hirabayashi and Min Yasui -- whose legal cases for refusing incarceration resulted in decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court upholding the legality of internment. Sansei lawyer, Dale Minami, lead counsel for an ad hoc legal committee, Bay Area Attorneys for Redress, was selected to lead the legal team representing Korematsu, an Oakland native who was originally tried in San Francisco. Federal Judge Marilyn Patel resolved the first of these cases when she granted the writ of error *coram nobis* in the Korematsu case in 1983.¹⁹⁵ The decision vindicated the entire Japanese American

¹⁹⁰ The CANE banner is depicted in the film "Crossroads in Nihonmachi: the Struggle to Save an American Community," (Emeryville, California: Urban Voice, 2007.)

¹⁹¹ Mike Tsukahara. Recognizing that shifting from a purely anti-redevelopment focus was necessary, CANE became the Japanese Community Progressive Alliance in 1979-1980, according to Tsukahara. Okita, 54.

¹⁹² "Crossroads in Nihonmachi"

¹⁹³ Niiya, 340, 342. Wong, 92-94.

¹⁹⁴ Wong, 96.

¹⁹⁵ Niiya, 123.

community with the finding that the government had used fabricated evidence to support its unjustifiable claims against Japanese American loyalty in order to obtain the Supreme Court decisions justifying internment.

Sansei activism and professional expertise led to another important victory for the community a decade later when local *Nikkei* fought the sale of the Japantown YWCA. Because the Alien Land Law barred the *Issei* from owning property, The San Francisco YWCA had held title to the property since it was purchased by Japanese women. When the San Francisco YWCA announced plans to sell the building, community members recognized that the historic structure and *Nihonmachi* Little Friends, which operated a bilingual, multi-cultural preschool in the building, were vulnerable. Long-time *Nisei* activists such as Michi Onuma joined with a number of *Sansei*, including several members of Korematsu's legal team, to support the *Soko Bukai* (Japanese Christian Church Association) effort to fight for the community's claim to the building.¹⁹⁶



Rally at Japantown YWCA, 1999.
(Reproduced in *Generations*)

The successful struggle for control of the Japantown YWCA galvanized members of the broader *Nikkei* community to the ongoing social and economic vulnerability of Japantown. A new generation had emerged with social and cultural capital to fight for the future of *Nihonmachi*. An important source of energy for these efforts came from the community-based organizations founded by students and community activists from the *Sansei* generation who staked their long-term claim to *Nihonmachi*. In 1976, the Japanese Community Youth Council purchased a building at 2012 Pine Street, used previously by a Filipino Methodist Congregation, from the San Francisco United Methodist Mission. Subsequently, other community-based organizations purchased land in Japantown and built their own facilities in

¹⁹⁶ Nishioka, Joyce. "A Matter of Trust: Japantown Leaders File Suit to Preserve Community Landmark." *Asianweek*, 8 July 1999.

the 1970s, including Kimochi and the National Japanese American Citizens League headquarter office. Today, Kimochi, Inc. owns a second building, formerly the Nichi Bei Bussan Department Store, on the Buchanan Mall.

Asian American, and specifically *Nikkei*, arts organizations were integral parts of this web of community activism and service. Wes Senszaki and others involved with the CANE newsletter “felt there was a real need on the cultural level to develop skills and promote a Japanese American community art.”¹⁹⁷ Theater, dance and music gave visibility to *Nikkei* cultural life and voice to questions being asked about community control of Japantown. Guerilla theater was staged in the Japantown Mall, other performances were held at Christ United Methodist Church. Describing the Japantown Art and Media Workshop, which was founded in 1977 and is still active today, long-time activist and artist Francis Wong credited their silkscreen posters with giving a distinct image to the community revitalization effort and to painful issues. They created a genuine Asian American iconography.”¹⁹⁸

Although not dedicated until 1986, the Japanese Community and Cultural Center of Northern California (JCCCNC) was also born from the redevelopment period. The 1963 Van Bourg/Nakamura and Okamoto plan called for a community center at the northwest corner of Buchanan and Sutter streets, “complementary to the existing Young Women’s Christian Association facility.” The authors went on to state that, “it is important that the architecture represented by this building be equal to the best anywhere in the City. As a symbol of common interest and community effort, it represents more than simply the sum total of its functions.”¹⁹⁹ In 1974, the *Nihonmachi* Community Development Corporation secured the property at 1840 Sutter Street for the new organization, which had been incorporated the previous year. The first phase of the organization’s Japanese-style building was completed in 1986 and housed a variety of arts and community nonprofits, as well as the JCCCNC’s own programs.²⁰⁰ The JCCCNC’s design, by *Nisei* architect Wayne Osaki, features overt references to traditional Japanese architecture, as do several other buildings developed by and for the *Nikkei* community in recent decades. The Japanese American Association (*Hokka Nichi Bei Kai*) building on Sutter Street, designed by Mitsuru Tada & Associates (1972), as well as Konkyo-ko Church, designed by Van Bourg, Nakamura, Katsura & Karney (1973) and Sokoji Zen Temple, designed by VBN Corporation (1984), share with JCCCNC a visual vocabulary of half-timbered walls, broad gable roofs with exposed rafter tails, and gilded ornamentation that contrast with the more severe “Japanese modernism” of many commercial buildings such as the Japan Center or the Miyako Inn at Sutter and Buchanan.²⁰¹ JCCCNC architect Osaki described his goal as trying “to bring some

¹⁹⁷ Asian American Revolutionary Movement Ezine. “Wes Senszaki. *East Wind Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1982.” <<http://www.aamovement.net/history/eastwind/11/senzaki1.html>>

¹⁹⁸ Japantown Art & Media Workshop began in a redevelopment-owned building at 1852 Sutter Street, now the location of the Japanese Community and Cultural Center of Northern California. Francis Wong, conversation with the author, March 24, 2009.

¹⁹⁹ Van Bourg/Nakamura and Okamoto, 8-9.

²⁰⁰ Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California, “30: Celebrating Our Community,” (September 2003.)

²⁰¹ Further research on the cultural and social meaning of these differences in recent architectural styles in Japantowns is merited.

sense of identity – a sense of the Japanese cultural background so that people could feel comfortable.....Although it was Japantown, it didn't really have an atmosphere.”²⁰²

PRESERVING CULTURE & REINFORCING IDENTITY

CONTINUING JAPANTOWN LEGACIES

The question “What makes Japantown vital – and what is necessary for its future?” has inspired discussion and considerable efforts by Japantown leaders and Bay Area *Nikkei* for some time. Although Japantown continues to be the cultural, historical, and spiritual center of San Francisco’s Japanese American community, the disruptive events of wartime internment and urban redevelopment have dramatically altered the “ethnic enclave” feel of Japantown. Thousands of *Nikkei* who lived in San Francisco’s Japantown before World War II did not return following internment, resulting in the loss of traditional social networks. Dozens of Japanese-owned properties were transferred to the SFRA in the 1960s and ‘70s; hundreds of businesses and thousands of residents were removed for redevelopment.²⁰³ Japantown has not only lost a great many of its older buildings, residents, and businesses, but its community dynamics and relationships were also altered by the large influx of outside capital and shifting demographics. Rising property values in nearby Pacific Heights (as well as Japantown itself) have put pressure on small businesses and residents of low and moderate income.

Japantown is no longer the site of a highly concentrated residential population of *Nikkei*. World War II internment, post-war redevelopment and the assimilation of Japanese Americans into the broader social fabric has resulted in a more dispersed presence of *Nikkei* throughout the United States. The *Nikkei* population of Japantown decreased by 6.5 percent during the 1970s and ‘80s; by 1990, more than 90 percent of Japanese Americans in San Francisco lived outside of Japantown.²⁰⁴ In addition, more than half of the *Nikkei* population of California is of mixed ethnic heritage, further complicating the issue of cultural identity. While increased residential and employment opportunities for *Sansei* and *Yonsei* (fourth-generation Japanese Americans) have attenuated the role of *Nihonmachi* in the day-to-day lives of Bay Area *Nikkei*, San Francisco’s Japantown continues to hold immeasurable symbolic and cultural meaning. *Nihonmachi* is the foundation for a regional community through the cultural, educational and spiritual ties it creates for Japanese and Japanese Americans. In addition to ethnically specific goods and services, *Nikkei* throughout the Bay Area visit Japantown for cultural and educational events. The streets of *Nihonmachi* are the site for annual events such as Bon Odori, Cherry Blossom festival and the Japantown Street Fair, which bring the regional community together.

²⁰² Wong, 115.

²⁰³ City and County of San Francisco Assessor’s Sales Ledgers.

²⁰⁴ Japantown Planning, Preservation and Development Task Force, “Concepts for the Japantown Community Plan” (2000), 8.

As the neighborhood's demographics shifted to a more diverse and pan-Asian population, and *Nisei* retirements led to the closure of long-time businesses ranging from manga shops to markets, bookstores to bowling alleys, community energies have focused on the question of what is essential to *Nihonmachi*. By the 1990s, Japanese Americans in San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Jose recognized that they shared a common challenge – envisioning the future for the last three remaining historic Japantowns in the United States. A series of community meetings in San Francisco's *Nihonmachi* during 1997-1998 led to the creation of a broad-based fifty-member Japantown Planning, Preservation and Development Task Force, which produced the "Concepts for the Japantown Community Plan" in 2000. The Japantown Task Force, a smaller board created in 2001, grew out of this effort. In its efforts to actively shape Japantown's future, the Task Force shepherded studies on economic, cultural and social impacts of neighborhood developments, youth services, and a preliminary historic context report that served as a foundation for this document.²⁰⁵

Leaders from California's three Japantowns fostered passage of Senate Bill 307 in September 2001, which acknowledged the significance of their communities through a California Japantown Preservation Pilot Project. Although not fully funded and implemented, the project was designed to support the development of specific plans to promote the preservation of these Japantowns and resulted in work by each community that grappled with the complex question about what cultural preservation means for an ethnic neighborhood in the 21st century. The California Japanese American Community Leadership Council that worked for the passage of Senate Bill 307 also succeeded in obtaining funds for heritage preservation projects in each of the three Japantowns from State Proposition 40 funds. In San Francisco, the funds created the San Francisco Japantown History Walk, a self-guided tour consisting of interpretive signs exploring the community's history and culture.

The arts have also provided a forum for examining the social forces that have shaped Japantown. The American Conservatory Theater premiered *Sansei* playwright Philip Kan Gotanda's *After the War* in the company's fortieth anniversary season. Set in the postwar time after *Nikkei* had returned to San Francisco, and with the community on the brink of redevelopment, Gotanda's play offers no easy answers, but provides a new lens through which to consider how Japantown's past has shaped the present and may shape the future.

On the centennial anniversary of the founding of San Francisco's Japantown in the Western Addition, the JCCCNC hosted the 2006 premiere of "*Nihonmachi*; The Place to Be," a musical play by the Los Angeles-based theater group Grateful Crane Ensemble. Written by native San Franciscan Soji Kashiwagi, the play centers on the struggles of a third-generation *manju* shop owner, whose dilemma over closing the business founded by his immigrant grandparents held powerful resonance for the audience. The packed crowd knew that San Francisco's own Benkyo-do *manju* shop was struggling for survival just across Sutter Street. In Kashiwagi's version, the press of history -- *Issei* sacrifices, WWII internment and resettlement, urban renewal, the Asian American and redress movements – convinces the

²⁰⁵ All of these studies may be accessed on Japantown Task Force (2002) <www.jtowntaskforce.org>

play's *Sansei manju*-maker to keep trust with previous generations who have passed on the legacy of Japantown.

The language of SB 307 is inclusive in stating that, "Saving our ethnic communities is critical to our state and our nation. Not only are they sites of buildings, businesses and landmarks of historic and cultural significance, they are vital hubs that draw millions of people from all over the world who relate to and learn from their culture, history, food, and other elements of their heritage."²⁰⁶ Although it would not be wise to ignore the challenges facing the future of San Francisco's Japantown, the historic creativity and tenacity of California's Japanese American communities provide hope and confidence for continued vitality. The cultural heritage of San Francisco's Japantown, and the work that community members have done and are doing today to guide the future of *Nihonmachi*, is reflective of powerful commitments to preserve the history and maintain the cultural character of the historic Japanese and Japanese American community.

PROPERTY TYPES

The Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan area encompasses a largely residential neighborhood. A variety of housing types are present, however; ranging from single-family dwellings to large apartment buildings and complexes. In addition to residences, the neighborhood also features commercial buildings, and religious and community facilities that are generally geared toward serving the surrounding neighborhood. A variety of other property types are also present. Though they are fewer in number and less concentrated, they fit with the general scale and environment of the neighborhood. An exception to this neighborhood orientation, however; is the wider-ranging focus of properties affected by Redevelopment, particularly large-scale commercial structures that function at both a neighborhood and city-wide scale.

The following section discusses the property types found in the Japantown neighborhood in general terms, and includes descriptions of the various forms each property type can take. Also included is a discussion of how each property type is significant to the historic context of Japantown and the general requirements it must meet in order to be considered eligible for historic designation.

Because this context statement concerns the history and culture of Japantown's ethnic communities the significance of the property types are defined in terms of their relation to ethnic and cultural themes. Though other cultural groups – Jewish, African American, Filipino, and Korean – are discussed within the narrative, the history of the Japanese American community is the primary focus of this study and, therefore, this section provides evaluative guidelines for properties with that specific cultural association. Because this context statement does not contain definitive histories of the other cultural and ethnic

²⁰⁶ The text of SB 307 can be found on Japantown Task Force (2002)
<www.jtowntaskforce.org/studies/SB.307.bos.resolution.FINAL.pdf>

communities, it is recommended that properties associated to those groups be assessed under a separate set of culturally-specific guidelines. Additionally, many resources throughout the neighborhood may have potential significance for their association with themes other than ethnicity and cultural history; however, they are not addressed by this culturally focused study and should also be evaluated under a separate set of guidelines.

RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY TYPES

Single-Family Dwellings



Left to Right: A Greek Revival style single-family house at 2231 Pine Street, an Italianate style single-family house at 1807 Octavia Street, and a Queen Anne style single-family house at 2199 California Street. (Page & Turnbull)

Buildings designed as single-family dwellings are prevalent in Japantown; however, many have been converted for multiple-family occupancy. This is a trend that dates as far back as the late 19th century, but was particularly prevalent after 1906, when the Earthquake and Fire caused a housing shortage that pushed the population into intact areas of the city, such as the Western Addition. In an effort to accommodate the displaced population, many single-family residences were subdivided into flats and apartments. For the purpose of this property type discussion, however; houses originally designed to function as a single residential unit will be discussed as such.

Single-family dwellings in the Japantown neighborhood have many forms and architectural styles, though most date to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, before the time when residential space was at a premium. For this reason, most adhere to Victorian-era architectural styles. In most cases, single-family dwellings are one to three stories in height, but most commonly two. A garage at the ground or basement level is an ubiquitous modification that is found on many single-family dwellings in the Japantown neighborhood. Single-family residences are most easily distinguished by their single primary entrance. This may consist of one door, or double doors, but will serve only a single entryway. This feature sets single-family dwellings apart from purpose-built multiple-family dwellings, which feature a separate entry for each residential unit within the building.

The most typical form of single-family residence in the Japantown neighborhood is the Italianate or Stick style row house. These buildings are long and rectangular in plan, conforming to the long, narrow lot dimensions prevalent in the area. They are typically two or three stories in height, often over a raised basement, and feature a single entry at one side of the front façade, which is covered by a hood or portico. A bay window typically spans from ground to roofline on the other side of the façade, and the front elevation is capped by an ornate cornice, which often adorns a parapet that disguises a gable roof or lower flat roof. Other single-family dwellings in Japantown are characterized by the Greek Revival and Queen Anne styles, while still others have undergone remodeling that has resulted in stylistic features more common to Edwardian-era architecture or later aesthetic trends such as the Mediterranean Revival style or even pared-down contemporary styles. Most single-family dwellings in the Japantown neighborhood are in good condition, and many have undergone restoration or remodeling; an effect of the relatively prosperous population that inhabits the area.

Flats and Duplexes



**From left to right: Italianate style flats at 1804 Bush Street.
Italianate style duplex at 1717-1719 Webster Street.
(Page & Turnbull)**

As discussed earlier, many single-family residences in the Japantown neighborhood were subdivided into multiple-family properties during periods of major population growth in the neighborhood. However, many additional residential structures were purpose-built as multiple-family residences, such as flats and duplexes.

The definition of a flat is a single residential unit that occupies an entire floor in a building. This results in multiple story buildings, where each story represents one residential unit. A two-story building will thus contain two flats, and a three-story building, three flats. Two-story flats are most common in the Japantown neighborhood, though three-story flats are not uncommon. Double-flats also exist, where two “stacks” of flats are arranged side-by-side. These will always be distinguishable from apartment buildings, however, by the number of entry doors. Both flats and duplexes feature individual entrances for each residential unit

within the building. This results in multiple doors, typically grouped together, on the ground or first story of a building.

Whereas a flat is divided into residential units horizontally, a duplex is divided vertically. A duplex, by definition, consists of two residential units arranged side-by-side within a single structure. (Triplexes also exist and consist of three residential units arranged side-by-side.) A duplex can be one or more stories in height, with one residential unit occupying all of stories on each side of the building. In Japantown, it is most common to find one and two-story duplexes.

Flats are more prevalent than duplexes within the neighborhood. Many take the same form as the Italianate and Stick style row houses described in the single-family dwelling section, but are distinguishable by their multiple entry doors. Edwardian styles, Mediterranean Revival and French Eclectic styles, and modern Modernist style flats buildings are also represented in the neighborhood. Queen Anne style flats are less prevalent, but also exist, as well as various other styles. Duplex buildings primarily exhibit the Italianate and Stick styles.

Flats and duplexes in Japantown are generally found to be in good condition, though some deferred maintenance is sometimes present, as is typical of rental properties that commonly have non-resident owners.

Apartment Buildings

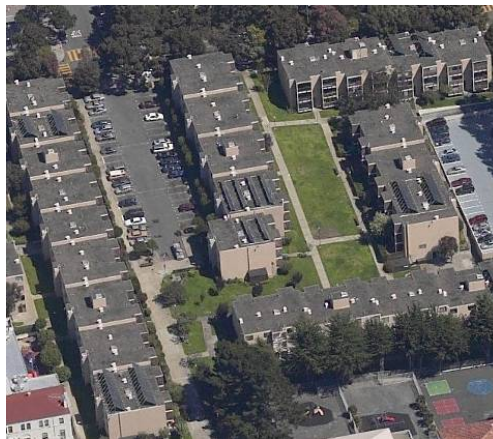
Apartment buildings are common throughout the Japantown Neighborhood, primarily consisting of small to mid-sized buildings (those containing approximately four to fifty residential units), though a few large-scale, modern apartment buildings containing around or upward of one hundred residential units, also exist. Apartment buildings tend to be located on larger lots and those situated on street corners. At least one instance of multiple identical apartment buildings situated on adjacent lots also exists.

As a building type, apartment buildings can be defined as multiple-family residential structures with access provided by a single entrance. Though secondary entrances may also be present, there will not be a separate exterior entrance for every residential unit, as with flats or duplexes. The primary entry will often lead into a lobby, which in turn provides access, via stairs or elevator, to the various floors, where each residential unit will have a dedicated entry.

Apartment buildings in the Japantown area typically date to the 1920s and onward, with the large-scale apartment blocks and towers dating to the mid-twentieth century and later. They come in a variety of architectural styles. Many of the small and mid-scale apartment buildings exhibit the Edwardian-era and Revival styles of the late 1910s and 1920s. Those with later construction dates exhibit the International and Modernist styles. The large apartment buildings that date to the 1960s and 1970s, are typically designed in the Modernist or even Brutalist styles. They are found primarily along the Geary Boulevard corridor where Redevelopment activities had a strong effect.



**Left to right: A small-scale Edwardian-era apartment building at 2007 Buchanan Street. A mid-sized Renaissance Revival style apartment building at 2001 California Street. A large-scale Brutalist style apartment block and tower at 1400 Geary Boulevard.
(Page & Turnbull.)**



**St. Francis Square, a Modernist style apartment complex at Geary Boulevard and Buchanan Street.
(Microsoft Virtual Earth, 2008.)**

Apartment complexes are also represented within the Japantown neighborhood, and like the large-scale apartment buildings, are found in the areas of the neighborhood where Redevelopment was most influential. They consist of the same type of residential units as those found in an apartment building, but are grouped together in a series of smaller buildings typically unified by a landscaped site. Individual buildings within an apartment complex are typically one to two stories in height and residential units have either individual exterior entrances, or a single exterior entrance per building. Apartment complexes are relatively modern adaptations of the multiple-family dwelling type and, in the Japantown area, date to the late twentieth century and typically feature Modernist architecture.

Apartment buildings and complexes in Japantown are generally found to be in good condition. In smaller buildings, some deferred maintenance is sometimes present, as is typical of rental properties that commonly have non-resident owners. Larger buildings and

complexes, however; are often well maintained due to the fact that they are usually owned and managed by a company or organization that has resources to provide for the building's maintenance.

Currently, two single-family dwellings are formally designated as historic resources within the Japantown area; the Stanyan House at 2006 Bush Street (local landmark) and the Madam C.J. Walker House at 2066 Pine Street (local landmark). Also designated, is the Cottage Row historic district; a grouping of twenty-two single-family residences located on the block bounded by Bush, Webster, Sutter, and Fillmore streets (National Register listed). One apartment building has been found eligible for listing at the local level; the Mealy & Collins Apartments at 1505 Gough Street. Of these resources, only the Madam C.J. Walker House has associations with the Japanese American community.

Significance

In relation to the themes set forth in this context statement, which focus on the ethnic character of the neighborhood, most residential buildings are not considered significant. Since the majority of the residential structures in the survey area were constructed prior to 1906 - the date of initial settlement of Japanese Americans in the neighborhood - they were not constructed by the subject cultural group and do not express physical aesthetics or other outward indications of the ethnic identity of their inhabitants. Though such residences may have been inhabited by Japanese Americans at some point in their history, they are not the obvious points of interface between the culture and society at large, the way other more public property types might be. Today, most residences in Japantown are not distinguishable from others as having been occupied by Japanese Americans.

This general determination that residential properties lack significance under the Japanese American context could be overridden if research were to find that a residence was associated with specific events or broad patterns in history that have had a definable impact on the Japanese American community, in which case it may be significant under California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR) Criterion 1. This could be the case if the residence played an important role in events that affected Japantown and the Japanese American community as a whole; for instance World War II internment. Residential properties that were inhabited by Japanese Americans before World War II and were returned to after the war would seem to possess the most significance under this criterion. If a residential property is found to be associated with a significant member of the Japanese American community – for instance an influential community leader, or prominent merchant or professional – it may be significant under CRHR Criterion 2. In this case, however; the residence should be a representation of the person's influence or achievements and not simply their place of residence. It is unlikely that residences will be significant under CRHR Criterion 3 as examples of architectural resources associated with the Japanese American context. If so, the residence would have to exhibit Japanese American aesthetics, methods of construction, or have been designed by a Japanese American architect or builder. Though many residences in the neighborhood exhibit notable architecture, such physical characteristics are not typically a result of cultural influence or occupancy by Japanese

Americans. Any archeological artifact found on a residential property in Japantown has the potential to yield knowledge of history and may even have associations with cultural practices and could therefore prove significant under CRHR Criterion 4.

The significance of residential properties could be established by conducting fine-grain archival research on the scale of census and city directory research, which would reveal property-specific histories on a house-by-house basis. An appropriate set of evaluative criteria would then have to be established, however, that would take into account the fact that cultural significance is not readily conveyed by residential properties in Japantown.

Integrity

The issue of historic integrity is relatively moot when evaluating residential resources under themes of this context statement, since it has been posited that residential resources do not readily convey associations with the Japanese American community. However, should a residential resource in Japantown undergo evaluation for integrity, the most important aspects are association and feeling. A property's ability to convey its association with the Japanese American culture is critical. Since events or persons are the most likely elements of significance that could be possessed by residences in Japantown, integrity of association with those things and the ability to convey those associations are key. Since feeling represents a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular time period, it is most applicable to residential resources in Japantown, which should embody some reference to Japanese American aesthetic and culture. Also important are location and setting. Because Redevelopment efforts in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the relocation of many residential resources, issues of integrity of location are important, both for buildings that retain their original locations and those that were moved. The current location of buildings moved within the neighborhood is significant due to the direct association with the events of Redevelopment. However, any building moved into or out of the Japantown neighborhood would lack ties to the geography and setting of the cultural neighborhood. Less important to the integrity of residential resources are the aspects of design, materials, and workmanship, unless those aspects are directly influenced by Japanese American design aesthetics or construction methods.

COMMERCIAL PROPERTY TYPES

Mixed-Use Buildings

Mixed-use buildings combine both commercial and residential uses and can be found throughout the Japantown neighborhood. They are particularly prevalent along commercial strips such as Fillmore and Post streets. Mixed-use buildings typically consist of two- to three-story structures comprising commercial space on the first story – often dominated by a storefront – with residential units above that are accessed by a first-story entrance. The upper-story residential units can consist of either flats, typically associated with smaller scale mixed-use buildings, or apartments, which are usually found in larger mixed-use buildings.

The architectural style and detailing of mixed-use buildings varies greatly, as the type was popular for many years. However, those from the Victorian era, especially the Italianate style, are most common in Japantown and typically feature bay windows on the residential upper stories. Edwardian-era architecture and the Mediterranean Revival style are common in mixed-use buildings, and more modern versions of the type tend to exhibit Modernist and sometimes International styles. Those buildings constructed during Redevelopment, especially those situated along Post Street, are often designed in a Japanese-influenced modern style.

First story storefronts on many mixed-use buildings are often heavily altered as a result of use by many commercial tenants over the years. They are generally in good condition, however; possibly due to the fact that they house businesses in a relatively affluent neighborhood.



Left to right: A small-scale Italianate style mixed-use building at 2325-2327 Pine Street and a larger Edwardian-era mixed-use building at 1560 Fillmore Street. (Source: Page & Turnbull)

Commercial Buildings

Small-scale commercial buildings are more prevalent in the Japantown neighborhood than large-scale commercial buildings, but are less common than mixed-use buildings. They are equivalent in many ways to the commercial portion of a mixed-use building, but less versatile in their function, which is perhaps why the mixed-use building type is more widespread. Large-scale commercial buildings are relatively few, consisting primarily of those constructed by Redevelopment efforts, which have had a major impact on the surrounding neighborhood. These buildings are related in that they are all part of the Japan Center mall complex. In Japantown, small commercial buildings are found interspersed with mixed-use buildings along the neighborhood's commercial corridors, like Fillmore and Post streets. The larger commercial structures are all located between Post Street and Geary Boulevard.

Small commercial buildings can typically be defined as one or two-story structures with commercial space on both stories; commonly a retail storefront on the first story and offices,

a service-oriented business, or utilitarian space that serves the retail establishment on the second story. Also common in the small commercial building category are single-story buildings with mezzanine levels. These buildings typically contain only a few commercial units total. The larger commercial buildings of Japan Center are also only two-stories in height, but are much larger in footprint and contain numerous commercial units, as well as interior public spaces. The three mall buildings of Japan Center are united by the Peace Plaza and the Webster Street Bridge.



Left to right: A one-story with mezzanine commercial building at 2049 Fillmore Street and the Benkyo-do shop. A two-story commercial building featuring retail and office space, at 1747 Buchanan Street. Bottom: The Japan Center mall, representing large-scale commercial buildings. (Page & Turnbull.)

The construction dates and architectural styles of commercial buildings vary; however, those from the 1910s to 1950s seem to be most common in Japantown, with others dating to the 1960s and 1970s present in those areas affected by Redevelopment. Therefore you will find this building type exhibiting such architectural influences as the Twentieth Century Commercial style, Mediterranean Revival style, and Art Deco and Art Moderne styles. Those constructed during Redevelopment, including the Japan Center mall buildings, will most often exhibit a Japanese-inspired modern style intended to characterize “Japantown”.

Small-scale commercial buildings typically feature a storefront on the first story, with large plate glass display windows, a clerestory, awnings, and signage. Upper stories and upper portions of the primary façade will commonly feature a flat wall surface and a parapet that is

often stepped, shaped, or adorned with a decorative cornice or applied tiles or medallions. The mall buildings have an interior orientation and few street-oriented storefronts. Large entrances are located on most facades, while the businesses inside have storefronts accessed from the interior public areas.

Storefronts on many commercial buildings are often heavily altered as a result of use by many commercial tenants over the years. It is also somewhat common to find older buildings that have undergone remodeling, resulting in the removal of original decorative features and a stripped down, utilitarian appearance. The largest number of these altered commercial buildings seem to be present in the southwestern corner of the Japantown survey area. Commercial buildings are generally in good condition, however.

Hotels

Though only a few hotels exist within Japantown, this is a relatively high concentration of the property type in a single neighborhood. They represent a broad span of construction dates and styles, from the turn of the twentieth century to the 1970s. The earlier buildings exhibit Queen Anne and Edwardian-era architecture, while the later buildings exhibit Modernist and Japanese-inspired modern styles. The older hotels are located in largely residential areas of the neighborhood, surrounded by apartment buildings and multiple-family residences, while the newer hotels are found in the primarily commercial areas that were shaped by Redevelopment, in close proximity to Japan Center and Buchanan Mall.



**Left to right: The Hotel Majestic at 1500 Sutter Street and the Kabuki Hotel at 1625 Post Street.
(Page & Turnbull)**

The hotels in Japantown are characterized as being four or more stories in height and thus represent some of the tallest and largest buildings in the area, with the exception of some modern apartment towers that are also present. While the older hotels consist of large rectangular-plan buildings, the newer hotels consist of a combination of low-rise blocks and taller towers, both of which contain lodging rooms.

The older hotels appear to have been renovated, though they retain good physical integrity and have been maintained in excellent condition. The Redevelopment-era hotels are also in good condition and have undergone no obvious alterations. Smaller hotels or lodging houses can appear very similar to mid-sized apartment buildings in form and, in some instances, have been converted to such use. The historic use of such buildings is now difficult to determine from their current use as apartment buildings. In other cases, such as the Queen Anne Hotel at the corner of Octavia and Sutter streets, the opposite is true. Originally a school, the building was converted to use as a hotel as early as 1913.

Theaters & Auditoriums

Two theaters/auditorium buildings are present in the Japantown neighborhood and also represent a broad separation of construction dates and architectural styles. The Fillmore Auditorium dates to 1912, while the Sundance Kabuki Theater dates to 1967 and is a product of Redevelopment activities. The Fillmore Auditorium exhibits Renaissance Revival style architecture, while the Kabuki Sundance Theater exhibits a mixture of Modernist and Japanese-inspired Modern styles that is compatible with the architecture of the Japan Center mall. The buildings are located on opposite corners of the intersection of Fillmore Street and Geary Boulevard, in a predominantly commercial area. These buildings are both about three stories in height and have expansive rectangular-plan footprints.

Both theater buildings are in good condition, though The Fillmore auditorium has undergone some alterations.



Left to right: The Fillmore auditorium at 1805 Geary Blvd. and the Kabuki Sundance Theater at 1881 Post St. (Page & Turnbull.)

Currently, one mixed-use building is formally designated as a historic resource within the Japantown area; the Fillmore-Pine Building at 1940-1946 Fillmore Street (National Register listed). Two apartment buildings have been found eligible for listing at the local level; the Mealy & Collins Apartments at 1505 Gough Street and the Bryant Apartments at 1600 Sutter Street. Of these resources, the Fillmore-Pine Building and the Bryant Apartments have associations with the Japanese American community.

Significance

In relation to the ethnic and cultural themes of this context statement, many commercial buildings could be considered significant. Though not all commercial buildings may have been constructed or owned by Japanese Americans, they can readily express the ethnic identity and cultural life-ways of the surrounding community. Elements like signage and applied decorative elements meant to convey cultural identity and market cultural goods and services are more typical and evident on commercial buildings than residential buildings. Commercial buildings can also be considered obvious points of interface between the ethnic community and society at large, which lends to their cultural significance.

Commercial buildings may be significant under CRHR Criterion 1 if they are associated with specific events or historic trends that have influenced the Japanese American community. This could be the case if the business played an important role in events that affected Japantown and the Japanese American community as a whole; for instance a hotel that served newly-arrived emigrants from Japan, or a grocery store that provided imported Japanese food and goods, which nurtured the continuation of Japanese life-ways within the community. Additionally, if a commercial property is found to be associated with a significant member of the Japanese American community – for instance, if it was owned or operated by a prominent merchant or professional – it may be significant under CRHR Criterion 2. Commercial buildings may be significant under CRHR Criterion 3 as examples of architectural resources associated with the Japanese American context if they exhibit Japanese American aesthetics, methods of construction, or have been designed by a Japanese American architect or builder. Any archeological artifact found on a commercial property in Japantown has the potential to yield knowledge of history and may even have associations with cultural practices and could therefore prove significant under CRHR Criterion 4.

Integrity

When evaluating the integrity of commercial properties in Japantown, the most important aspects are association and feeling. A property's ability to convey its association with the Japanese American culture is critical. A commercial property should maintain obvious associations through the retention of features that connote its commercial functions, the activities carried out by the businesses housed there, and even the goods or services that were provided; all of which will uphold ties to the Japanese American community and culture. Since feeling represents a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular time period, it is also important to commercial resources in Japantown, which should embody some reference to Japanese American aesthetics and culture. Similarly, integrity of design is important, because it is often the presence of Japanese-language signage or the presence of Japanese-inspired architectural details that advertise a commercial property's ties to Japanese American culture and the provision of cultural goods and services. Because Redevelopment efforts in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the relocation of many buildings, issues of integrity of location are important, both for buildings that retain

their original locations and those that were moved. The current location of buildings moved within the neighborhood is significant due to the direct association with the events of Redevelopment. However, any building moved into or out of the Japantown neighborhood would lack ties to the geography and setting of the cultural neighborhood. Less important to the integrity of commercial resources are the aspects of materials and workmanship, unless those aspects are directly influenced by Japanese American design aesthetics or construction methods.

CIVIC & COMMUNITY PROPERTY TYPES

Schools

Schools located in the Japantown neighborhood can be characterized as small, private institutions with a cultural and community focus, such as Japanese language schools, and schools with religious affiliations. The buildings that house school activities date to the early 20th-century and represent a variety of architectural styles, such as Japanese-influenced and Mediterranean Revival styles. Schools in Japantown are located in largely residential areas of the neighborhood, surrounded by apartment buildings and single-family residences. The school buildings in Japantown are characterized as being around three stories in height and contain multiple classrooms, auditorium spaces, etc. They are generally well-kept and retain good physical integrity.



Left to right: The Morning Star School at 1715 Octavia Street and Kinmon Gakkuen / Nihonmachi Little Friends building at 2031 Bush Street. (Page & Turnbull.)

Churches & Religious Buildings

There is a large number of churches located in the Japantown neighborhood. Many have strong ties to the Japanese American community, though they may be associated with a variety of religions, including typically European-based denominations. The buildings that house the various congregations in Japantown range in date from the early 20th-century to the 1970s and represent a variety of architectural styles, many of which have high style

elements. For instance, the St. Francis Xavier Church is described as a mixture of Japanese architectural elements and Western building forms. The Buddhist Church of San Francisco exhibits Classical styling, while the Christ United Presbyterian Church, built in 1975, exhibits the Modernist style. Churches in Japantown are located in largely residential areas of the neighborhood, and are primarily situated on prominent corner lots. Incidentally, most of the newer churches are situated along Laguna Street, while the older churches tend to be located close to the Pine and Octavia streets intersection. The church buildings in Japantown are characterized as being around two stories in height and are all in good condition. They retain good physical integrity, probably due to the attention of committed congregations.



**Left to right: Christ United Presbyterian Church at 1700 Sutter Street, St. Francis Xavier Church at 1801 Octavia Street, and the Buddhist Church of San Francisco at 1881 Pine Street.
(Page & Turnbull)**

Community Centers & Social Halls

Community centers and social halls in Japantown are utilized by a variety of organizations, including those that have cultural and religious affiliations. Some buildings date to the early twentieth century and are used by more traditional organizations, like the YMCA and YWCA, while others date to the late twentieth century and are occupied by organizations that are the products of Redevelopment-era activism, like the Japanese Cultural and Community Center. The buildings represent a variety of architectural styles, but commonly have some Japanese stylistic influence. Community buildings in Japantown are located in largely residential areas of the neighborhood, though they are often near commercial areas and other areas of activity. Most of the community buildings

are two to three stories in height and are generally well-kept, with good physical integrity, which can be attributed to their use by active, community-minded groups.



Left to right: The Japantown YWCA at 1830 Sutter Street and the Japanese Cultural and Community Center at 1840 Sutter Street. (Page & Turnbull.)

Currently, one building in the civic & community property type category is formally designated as a historic resource within the Japantown area; the Bush Street Temple, also known as Ohabai Shalome, at 1881 Bush Street (locally listed). Though originally used as a Jewish synagogue, the building had historic association with the Japanese American community for many years as the Soto Zen Mission.

Significance

In relation to the ethnic and cultural themes of this context statement, civic and community properties are probably the most significant. Civic and community buildings associated with the Japanese American community were often built or commissioned by members and groups within community itself and are therefore most expressive of cultural values and aesthetics. They readily express the ethnic identity and cultural life-ways of the group, including their social, spiritual and recreational practices.

Civic and community properties may be significant under CRHR Criterion 1 if they are associated with specific events or historic trends that have influenced the Japanese American community. For instance, a school building that was established as the result of the 1895 school exclusion law, instituted by the San Francisco Board of Education, which restricted Japanese American children from attending mainstream schools might be significant for association with that event and subsequent social development. Additionally, if a civic or community property is found to be associated with a significant member of the Japanese American community – for instance, a prominent civic or religious leader – it may be significant under CRHR Criterion 2. Civic and community buildings are very likely be significant under CRHR Criterion 3 as examples of architectural resources associated with the Japanese American context because many exhibit Japanese American aesthetics in their design. Though less likely, they may potentially exhibit culturally-based methods of construction, or may have been designed by a Japanese American architect or builder. Any

archeological artifact found on a civic or community property in Japantown has the potential to yield knowledge of history and may even have associations with cultural practices and could therefore prove significant under CRHR Criterion 4.

Integrity

When evaluating the integrity of civic or community properties in Japantown, the most important aspects are association and feeling. A property's ability to convey its association with the Japanese American culture is critical. A civic or community property should maintain obvious associations through the retention of features that connote its function within the community, the activities carried out at the property, and the cultural importance that it had for the community. Since feeling represents a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular time period, it is also important to civic and community resources in Japantown, which should embody some reference to Japanese American aesthetics and culture, since that is the demographic they served. Similarly, integrity of design is important, because it is often the presence of Japanese-inspired architecture that expresses a civic or community property's ties to Japanese American culture and the cultural activities carried out at the property. Because Redevelopment efforts in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the relocation of many buildings, issues of integrity of location are important, both for buildings that retain their original locations and those that were moved. The current location of buildings moved within the neighborhood is significant due to the direct association with the events of Redevelopment. However, any building moved into or out of the Japantown neighborhood would lack ties to the geography and setting of the cultural neighborhood. Issues of location are especially important for civic and community buildings, which should retain a physical proximity to the community that they were intended to serve. Less important to the integrity of civic and community resources are the aspects of materials and workmanship, unless those aspects are directly influenced by Japanese American design aesthetics or construction methods.

INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY TYPES

Industrial buildings are rare in the Japantown neighborhood; however two have been identified within the survey area. They are relatively large structures that stand out among the smaller residential and commercial buildings in the immediate area. Both are located on Bush Street within a block of each other at 2226-2232 and 2130-2140 Bush Street. 2226-2232 Bush Street was constructed in 1919 and exhibits the 20th Century Commercial style, while 2130-2140 Bush Street was constructed in 1933 in the Art Deco style. The former is two stories in height, while the latter is three stories in height. Both are in generally good condition. 2226-2232 Bush Street recently underwent remodeling.

In general, industrial buildings will be multi-story concrete or masonry structures with facades divided into symmetrical structural bays. These bays will contain large expanses of multi-light, industrial-sash windows and vehicular openings fitted with overhead roll-up doors. Inside, most have open floor space for manufacturing uses and are roughly finished.

Industrial buildings are often capped by a truss roof. In the case of 2226-2232 Bush Street, a sawtooth roof allows for skylights to provide light to the interior work spaces. Ornamentation is usually restrained, consisting for the most part of concrete or sheet metal string course moldings, shaped parapets, corbelling, and occasionally a simple cornice.



**Left to right: Industrial buildings at 2226-2232 Bush Street
and 2130-2140 Bush Street. (Page & Turnbull)**

Currently, none of the industrial buildings in Japantown are designated as historic resources and none are known to have any associations with the Japanese American community.

Significance

Because only two industrial buildings have been identified in Japantown and neither is known to have Japanese American associations, it is unlikely that either building would be deemed significant in relation to the ethnic and cultural themes of this context statement. The history presented by this context statement does not describe manufacturing or other factory work as a major occupation of Japanese Americans, nor was labor and industry a particularly strong theme in Japanese American history. Though the industrial establishments in Japantown may have employed Japanese American workers, it is unlikely that they had enough impact on the cultural community's lifestyle or economic status to be considered significant.

Should an industrial building in Japantown be evaluated for significance, however, it would need to be associated with specific events or historic trends that have influenced the Japanese American community in order to be significant under CRHR Criterion 1. For instance, if a particular product that contributed specifically to the local Japanese American culture and lifestyle was manufactured at the property, it might be considered significant under Criterion 1. Additionally, if an industrial property is found to be associated with a significant member of the Japanese American community – for instance, if it was owned or operated by a prominent Japanese American business person – it may be significant under CRHR Criterion 2. Industrial buildings may be significant under CRHR Criterion 3 as examples of architectural resources associated with the Japanese American context if they exhibit Japanese American aesthetics, methods of construction, or have been designed by a

Japanese American architect or builder. Any archeological artifact found on an industrial property in Japantown has the potential to yield knowledge of history and even have associations with cultural practices and may therefore prove significant under CRHR Criterion 4.

Integrity

When evaluating the integrity of industrial properties within the Japantown context, the most important aspects are association and feeling. A property's ability to convey its association with the Japanese American culture is critical. An industrial property should maintain obvious associations through the retention of features that connote the functions of the building that uphold ties to the Japanese American community and culture. Since feeling represents a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular time period, it is also important to industrial resources in Japantown, which should embody some reference to Japanese American aesthetics and culture. Similarly, integrity of design is important, because it is often the presence of Japanese-language signage or the presence of Japanese-inspired architectural details that may advertise a property's ties to Japanese American culture and the production of cultural goods. Because Redevelopment efforts in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the relocation of many buildings, issues of integrity of location are important, both for buildings that retain their original locations and those that were moved. The current location of buildings moved within the neighborhood is significant due to the direct association with the events of Redevelopment. However, any building moved into or out of the Japantown neighborhood would lack ties to the geography and setting of the cultural neighborhood. Integrity of materials and workmanship are important, as industrial resources typically have distinctly utilitarian architectural, both in aesthetics and form. However, unless those aspects are directly influenced by Japanese American design aesthetics or construction methods, integrity of materials and workmanship are not particularly applicable to the Japanese American cultural context.

PUBLIC UTILITY BUILDINGS

Only two public utility buildings are present in the Japantown neighborhood, but they are relatively prominent structures that stand out among the smaller residential structures in the immediate area. Both are situated in close proximity to one another near the western edge of the Japantown area boundaries. The Pacific Telephone & Telegraph building was constructed in 1932 and exhibits the Art Deco style, while the former Home Telephone Co. building was constructed circa 1915 in the Classical Revival style. The former is three stories in height, while the latter was originally only one story in height. Both are in excellent condition, though large modern additions have been added to each. The Pacific Telephone & Telegraph building is one of many almost identical Art Deco utility buildings once owned by the Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Company and located throughout San Francisco. It is therefore part of a larger context within the city, but has little application to the cultural context of the Japantown neighborhood.



**Left to right: The Pacific Telephone & Telegraph building at 1930 Steiner Street and the former Home Telephone Co. building at 2255 Bush Street.
(Page & Turnbull)**

Currently, neither of the public utility buildings in Japantown are designated as historic resources and none are known to have any associations with the Japanese American community.

Significance

Because only two public utility buildings have been identified in Japantown it is unlikely that either building would be deemed significant in relation to the ethnic and cultural themes of this context statement. The history presented by this context statement does not describe public utilities as a major theme or issue in Japanese American history or in the development of this particular neighborhood. Though public utility companies may have employed Japanese American workers, it is unlikely that they or the representative buildings in Japantown had enough impact on the community's lifestyle or economic status to be considered significant.

Should a public utility building in Japantown be evaluated for significance, however, it would need to be associated with specific events or historic trends that have influenced the Japanese American community in order to be significant under CRHR Criterion 1. Additionally, if a public utility building is found to be associated with a significant member of the Japanese American community it may be significant under CRHR Criterion 2. Public utility buildings could be significant under CRHR Criterion 3 as examples of architectural resources associated with the Japanese American context only if they exhibit Japanese American aesthetics, methods of construction, or have been designed by a Japanese American architect or builder. Any archeological artifact found on a public utility property in Japantown has the potential to yield knowledge of history and may even have associations with cultural practices and could therefore prove significant under CRHR Criterion 4.

Integrity

When evaluating the integrity of public utility properties within the Japantown context, the most important aspects are association and feeling. A property's ability to convey its association with the Japanese American culture is critical. A public utility property should maintain obvious associations through the retention of features that connote any functions of the building that uphold ties to the Japanese American community and culture. Since feeling represents a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular time period, it is also important to public utility resources in Japantown, which should embody some reference to Japanese American aesthetics and culture. Similarly, integrity of design is important, because it is often the presence of Japanese-language signage or the presence of Japanese-inspired architectural details that may advertise a property's ties to Japanese American culture and the production of cultural goods or services. Because Redevelopment efforts in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the relocation of many buildings, issues of integrity of location are important, both for buildings that retain their original locations and those that were moved. The current location of buildings moved within the neighborhood is significant due to the direct association with the events of Redevelopment. However, any building moved into or out of the Japantown neighborhood would lack ties to the geography and setting of the cultural neighborhood. Integrity of materials and workmanship are important, as public utility resources typically have distinct architectural style due to their status as "public" buildings. However, unless those aspects are directly influenced by Japanese American design aesthetics or construction methods, integrity of materials and workmanship are not particularly applicable to the Japanese American cultural context.

OPEN SPACE

Though a number of large city parks are located in the vicinity of Japantown, none are located within the survey area itself. However, a number of smaller open spaces – some City-owned, others not – are found scattered throughout the neighborhood. These include urban open spaces like Peace Plaza and Buchanan Mall, as well as "mini-parks" like the Cottage Row walkway. Open space is also incorporated within a few of the large apartment complexes in Japantown, providing a park-like setting to enhance residential developments. Such open spaces can be found at Nihonmachi Terrace and the St. Francis Square housing cooperative. The open space that surrounds the latter was, in fact, designed by well-known landscape architect Larry Halprin. Aside from the Cottage Row mini-park, most of these open spaces were created relatively recently, often as elements of Redevelopment or socially-oriented movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The open spaces in Japantown can be grouped into two general categories according to their physical attributes; park-like spaces that incorporate lawns, bushes, trees and other vegetation-based landscaping, and urban mall spaces that are characterized primarily by hardscape, public art installations, and street furniture.



Left to Right: Open space within the St. Francis Square apartment complex and Peace Plaza (Source: Page & Turnbull.)

Currently, only one example of an open space is designated as a historic resource within the Japantown neighborhood. The Mary Ellen Pleasant Memorial Park, located at the corner of Bush and Octavia streets, is a City of San Francisco Structure of Merit. It has no association to the Japanese American context, however.

Significance

In relation to the ethnic and cultural themes of this Context Statement, much of the open space in Japantown could be considered significant for the purposes of historic designation, though most would have to be considered exceptionally significant due to age. Though open spaces in the neighborhood were not necessarily owned by Japanese Americans, they tend to have obvious connections to Japanese American-associated developments; including both residential and commercial complexes. In many cases the landscape elements within the open spaces reflect the ethnic identity and aesthetics of the surrounding community. Elements like bonsai trees, rock gardens, and public art convey cultural identity.

Open spaces are most likely to be significant under CRHR Criterion 1 for associations with specific events or historic trends that have influenced the Japanese American community. Many of the open spaces in the neighborhood are related to Redevelopment activities and the efforts of community and social groups that strove to establish elements of cultural identity within the neighborhood, and, therefore, may be considered to have associations with historic events. Open spaces are not likely to be associated with a significant member of the Japanese American community, but if so, it may be significant under CRHR Criterion 2. Open spaces may also be significant under CRHR Criterion 3 if they exhibit Japanese American aesthetics in gardening and landscape architecture, or have been designed by a Japanese American landscape architect, artist, or other designer. For example, Buchanan Mall was designed by a Japanese American landscape architect (Rai Okamoto) and a Japanese American artist (Ruth Azawa), which might make it significant as the work of a master under Criterion 3. Any archeological artifact found within an open space in Japantown has the potential to yield knowledge of history and may even have associations with cultural practices and could therefore prove significant under CRHR Criterion 4.

Integrity

When evaluating the integrity of open spaces in Japantown, the most important aspects are association and feeling. A property's ability to convey its association with the Japanese American culture is critical. An open space should maintain obvious associations through the retention of features that connote its ties to the Japanese American community and culture. Since feeling represents a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular time period, it is also important to open spaces in Japantown, which should embody some reference to Japanese American aesthetics and culture. Similarly, integrity of design is important, because it is often the presence of Japanese-inspired landscaping, plantings, or public art that illustrate involvement of the Japanese American community with an open space. Also important to the integrity of open spaces are the aspects of materials and workmanship. In some cases "materials" may be somewhat impermanent if they include elements of vegetation. However, since Japanese landscape design and gardening puts emphasis on plant species and the way they are placed, cultivated and tended, the concepts of workmanship and materials are applicable. This is also true of more permanent elements such as sculpture, street furniture, monuments, etc. Integrity of setting and location hold a similar level of importance as they do with other property types, though it is nearly impossible to relocate an open space. Should any elements thereof be relocated into or out of the Japantown neighborhood, however; they would lack ties to the geography and setting of the cultural neighborhood. Because Redevelopment efforts in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the relocation of many resources, issues of integrity of location are important, both for resources that retain their original locations and those that were moved. The current location of many open spaces within the neighborhood is significant due to the direct association with the events of Redevelopment.

APPENDIX

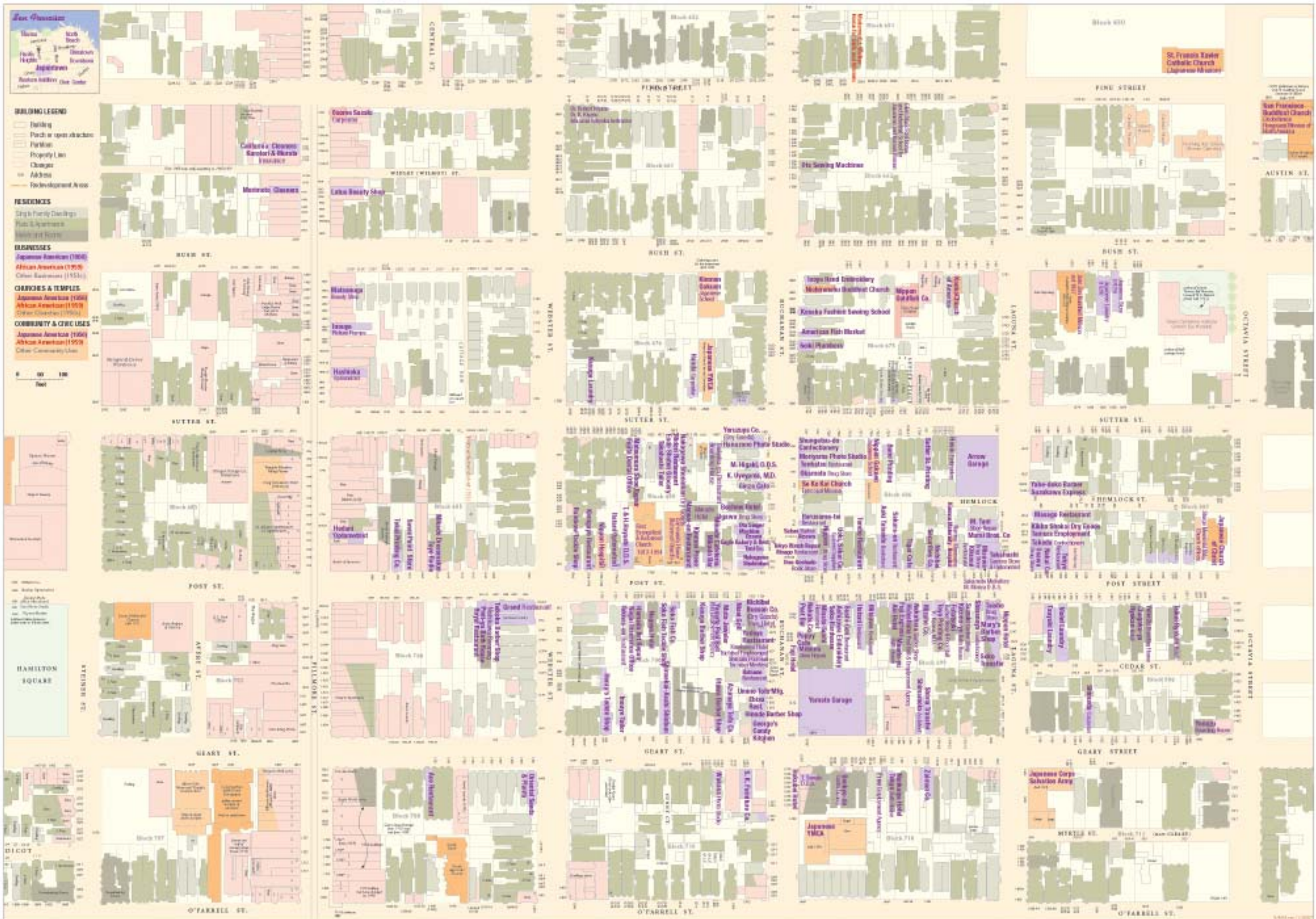
The following series of maps were created by Ben Pease and depict San Francisco's Japantown at various points in its history. The information shown on these maps is synthesized from Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. maps, Japanese American business directories and related maps from the Japanese American History Archives, oral histories and other primary sources. They have been valuable in the writing of this Historic Context Statement and other historical and cultural documentation for the Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan.

Maps are copyrighted 2006 by Ben Pease, Pease Press, and are duplicated here with permission from the author.

Selected landmarks along Fillmore in the 1920s
(notes from Jerry Flamm's *Good Life in Hard Times*)

Selected landmarks along Fillmore in the 1920s
(notes from Jerry Flamm's *Good Life in Hard Times*)





1940

San Francisco's Japantown and Western Addition at the close of the Depression and the Eve of WWII

This map is adapted from a map created for the exhibit "Back in the City" at the National Japanese American Historical Society (japanesehistory.org) in 2004.

The base map is a composite of Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. maps from 1895, 1913, 1951 and 1964. Information from these maps is reproduced for the Japantown Digital Neighborhood Planning Project with permission from The Sanborn Library LLC.

Japanese American businesses and institutions are from Hakuhon Hainichi and Fashim-Times directories of 1940.

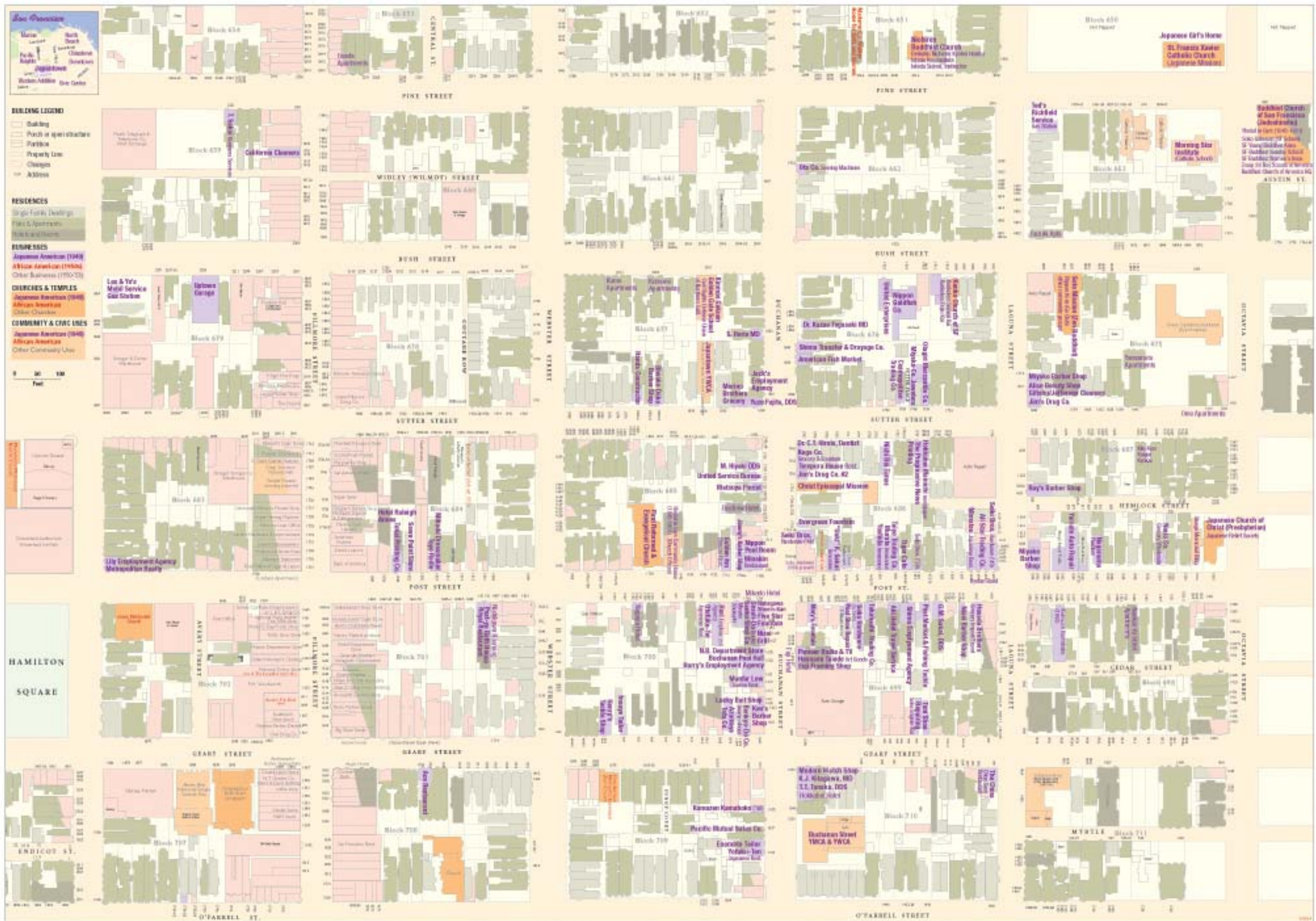
Back-owned businesses are a partial listing gleaned from the book "History of the West and other sources" and are not shown at the time and many more were soon to arrive.

Western Street median names of 1955 are from Peter Hain's "Western Street" website (2005) and are shown for reference but not shaded for 1940.

Buildings and general business uses are a composite from a variety of sources and may not be 100% accurate for the date shown. Large black areas are not yet mapped.

Map ©2004-2007 by Ben Papp

PRIME PRIME CARTOGRAPHY



1948-'49 San Francisco's Japantown and Western Addition rebuilding after WWII

Map Labels:

This map is adapted from a map created for the exhibit "Back in the City" at the National Japanese American Historical Society (www.njhs.org) in 2004.

The base map is a composite of Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Co. maps from 1899, 1913, 1925, and 1944. Information from these maps is reproduced by the Japantown Center Neighborhood Planning Process with permission from The Sanborn Library, LLC.

Japanese American businesses and institutions are from Japanese Merchant Directories, 1948 and 49.

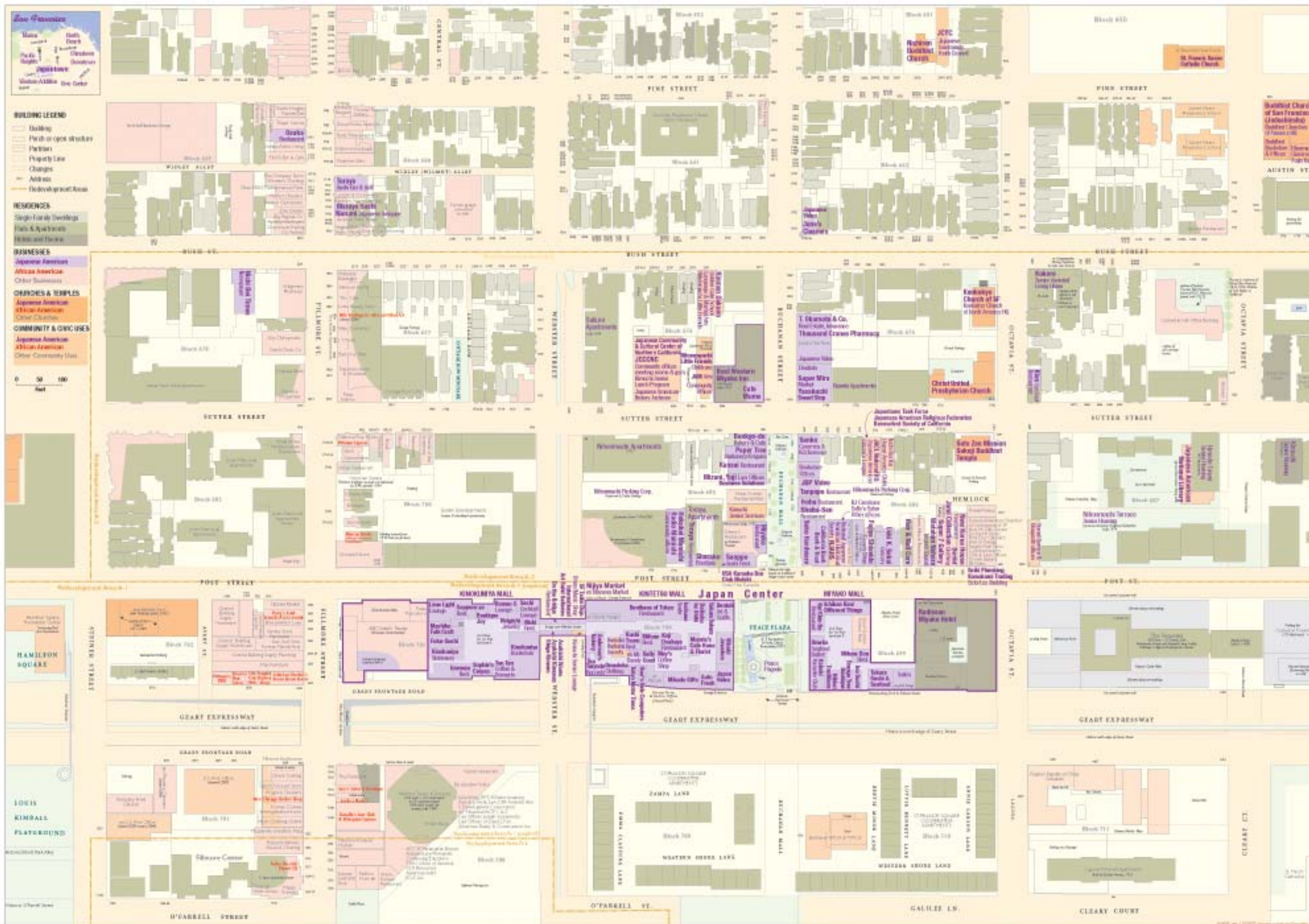
- Japanese American National Library
- 1950 Japanese Merchant Directory
- Japanese American National Library

Block owned businesses are partial listing; many more existed at the time.

Various Filmore Street merchant names for 1953 are from Peter Filmore's Filmore Place website (2000), not independently checked.

Buildings and general business uses are a composite from a variety of sources and may not be 100% accurate for the time shown. Large block areas are not yet mapped.

Map ©2004-2007 by Ben Phares



2004

San Francisco's Japantown and Western Addition Begin a New Century



Map Notes
This map is adapted from a map created for the exhibit "Back in the City" at the National Japanese American Historical Society (www.njhs.org) in 2004.

The base map is a composite of Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. maps from 1899, 1913, 1915, 1917, and 1924. Information from these maps is reproduced for the Japantown/Western Addition planning process with permission from The Sanborn Library LLC.

Business and residential surveys by cartographer Ben Pease, 2004-2006. You may notice how much has already changed.

Large blank areas are not yet mapped.

Map ©2004-2007 by Ben Pease

Pease Pease Cartography
www.peasepease.com

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