1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: LITTLE TOKYO HISTORIC DISTRICT

Other Name/Site Number: Japantown

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 301-349 East First Street; 110-120 San Pedro Street; 119 Central Avenue Not for publication:___

City/Town: Los Angeles Vicinity:___

State: CA County: Los Angeles Code: 037 Zip Code: 90012

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property		Category of Property	
Private:	X	Building(s):	___
Public-local:	X	District:	X
Public-State:	___	Site:	___
Public-Federal:	___	Structure:	___
		Object:	___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
9	4	buildings
___	___	sites
___	___	structures
___	___	objects
9	4	Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 9

Name of related multiple property listing:

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

_____ _____
Signature of Certifying Official Date

_____
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

_____ _____
Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date

_____
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I, hereby certify that this property is:

____ Entered in the National Register _____
____ Determined eligible for the _____
National Register
____ Determined not eligible for the _____
National Register
____ Removed from the National Register _____
____ Other (explain): _____

_____ _____
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic:	Domestic	Sub:	Multiple Dwelling Hotel
	Commercial Trade		Specialty Store, Restaurant, Business
	Religion		Religious Facility
Current:	Domestic	Sub:	Multiple Dwelling
	Commerce/Trade		Specialty Store, Restaurant, Business
	Recreation and Culture		Museum

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Eclectic

MATERIALS:

Foundation:	Masonry
Walls:	Brick, Concrete, Stucco
Roof:	Composition
Other:	Glazed Tile (decoration and bulkhead—beneath storefront windows)

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

SUMMARY[1]

The Little Tokyo Historic District typifies the economic, social, and cultural development of the Japanese-American community of Los Angeles before the Second World War. The district consists of the north streetfront of the 300 block of E. First Street and several other buildings on the same city block, directly east of the Los Angeles Civic Center. This area is "generally recognized as the center of Little Tokyo,"[2] and is the only block in the larger former "Little Tokyo" or "Japantown" that retains a continuous streetface.

Although the district is only the commercial heart of the original Japanese-American community of Los Angeles, it nevertheless effectively preserves the neighborhood's distinctive ethnic flavor. This ethnicity is evident, for example, in signs in Japanese characters and food displays in restaurant windows and in the markets.

Most buildings in the district are in common Los Angeles commercial styles of the first quarter of the 20th century. Ranging in height from 1 to 4 stories, all are brick and present somewhat formalized facades to the street, with, in most cases, unaltered utilitarian red brick elevations on the sides and rears; there are no setbacks from First Street.

With exceptions set out in the detailed description below, decoration and ornaments are typically derived from Classical architectural styles. One building each incorporates Art Deco, Neoclassical, and Oriental motifs.

Multiple use characterizes the present and historic functions of the buildings. Ground floor retail along the street frontage provides a pedestrian orientation as well as a commercial unity. The lower stories were devoted to retail and service establishments, while the upper levels housed the proprietors and their families, offered furnished rooms, or provided office space. Occasionally, merchants would also live on the ground levels in the rear of the buildings and, as a result, truck gardens were planted behind some of them. Ancillary structures, both wood

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[1] The descriptions of buildings here are modified and updated slightly from those that appear in the National Register of Historic Places nomination prepared by the Los Angeles Conservancy and Little Tokyo Advisory Committee in 1986. Additional information has been added from studies prepared by and for the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles. Mr. Tom Furushiro of the latter agency reviewed the text for accuracy in April 1993.

[2] Los Angeles *Herald Examiner*, August 18, 1978, E-2.

frame and brick, were constructed in the rear and usually attached to the principal buildings. Two former religious structures are within the district.

The district's historic integrity is strong, with nine of its 13 buildings classed as contributing and most in good condition. Some storefronts have been altered.

JAPANESE UNION CHURCH (120 NORTH SAN PEDRO STREET) (1)

The northernmost building in the district is the Japanese Union Church. The church was the designated "Civil Control Station" for Little Tokyo to which all Japanese-Americans were required to report under the provisions of "Civilian Exclusion Order No. 33" on May 4-5, 1942, preliminary to "relocation."

This brick edifice was designed by architect H.M. Patterson and erected in 1922-23. The church is in the Classical Revival style separated from the street by an iron-railed forecourt and from the commercial building to its south by a narrow walkway which slopes down to a partial basement.

The church is 3 stories in height and rests on a concrete foundation. The symmetrical front facade is clad in brown-colored brick while the remaining sides are of red brick. The facade features a 2-story Greek portico supported by four concrete Ionic columns with cast stone capitals featuring egg-and-dart molding. The entablature has rosettes on the architrave which repeat the egg-and-dart detail. Within the portico are three inset arches flanked by pilasters with Classical capitals and bases. Each arch contains an arched window of favrile glass surrounded by stained glass above a patterned brick spandrel with cross motifs. At the base of each arch is a pair of wood paneled doors leading into the church.

The portico pediment continues into a cornice, at the second-floor level, in an egg-and-dart pattern, which wraps around the sides of the building forming small returns. Above the portico a high gabled parapet rises into a triangle with a squared apex topped by a 6′ high metal cross.

Additional arched stained glass windows as well as 1-over-1 double-hung wood sash appear on the sides and the rear elevation. Further fenestration of a utilitarian nature on the parapeted east elevation suggests residential and other uses in the rear of the sanctuary.

The interior contains a large auditorium on the second floor and classrooms and dining facilities on the lower floor. Its social hall served as a gymnasium. In the early 1950s, the classrooms held popular English classes when it became possible for *Issei* (first-generation immigrant Japanese) to become citizens. The church is no longer used for religious purposes but remains in good condition. (Contributing.)

SAN PEDRO FIRM BUILDING (108-116 NORTH SAN PEDRO) (2)

To the south of the Union Church stands a 3-story commercial building, designed by William E. Young in 1925. Simplified elements of Classical Revival styling are in evidence on the building. It has a brown brick facade above a shallowly rusticated cast stone base. Brick pilasters or piers rise from the first-floor stuccoed storefronts and define 5 bays. Inset squares of green terra cotta ornament the tops of the piers. With the exception of the central bay on the third story, which contains a single window, all of the upper story bays are occupied by pairs of wood-framed, 1-over-1 double-hung sash windows. Brick corbelling runs just below the second-floor sills and along the cornice line.

Beneath a plain stringcourse which marks the top of the base, the ground story accommodates four (recent) storefronts and the central entry to the upper floors. The storefronts are nearly identical, with angled display cases flanking aluminum frame doors and prism glass transoms. Canvas awnings embellish the storefronts. Recessed behind a flattened arch, the building entrance has an aluminum framed double door and transom. Above the entry, a painted metal fire escape rises up the central bay. The building culminates at the top with a low stepped brick parapet above a belt course. The end bays are raised, accented by recessed panels above the piers, and connected by a pipe railing across the three central bays. A free-standing building, its straightforward utilitarian red brick side elevations are visible from the street. (Contributing.)

106 N. SAN PEDRO / 301 E. FIRST STREET (3)

This 1-story brick commercial building, wrapping around the corner of First and San Pedro, was constructed in 1908 and modified in 1925. From 1930 until World War II, the building was owned by Yneto Kataoka, a jeweler-watchmaker.

It encompasses a narrow storefront on First Street with an angled entry on the corner and extends some 104′ along San Pedro. The First Street frontage is totally obscured, its brick walls sheathed with vertical siding, and its parapet hidden by signage. A single square of brick is visible, hinting at corbelling in the parapet. On the west elevation the parapet becomes visible and rises up in two shallow steps to hide the roof. The northern portion of the San Pedro elevation is filled by two storefronts, marked by canvas awnings, which consist of display windows above painted brick and wood-framed doors and transoms. There is a rounded screen of corrugated metal, at first glance resembling a column, which shields the pipes on the northwest corner of the building. (Non-contributing.)

303--307-1/2 E. FIRST STREET (4)

Nat Dryden built this building in 1907 for William Bennett. It was acquired in 1915 by Edmund Jung, who was apparently an American-born Chinese, who could own land because of his American

birth. In 1927, the tenants included only Japanese: a bookstore-stationer, a druggist, a hardware store, and a restaurant.

It is a 1-story, brick commercial building containing three storefronts. Lathwork and a backlit sign cover much of the transom and parapet, which probably remain somewhat intact behind these accoutrements. Brick corbelling is barely visible at the roof line. Sheathed in modern materials with the brick now hidden, this building retains the basic shape of the 1930s storefronts. (Non-contributing.)

309--313-1/2 E. FIRST STREET (5)

An Art Deco design characterizes the stucco facade of this 2-story brick and concrete commercial building, erected in 1933 by builder Mieki Hayano from a design by W.C. Cook, who was the engineer for Yasujiro Kawasaki. Kawasaki's children were the original legal owners of the property because the State's Alien Land Law prevented foreign-born Japanese from owning land. It was the only building in the district that continued to be owned by Japanese-Americans throughout World War II, and is still in the family. In addition, it was the home of the first Nisei Week Festival and Parade (1934). Finally, because of its relatively high integrity and its architectural quality as a small-scale foray into Art Deco design, this building rates as one of the best architecturally in the district.

Framed by raised end bays with stepped pilasters, the second story preserves the Art Deco scheme. A series of six casement windows with transoms, separated by slightly raised pilasters, forms a gallery between the end bays. Ornate, shallow, cast panels in foliage design are above the end bay windows, while the end pilasters and the central bays are ornamented with bands of chevron moldings at the cornice. The south side of the first story has been altered in appearance but not in proportion. A decorative grille transom spans the eastern, smaller, storefront and the entry to the second floor. The broader west transom, topping two 1950s vintage brick- and aluminum-framed glass storefronts, has been filled in but may just cover the transoms. Narrow bands of lotus-shaped designs, echoing those above the second-story windows, punctuate the transom.

The original Oriental motifs utilized at 313, including a diamond window over the double wood and glass door, are of interest. Two second-story neon signs projecting at 90 degree angles over the building are also notable. In the rear of the property, but visible over the 1-story buildings to the west, a 2-story brick ancillary structure is connected by a 1-story infill to the main building. (Contributing.)

315-319 E. FIRST STREET (6)

The only post-World War II building in the district, 315-319 E. First is a 1-story commercial building containing three storefronts; it dates to 1957. Its scale and lack of setback are

compatible with the character of the district. The architect was Y. Tom Makins for the Kawasakis, owners of the adjacent building at 309-313-1/2. Framed by stone piers, the face is spanned by a corrugated metal parapet to which signs are attached. Stone is also used for the bases of the display windows which flank the central entries of the three identical storefronts. Canvas awnings shade the facades of the three establishments. (Non-contributing.)

321-323 E. FIRST STREET (7)

A 2-story, brick, commercial, vernacular building, this 1930 structure by an unknown builder resembles the 3-story building to the east, but has been much more modified, notably by the removal of the third story in 1967, leaving an unembellished parapet above the second level.

The whitewashed facade contains five second-story bays on an AABAA scheme. Raised piers separate the end bays. Pairs of 1-over-1 double-hung sash windows occupy the A bays, while single broader 1-over-1 sash windows are in the B bay. Some of the windows are now framed with aluminum and a couple have been given decorative shutters, although others retain the original wood surrounds. Each flat-headed window is set within a segmented opening whose arch is outlined with two courses of header brick. A series of molding, culminating in an egg-and-dart design, bands the facade just below the second-story windows, but is mostly obscured by signage. It contains two storefronts, faced with narrow red brick or ceramic tile and lit by metal-frame openings. The original entry to the upper story at 321-1/2 is intact. Another remnant of the original construction is a cast-iron column marking the common wall at the east end of the building. (Non-contributing.)

325-329 E. FIRST STREET (8)

This 3-story commercial building, built about 1920, has served as a hotel and a store. Once the twin of the building adjacent to it on the west, the brick structure has a whitewashed facade. The ground floor has been rehabilitated to its historic appearance, featuring tile bulkheads, large display windows, awnings, transom windows, and new signage.

The window pattern creates a division which adheres to a AABAA scheme. Pairs of tall and narrow, 1-over-1, double-hung sash windows occupy segmentally arched apertures in the "A" bays, while a single broader window, fronted by the fire escape, fills the "B." Some of the windows have been altered by the substitution of metal frames for the original wood. Two-story brick piers flank the end "A," rising through egg-and-dart stringcourses which band the facade beneath the window openings on both upper stories. The piers continue through the plainly corbelled cornice to the top of the unembellished parapet. (Contributing.)

331-335 E. FIRST STREET (9)

This building dates to 1914 and was designed by Alfred F. Priest for non-Japanese owners as a hotel with first-floor storefronts. Before and after World War II it was known as the Mikado Hotel; during the war, when it served a largely Black clientele, it was the Shreveport Hotel and housed a "soul food" restaurant.

A fine example of the commercial vernacular that filled American "Main Streets" in the early years of the 20th century, this 3-story brick building is one of the highlights of the block, for its retains a high degree of architectural and historic integrity.

Above storefronts in glazed white brick on the first story, the second and third stories are intact and faced with buff brick ornamented with darker red brick decorative details. This is a symmetrical composition of 5 bays, arranged in a AABAA plan. Each bay contains a wood-framed 1-over-1 double-hung sash window, with a narrow opening in the central bay. Lintels, articulated by soldier courses of red brick, cap each window and are accented with keystones of radiating bricks on the third story. Corbelled sills also ornament the third-floor openings. The second-story windows are set directly above the ground-floor entablature. Consisting of several courses of brick culminating in a dentil-like band, this frieze and cornice provide a visual balance for the elaborate corbelled brick cornice above the third floor. End brackets, consolled in a T shape, frame this cornice.

The ground floor remains as it looked in 1932 and contains three storefronts plus the entry to the upper stories. The east and central openings contain a slightly recessed glass door set between unevenly sized display windows atop glazed tile bulkheads, lavender on the east and turquoise on the west. There are transoms of lead prism glass and canvas awnings. The westernmost storefront has been lengthened and its transoms covered. While the door to the upper level has also been changed, the paneled metal canopy suspended on chains from the facade is in place. (Contributing.)

337-339 E. FIRST STREET (10)

An extremely pared down design of Classical Revival influences is discernible on this 2-story commercial, vernacular building dating to ca. 1905. Built of brick, it displays a whitewashed facade that has been altered below the transoms. Raised brick pilasters, banded by stove moldings, separate the four paired window sets on the upper story. Flatheaded windows appear in the end sets while segmentally arched openings are in the central bays. All are covered from view by awnings. A frieze zone is delineated by a beltcourse beneath the windows and a stove molding which bands the facade above the storefronts. The storefronts were remodeled about 1986 and are a simplified interpretation of a traditional storefront. The long casement windows with transoms are paired and topped with segmental arched and flat arched heads. (Contributing.)

341-345 E. FIRST STREET (11)

A straightforward, commercial, vernacular design dating to ca. 1905, and unaltered above the ground floor, distinguishes this 4-story brick building. This modest building has intact materials and design elements on the upper floors. In 1927, it housed three Japanese tenants on the ground floor: a bookstore, a druggist, and a barber.

The facade, sheathed with hard-fired buff brick, is divided into five equal-sized bays of 1-over-1 wood-framed sash. Corbelled sills adorn the third- and fourth-floor window openings. Additional corbelling, punctuated by raised blocks which open downward in the form of miniature inverted pyramids, bands the parapet. Centered beneath the parapet is an inset panel which probably once contained the name of the building but has been stuccoed. The second-story windows rest directly above a decorative belt course which separates the retail ground level from the residential upper floors. Four storefronts and the entry to the upstairs, the latter on the east end, occupy the ground level. (Contributing.)

347-353 E. FIRST STREET (12)

This 3-story, commercial building, in good condition, dates to ca. 1911, and was remodelled in 1935 under the influence of Art Deco. It is constructed of brick faced with scored stucco. A 3-bay ABA scheme is followed on the upper stories. The A bays contain pairs of 1-over-1, wood-framed, double-hung sash linked by single stone lintels and sills. Outlined by a 2-story, raised, round stucco arch, the central double-size bay is filled by two pairs of windows, separated by attenuated stone pilasters on each level. Those on the second story are tall and narrow double-hung sash, while the outer windows on the third story are fixed and conform to the sides of the arch in shape. A corbelled sill, bisected by an iron fire escape which rises up the center of the facade, connects the second-floor windows in the B bay. Slightly raised patterns of diamonds and chevrons band the facade above the ground story and are echoed above each bay at the roofline. The zig-zag decorative motif is particularly reflective of the Art Deco style.

Two storefronts and the entrance to the upper stories are contained on the first floor. The larger one of the two occupies slightly more than half the street frontage and accommodates the Far East Cafe, which has fine interior period features. The building displays typical storefront elements, including a wood-framed transom, glazed tile bulkheads for display windows, and four notable neon signs, two attached to the building and two in the windows. The smaller storefront on the east utilizes glass block in place of glazed tile. (Contributing.)

355-369 E. FIRST STREET (CORNER OF FIRST STREET AND CENTRAL AVENUE (13)

This facade is part of the temple complex on Central Avenue described immediately following.

HOMPA HONGWANGI BUDDHIST TEMPLE (119 N. CENTRAL AVENUE)

The former Nishi Hongwangi or Hompa Hongwangi Buddhist Temple is an eclectic building consisting of three sections, distinct from one another architecturally and historically, but all constructed in 1925 for the *Jodo Shinshyu* Buddhist sect from a design by architect Edgar H. Cline.

The temple merged three existing Buddhist churches in the area under Bishop Koyo Uchida, and became one of the largest and most influential Buddhist churches in the United States.[3] Except during World War II, when it was used to store the household goods of its "relocated" parishioners, and continued to function under the Rev. Julius Goldwater, a Caucasian Buddhist priest, it remained open until sold by the congregation in 1969 in anticipation of urban renewal in the area.

Anchoring the corner of E. First Street and Central Avenue is a 3-story business block, occupied by stores and offices. On the Central Avenue frontage, the temple rises slightly higher than the commercial block and displays an eclectic styling, drawing upon Oriental and Egyptian precedents. The temple office (the northernmost portion of the structure) echoes the style of the First Street elevation.

The First Street facade curves around the corner of First Street and Central Avenue. It has dark red brick, laid in common bond, on the first and second stories, while the third is finished in plaster, which is scored to simulate stone and is topped by a narrow cornice. A stringcourse marks the transition from one material to the other along the third-floor sill level. The second and third floors feature symmetrically spaced double-hung windows. Most of the ground floor shops retain their original storefronts, including glass paneled doors, transom windows, and checkerboard bulkheads of black and yellow tiles. The office entry on the west end has a terra cotta surround and a shield and scroll ornament centered above it.

The corner storefront consists of a wood-framed glass door with a geometric pattern of muntins which is recessed by two free-standing pillars. Side windows are above checkered tile bulkheads which are pierced by metal lattice vents.

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[3] *Buddhist Churches of America, 75 Years of History* (Chicago: Nobart Publishing Company, 1974), pp. 197-209, supplied additional information for this description.

The Central Avenue temple facade, rising three stories--slightly higher than the adjoining First Street office section--is particularly noteworthy. It is framed by two massive raised pylon-like bays and faced with scored concrete. The south bay contains the impressive tile-faced temple entry with its huge cement roof canopy (*karahafu*) sitting on large elaborate brackets. This entry duplicates the imperial gateway at the Mother Temple in Kyoto, but in cement rather than wood.

Sawn wood ornaments decorate one beam, which spans the underside of the canopy. It is adorned with a shield and scroll at its apex and framed by a roundel set on each side. A single broad window with a geometric fretwork of muntins pierces the upper levels of the entrance bay. The same window motif appears on the north bay, topping a single tall narrow window on the second story and a secondary entrance at ground level. Flanked by small recessed windows, this entrance is set within an unornamented frame with tapered sides and extended lintel.

The center of the temple facade, flanked by the contrasting side wings, is articulated by four 2-story brick piers against a scored concrete surface atop a 1-story brick base. The lotus petal-designed capitals and the patterned bases of the piers use Egyptian motifs. A deep cavetto cornice marks the roofline of the temple with a small patterned terra cotta parapet above the central portion.

There is a social hall on the first floor, but the highlight of the interior is the *hondo* (sanctuary) on the second floor of the temple portion of the complex. This was the largest assembly hall in Little Tokyo, seating 800-1,000, including meetings of the Central Japanese Association. The pews were an Occidental innovation, not customarily being used in Japan. The *hondo*'s decorations, however, closely parallel those in the Nijo Castle and Nishi Hongwanji in Kyoto. The pillars that frame the altar and the dramatically high coffered ceilings and walls retain their historic motifs; historic light fixtures also remain.

The squarely proportioned temple office section, which included the priest's quarters on the upper floor, is smaller and set back slightly. Its design is the same as the storefronts and the offices, which face on First Street, having 3 stories, double-hung windows, a facade of brick and scored concrete, and a continued cornice.

In 1992, the building reopened as the Japanese-American National Museum. The rehabilitation reused the second floor sanctuary as an exhibition space by leveling the sloped auditorium floor in a manner that is removable at a later date. (The pews are in storage.) The first-floor social hall is reused as an interactive learning center. Some of the First Street storefronts have become space for the museum shop, while the former priests' quarters are used as workshop and storage space. The second and third floor office spaces remain in their original use. (Contributing.)

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally: X Statewide: ___ Locally: ___

Applicable National Register Criteria: A X B ___ C ___ D ___

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A X B ___ C ___ D ___ E ___ F ___ G ___

NHL Criteria: 1
NHL Exceptions: 1

NHL Theme(s): XXX. American Ways of Life
E. Ethnic Communities

Areas of Significance: Ethnic Heritage: Asian--Japanese-American

Period(s) of Significance: 1905-1942

Significant Dates:

Significant Person(s):

Cultural Affiliation:

Architect/Builder:

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

SUMMARY

The Little Tokyo district, also known to its residents as Japantown, "J-Town," *Nihonmachi*, or "Sho Tokyo," is a small commercial district along First Street in Los Angeles that served as "a haven, a foothold in America" for arriving Japanese immigrants,[1] and became the focus of the nation's largest Japanese-American community before World War II. That community was substantially reduced in size by the combined effects of the war, during which Japanese-Americans were forcibly relocated, as well as urban renewal and higher-density development. The district nevertheless remains the historical focal point for the Japanese-Americans of greater Los Angeles. The Little Tokyo Historic District illustrates the historical development of the major Japanese-American community on the U.S. mainland and symbolizes the hardships and obstacles that this ethnic group has successfully overcome.

The first Japanese immigrants arrived in the Los Angeles area in the 1880s, a decade in which total Japanese immigration to the mainland U.S. never exceeded 700 a year, but no significant community emerged until the city entered a period of explosive growth in the first decade of the 20th century. During that decade, Japanese immigration also soared in relative terms; between 1900 and 1908, Japanese immigration exceeded 10,000 in every year except 1901, and peaked at just over 30,000 in 1907, the year before the exclusionary "Gentleman's Agreement" was put in place. (To put the scale of Japanese immigration into perspective, 1,285,000 persons were admitted as immigrants in 1907.)

Despite attempts at both State and national levels to prevent further immigration the population swelled in the area that became Little Tokyo, responding to the demand for labor. Discriminatory land tenure legislation also did not prevent the persevering Japanese from securing a dominant role in the Southern California retail produce industry by 1916. The Japanese immigrants utilized their labor and group cooperation in the Little Tokyo community and by 1941 were well on their way to establishing a secure position in the American socio-economic structure.

The government-ordered wartime internment of Japanese Americans, however, proved, according to an article in *Counterpoint: Perspectives on Asian America*, "a major turning point in the history of Little Tokyo just as it was for all Japanese

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[1] John Modell, *The Economics and Politics of Racial Accommodation: The Japanese of Los Angeles, 1900-1942* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1977), p. 68.

Americans."[2] Although Japanese-Americans overcame this tragic experience and entered the mainstream of American social and economic life after the war, the Little Tokyo community dispersed, not regaining its previous size and influence. Only the core of the neighborhood remains.

The Little Tokyo district consists of 13 buildings in downtown Los Angeles along N. San Pedro Street, E. First Street, and N. Central Avenue, the popularly and historically recognized heart of the Japanese-American community. Although isolated buildings survive in the surrounding area, the district is the only significant remnant of the pre-World War II years when the community was at its peak as the thriving center of the largest Japanese community in the United States. The low-scale brick buildings are generally in good condition and include stores, offices, restaurants, small hotels, and two churches.

HISTORY

The relaxation of previous restrictions by the Emperor of Japan opened up Japanese emigration for the first time in 1868, but immigration to the mainland U.S. never exceeded 1,000 in any year until 1891. At first, San Francisco attracted the largest number, but that city's Japanese community declined after the 1906 earthquake. Many moved to Los Angeles.

The date of 1885 claimed for Little Tokyo is attributed to an ex-seaman named Kame, who opened a restaurant on E. First Street that year. By the late 1890s, there were 16 Japanese owned restaurants in the immediate area. Most served American meals to an ethnically mixed working class clientele who resided in the area.

The E. First Street area evolved into a predominantly Japanese neighborhood that abutted Chinatown and a Black district. A number of the buildings and businesses were German and Jewish-owned. By 1903 the Japanese were beginning to concentrate in boarding houses in the area and the term Little Tokyo began to be applied.

A variety of ethnic groups lived in the Little Tokyo area at the turn of the century and operated second-hand shops, saloons, gambling houses, and boardinghouses that catered to the largely transient population. The availability of cheap, temporary housing attracted the city's first Japanese immigrants, who were nearly all male laborers without families, generally from the southern and western parts of Japan. Some had come to Los Angeles as strikebreakers at Pacific Electric, while others worked for the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railroads. Like the "birds of passage" characteristic of Italian immigration in the

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[2] Little Tokyo Anti-Eviction Task Force, "Redevelopment in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo," in *Counterpoint: Perspectives on Asian America*, ed. by Emma Gee (Los Angeles: Asian American Studies Center, University of California, 1976), p. 329.

late 19th century, these workers intended to return to Japan and their families. As the city entered a new period of growth about the middle of the first decade of the new century, however, economic opportunities opened up that made permanent settlement increasingly attractive. This change in outlook and prospects became evident toward the end of the decade, when for the first time female immigrants outnumbered males. With the arrival of wives and prospective brides, the transient character of the neighborhood yielded to more settled and cohesive community development.

Even before the San Francisco earthquake 3,000 Japanese were living in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo, which soon became the nation's largest Japanese-American community. *Sushi-ya* (sushi bars) and *nomi-ya* (drinking places) flourished. Several of the buildings on E. First Street, the center of the community, were built during this period (301, 303-307, 337-339, and 341-345). These buildings were not constructed for Japanese owners as Japanese immigrants could not own land under the California Alien Land Law.

The numbers of Japanese immigrants and their success, however, offered another target for the racial prejudice that had surfaced against the Chinese. The Exclusion Acts of 1882, 1892, and 1902 curtailed only Chinese immigration, but support increased by the early 20th century for similar action against the Japanese. The "Gentlemen's Agreement" worked out between the United States and Japan in 1907-08 ended the immigration of laborers and satisfied labor partisans critical of the immigrants' willingness to work for low wages. Japanese immigration fell from a peak of 30,000 in 1907 to a mere 3,100 in 1909. This did not, however, quiet widespread fears of the "Yellow Peril."

Yielding to nativist pressure nationally, Congress passed the highly restrictive general Immigration Act of 1924, which virtually halted further Japanese immigration, along with that from many other nations. After that year, Japanese immigration to the U.S. did not exceed 1,000 a year again until 1952.

At the same time, court rulings also systematically denied citizenship to East Asians on the basis of race. California State legislators used this ineligibility to restrict land ownership and leasing rights in a series of bills passed between 1913 and 1923. In short, "discrimination, enforced congregation, and legal disabilities" soon became part of the Japanese-American's daily life.[3] Restrictive racial real estate covenants, legal until 1948, also were partially responsible for the congregation of Japanese-Americans in Little Tokyo.

Despite these restrictions, the *Issei*, or first generation of Japanese-Americans, prospered economically. "The close proximity and clear communications offered by Little Tokyo were crucial" in

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[3] Modell, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

securing employment.[4] By cooperating closely and joining with fellow workers and boardinghouse proprietors who functioned as go-betweens, the Japanese negotiated gang labor contracts that gave them an advantage with area employers, particularly at nearby fruit and vegetable farms. These labor-intensive enterprises produced substantial profits.

The Japanese quickly proved so adept and skillful at producing sizeable and profitable yields from these otherwise marginal farms, that many advanced to become operators and managers. The ambitious then moved on to share tenantry, cash tenantry, and eventually land ownership. The tenantry arrangements usually allowed the *Issei* farmers to function independently but without running into the restrictions on land ownership. Some attempted to avoid these restrictions by putting land in the names of their American-born children (the *Nisei*) or in the names of sympathetic Caucasians; in any case, they demonstrated an amazing upward mobility. The Japanese Americans dominated the cut flower industry in the region by 1920 and accounted for nearly 80 percent of the retail produce business in Southern California by 1916.

> Japanese-American economic enterprise followed the traditional pattern of minority enterprise in this country ... it started out by exploiting the fringes of Caucasian economic enterprise, where initiative, hard work, and the willingness to put up with a great deal of discomfort can make a substantial difference.[5]

Japanese-Americans in the Los Angeles area worked in the non-agricultural sector as well, particularly in canneries, lumber mills, mines, and personal service. According to Harry H.L. Kitano, "by 1924, next to agriculture, the major occupation of the Japanese was in small shops and businesses."[6] These enterprises were located largely within Little Tokyo and provided the amenities essential to a growing ethnic community. Rooming-houses and boardinghouses continued to operate, although many of the proprietors now functioned largely as labor contractors. The red-light district yielded to more respectable restaurants, grocery stores, banks, and other small businesses that reflected the settled nature of the community. Newspapers flourished, led by the *Rafu Shimpo*, founded in 1903, and the oldest existing Japanese newspaper in the United States.[7]

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[4] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

[6] Harry H. L. Kitano, *Japanese Americans: The Evolution of a Subculture* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 21.

[7] Los Angeles *Herald Examiner*, August 18, 1978, E-2.

Religious buildings were also established, beginning with a Protestant mission in 1889 and the first Buddhist mission in 1904. These enterprises and institutions provided the basis for the nation's largest and fastest growing Japanese American community. In the years between 1920 and 1940, gains in Los Angeles County accounted for all the growth of the Japanese population in the United States.

Little Tokyo's phenomenal growth reflected the nurturing atmosphere of the close-knit community. Cooperation, cohesion, and a sense of community fostered economic and social development. Local businessmen formed temporary credit associations or pools, called *tanomoshi-ko*, to provide capital on a rotating basis for new ventures. Local leaders also established formal organizations, such as the Central Japanese Association, to promote internal harmony and community development. In 1940 there were *kenjin-kai* associations in Little Tokyo based on prefecture of origin, representing 40 of Japan's 46 prefectures, as well as the Japanese-American Citizens' League and the Japanese Chamber of Commerce.

The influence of community cooperation was most evident in the low levels of crime and welfare in Little Tokyo relative to the greater Los Angeles area. Group sanctions such as gossip, publication of the names of offenders, and ostracism proved effective in reducing crime. While poverty was a problem, Little Tokyo welfare rolls remained low due to community efforts. In a more positive vein, this cohesion and sense of community was manifested in festivals (such as Nisei Week in August, beginning in 1934), an annual picnic, and other efforts to preserve ethnic traditions.

By the advent of World War II, Little Tokyo was a thriving community of more than 35,000 (within three miles of the present historic district). Pearl Harbor and the entry of the United States into the war against Japan, however, brought this era to an end.

Wartime suspicions and hysteria led to the popular conclusion that the Japanese Americans on the West Coast were engaging in sabotage and espionage to prepare the way for Japanese military invasion. This culminated in February 1942 in a Presidential order authorizing the internment and resettlement of all Japanese residents in most Western States in designated coastal areas. As a consequence, 112,000 Japanese-Americans [anyone with 1/16 or more Japanese blood was eligible for internment], two-thirds of whom were American citizens against whom no formal charges of disloyalty were even identified, were herded off to Assembly Centers--those from Little Tokyo being mainly shipped to converted horsestalls at the Santa Anita Racetrack--and then sent for the duration of the war to Internment Camps in remote areas, mainly in the West. (Manzanar, in Inyo County, California, the best known of the Internment Camps, and the Rohwer Internment Camp Cemetery in Desha County, Arkansas, have been designated National Historic Landmarks; Manzanar is also included in the National Park System.)

From the camps, Japanese-Americans volunteered for service in the U.S. Armed Forces in higher proportion than any comparable ethnic group. According to historian Lynn Bowman, "After the war ended, it became clear that the treatment of the Japanese was one of the most serious injustices in U.S. history."[8]

In addition to the deprivation of their civil rights, the Japanese-Americans experienced severe economic losses as a consequence of internment. While some managed to return to their former homes and businesses, many found that they had lost all. Blacks had moved into Little Tokyo during the war, when it became known as "Bronzeville," and the character of the community had changed drastically. Determined to reestablish their community, some of the returning evacuees lived for a time at the Hongwangi Temple. Eventually, the central core of Little Tokyo along First Street was revived, but the community was otherwise severely reduced in size and influence. The former residents, particularly the *Nisei*, had dispersed, and the economic base in the produce industry had vanished. Two other factors caused Little Tokyo to shrink. The City expanded its civic complex just to the west, eliminating the northwest quadrant of the San Pedro-First Street intersection, historically a part of Little Tokyo. Development pressures, some of them coming, ironically, from Japanese firms, led to rebuilding south of First Street.

City plans for the area as a whole cast into serious doubt the preservation of even the remaining strip on the north side of First Street. By the mid-1980s, however, consensus had been reached to undertake a major preservation effort on the north side of First Street. As part of this effort, the area was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. One of the centerpieces of the effort was the establishment of the Japanese American National Museum in former Nishi Hongwanji Temple.

Little Tokyo was the historical focus of Japanese-American settlement in Los Angeles. The Little Tokyo Historic District, as the most visible symbol of that historical heritage, also illustrates the bitter experiences of discrimination and internment endured by Japanese-Americans, as well as their prideful building of a prosperous community. Little Tokyo continues to be a magnet for the Japanese-American community of Southern California and an attraction for visitors of all races and nationalities.

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[8] Lynn Bowman, *Los Angeles: Epic of a City* (Berkeley: Howell-North Books, 1974), p. 335.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

___ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
_X_ Previously Listed in the National Register.
___ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
___ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
___ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #_____
___ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #_____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

___ State Historic Preservation Office
___ Other State Agency
___ Federal Agency
_X_ Local Government
___ University
___ Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 4 acres

UTM References:

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	7	385610	3768360
B	7	385740	3768180
C	7	385740	3768080
D	7	385540	3768230

Verbal Boundary Description:

A line beginning at the northwest corner of the Subdivision of the Property of Don Manuel Requena, Lot 38 (120 N. San Pedro Street) and extending east approximately 183′ along said lot's north boundary to its northeast corner; thence, south approximately 128′ along the east (rear) boundaries of the Subdivision of the Property of Don Manuel Requena, Lots 38, 39, 40, 41, and 42 (110-120 N. San Pedro Street) to the southeast corner of Lot 42; thence, eastward approximately 226′ along the north (rear) boundaries of Tract M.R. 10-8, Lot 11 (321 E. First Street); Hanley Property, Lot A (327 E. First Street); and the Subdivision of the Pryor Tract of Land, Block 4, Lots 15, 14, and 13 (331-343 E. First Street), to the northwest corner of the Subdivision of the Pryor Tract of Land, Block 4, Lot 9, Sublot 2 (119 N. Central Avenue);

Thence, northeast approximately 74′ along the north boundary of said lot to its northeast corner; thence, southwest approximately 210′ along the west edge of the right-of-way of Central Avenue to its intersection with First Street; thence, west approximately 597′ along the north edge of the right-of-way of First Street to its intersection with San Pedro Street; thence north some 229′ along the east edge of the right-of-way of San Pedro Street to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification:

Included within the boundary described below are 13 structures. The district so defined was the historic heart of Little Tokyo and is the only intact section of the larger pre-World War II community.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

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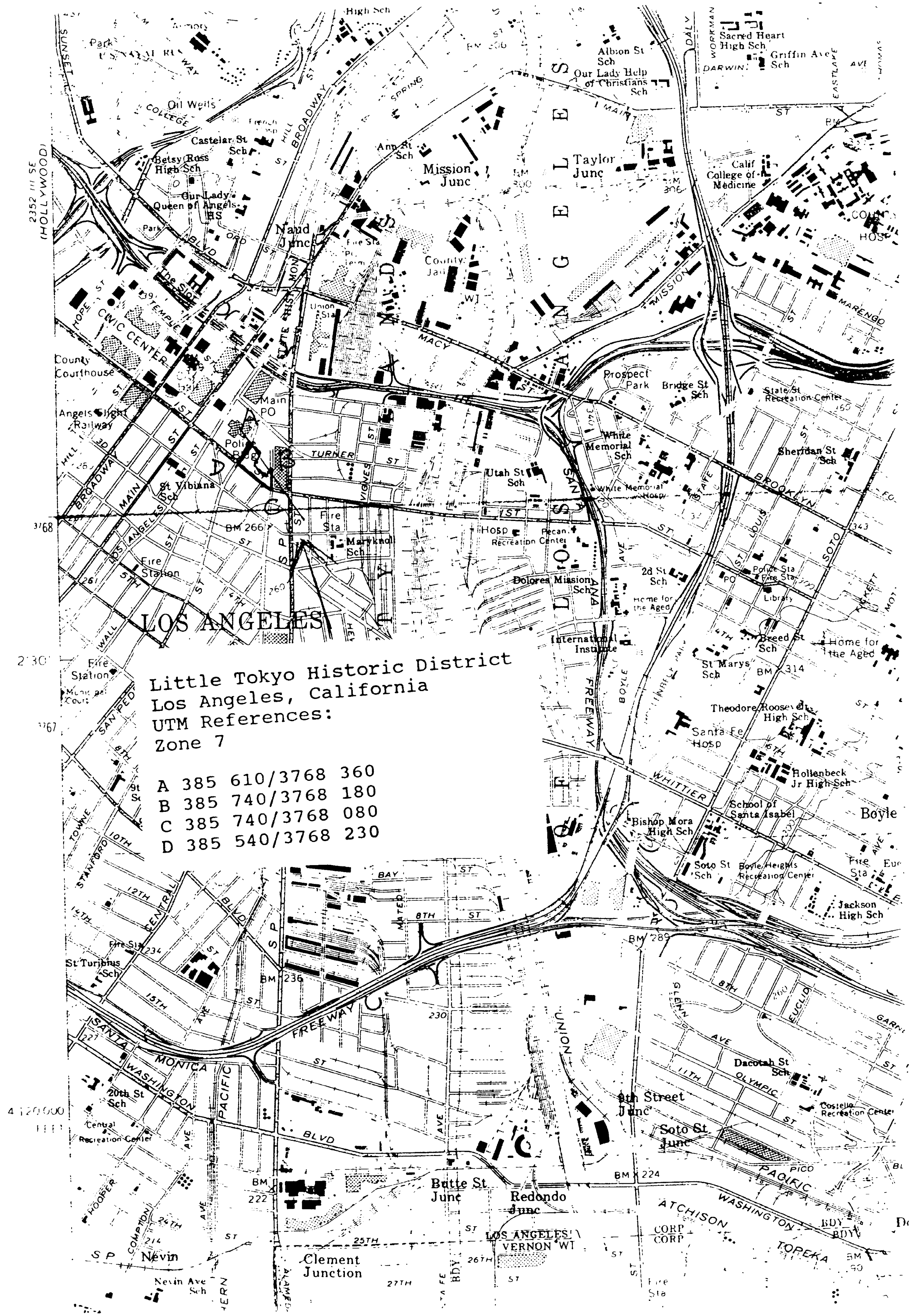
Telephone: 202/343-3793

Date: May 7, 1993


LOS ANGELES
Mission Junc
Taylor Junc
Naud Junc
County Jail
Union Sta
Main PO
County Courthouse
Angels Flight Railway
Civic Center
St Vibiana Sch
Maryknoll Sch
Dolores Mission Sch
International Institute
White Memorial Sch
White Memorial Hosp
Prospect Park
Bridge St Sch
State St Recreation Center
Sheridan St Sch
Utah St Sch
Calif College of Medicine
Sacred Heart High Sch
Griffin Ave Sch
Albion St Sch
Our Lady Help of Christians Sch
Ann St Sch
Castelar St Sch
Betsy Ross High Sch
Our Lady Queen of Angels HS
Breed St Sch
St Marys Sch
Home for the Aged
Theodore Roosevelt High Sch
Santa Fe Hosp
Hollenbeck Jr High Sch
School of Santa Isabel
Bishop Mora High Sch
Soto St Sch
Boyle Heights Recreation Center
Jackson High Sch
Dacotah St Sch
Costello Recreation Center
9th Street Junc
Soto St Junc
Butte St Junc
Redondo Junc
Clement Junction
Nevin
Nevin Ave Sch
20th St Sch
Central Recreation Center
St Turibius Sch
Boyle
SANTA MONICA FREEWAY
SANTA ANA FREEWAY
WHITTIER
BROOKLYN
MACY
MISSION
WASHINGTON BLVD
OLYMPIC
ATCHISON TOPEKA
2352 III SE (HOLLYWOOD)

Little Tokyo Historic District
Los Angeles, California
UTM References:
Zone 7

A 385 610/3768 360
B 385 740/3768 180
C 385 740/3768 080
D 385 540/3768 230