



Community & Economic Development Department
3900 Main Street, Riverside, CA 92522 | Phone: (951) 826-5371 | RiversideCA.gov

Planning Division

CULTURAL HERITAGE BOARD MEETING DATE: MAY 15, 2024
AGENDA ITEM NO.: 5

PROPOSED PROJECT

Case Numbers	DP-2024-00577 (Historic Designation)	
Request	To consider a Historic Designation request to designate the Okubo Residence as a City Landmark	
Applicant	Valerie Silva	
Project Location	2356 Eleventh Street, on the north side of Eleventh Street between Sedgwick and Eucalyptus Avenues	
APN	221-031-014	
Ward	1	
Neighborhood	Eastside	
Historic District	Not Applicable	
Historic Designation	Not Applicable	
Staff Planner	Scott Watson, Historic Preservation Officer 951-826-5507 swatson@riversideca.gov	

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Cultural Heritage Board recommend that the City Council:

- DETERMINE** that Planning Case DP-2024-00577 (Historic Designation) for the designation of the Okubo Residence as a City Landmark is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15061 (b) (3) (Common Sense Rule) and 15308 (Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment), as the proposal will have no significant effect on the environment, identifies the structure as a cultural resource, and preserves the historic character of a cultural resource; and
- APPROVE** Planning Case DP-2024-00577 (Historic Designation), based on the facts of findings, and designate the Okubo Residence as a City Landmark.

BACKGROUND

The Okubo Residence

The Okubo residence is located at 2365 Eleventh Street. The residence was constructed circa 1900. The Okubo Family rented the residence beginning in 1925 until purchasing it in 1930. The family lived at the residence until 1942 when Executive Order 9066 was signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, causing the forced relocation of Japanese Americans to the War Relocation Authority (WRA) camps. The Okubo family never returned to the residence which they rented to Valeriano and Mercedes Silva during incarceration. In 1951, the Silva Family purchased the home from the Okubos and still own the property today.

As part of the City's Japanese American Historic Context Statement (Japanese American Heritage and the Quest for Civil Rights in Riverside, California, 1890s-1970s) complete in 2011, the residence was found eligible for listing in National Register and California Register Criteria A/1 because it is associated with events that convey the experience of the Japanese American community as a whole, and Criteria B/2 because it is associated with the life of prolific artist Miné Okubo.

The Okubo Family

In 1904, Tometsugu (Frank) and Mijoko (Miyo) Kato Okubo immigrated from Japan to the United States, reportedly for Miyo to work as a calligrapher at the Empire of Japan Exhibition as part of the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. Tometsugu and Miyo moved to Riverside soon after, where their first child, Yoshi, was born in October of 1904. The family rented a few places in Riverside's Eastside before moving to the residence at 2365 Eleventh Street, which Tometsugu purchased in the name of his eldest daughter, Yoshi, in 1930.

While living in Riverside, Tometsugu worked at a candy shop, as a tailor, and a gardener/landscaper. Miyo painted at home while raising her six children, teaching them various arts and encouraging them to pursue artistic careers. Yoshi, Miné, and Binji went on to have careers connected to the arts. Miné will be discussed later in this report. Yoshi went on to be an artist and gallery manager and Binji was a painter and director of the Art Students League in Los Angeles. Miyo's artistic skills lived on in her children passed her death in 1940.

Due to the forced relocation of Japanese Americans in World War II, the family reported to the Civil Control Station at 3557 Main Street, on May 20-21, 1942, where the family, along with other Japanese Americans, were placed on busses and sent to WRA Camps. For the remainder of the war the family was separate. Tometsugu, was placed in a detention camp in Fort Missoula, Montana. The camp was intended for individuals considered to be spies or posing a serious threat. Often included in this category were first-generation Japanese immigrants who were active in the community.

After being released from the camps, records indicate that Tometsugu lived in Pomona with his daughter Yoshi. He passed away in 1956, and Tometsugu and Miyo are buried in the Olivewood Cemetery. Their daughters Yoshi and Miné were later buried with them.

Miné Okubo

Miné Okubo was born on June 27, 1912, in Riverside. She attended Longfellow Elementary School, Riverside Poly High School, and Riverside Junior College. She credits the pursuit of an artistic career due to encouragement not only from her mother but also from her High School Art teacher, Althea B. Williams. Upon encouragement from her Riverside Junior College art teacher, she applied to the University of California, Berkeley. In 1933, she received a fellowship at UC Berkeley where she would go on to complete a bachelor's and master's degree in fine arts and anthropology. After a 1938 fellowship to study art in Europe was cut short due to the outbreak of the war, Miné received news of her mother had become ill and returned to Riverside. After her mother's passing,

Miné returned to the Bay Area and worked for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Art Project and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. During her time with the WPA, she worked on murals, mosaics and frescoes at Government Island, Oakland Hospitality House, Treasure Island and Fort Ord. She also worked for Diego Rivera and it is reported that while he painted murals, she would explain the work to visitors.

The following excerpt from the 2011 California Department of Parks and Recreation Form (DPR Form), completed by Jenn Wilson as part of the Japanese American Historic Context Statement, discusses Miné Okubo's artistic career and its impact:

In 1942, Miné, along with her brother, Toku, who was residing with her in northern California while he attended the University of California Berkeley, were forced to evacuate her home under Executive Order 9066. Miné's family, residing at 2365 11th Street, in Riverside, was also at internment camps, but was separated in various camps. Miné was just one of 120,000 Japanese American evacuees incarcerated in America during World War II. She and her brother were first at Tanforan Relocation Camp in San Bruno, California. Six months later, Toku and Miné were transferred to Topaz Relocation Center in Utah. It was during this time that Miné sketched over 2,000 drawings of her experience in the camp.

Many of the sketches depicted the hardships that she and fellow evacuees endured in the camps. She submitted a sketch of a camp guard to an art contest in San Francisco. It caught the attention of Fortune magazine, which hired Okubo to illustrate a special issue on Japan. The job offer allowed her to leave the camp and head to Fortune magazine headquarters in New York City.

Miné Okubo's sketches of her internment experience continued to attract attention, and eventually led to the publication of her book, *Citizen 13660*, in 1946. The book includes roughly 200 drawings along with Okubo's accompanying text. It was the first account by a WWII American internee to show the experience of the internment camps. Miné's work throughout her life gained her much recognition. She received the San Francisco Museum Annual Prize in 1948; taught art at the University of California, Berkeley, from 1950-1952; made an appearance in the televised program, *The Nisei: The Pride and the Shame*, Twentieth Century TV, CBS News with Walter Cronkite, in 1965; was selected by the California State Department of Education as one of twelve women pioneers in *The History of California (1800 to present)*; received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Women's Caucus for Art of the College Art Association, in 1991; had a play written about her life called "*Miné: A Name for Herself*"; and in 2006 Riverside Community College debuted *Miné Okubo Drive* on their campus.

ANALYSIS

The applicant is requesting approval of a Historic Designation to designate the Okubo Residence as a Historic Landmark.

The applicant has provided an architectural description, statement of significance, photographs documenting the architecture and building setting, and copies of primary and secondary sources as summarized below.

Architectural Description

The Okubo Residence is situated on the north side of Eleventh Street, behind a brick wall and hedges. The single-story residence exhibits a Late Victorian style with Colonial influences. It is wood framed construction, with a raised foundation and a rectangular plan. The residence is clad in wood siding and is capped with asphalt shingle-topped, moderately pitched gable-on-hipped roof with narrow eaves with fascia boards. A projecting porch with a shed supported by slender

doric columns running the length of the façade (south elevation). The primary entry is centrally located on the façade. The fenestration of the residence includes fixed and double-hung wood windows with wood trim, some paired and some with divided light.

Statement of Significance

The Okubo Residence is historically significant because demonstrates the Japanese American community experience in Riverside, including the practice of purchasing properties in the name of American born children and the forced relocation of Japanese Americans during World War II. The residence is also historically significant for its association as the child who home of recognized artist Miné Okubo, who's art demonstrated a firsthand experience in the Japanese interment camps of World War II. Despite its condition, the Okubo residences still retains a high-degree integrity required for City Landmark designation.

TITLE 20 EVALUATION

Under Title 20 (Cultural Resources), "Landmark" means: "Any improvement or natural feature that is an exceptional example of a historical, archaeological, cultural, architectural, community, aesthetic or artistic heritage of the City, that retains a high degree of integrity." Based on the applicable criteria from Chapter 20.50 of Title 20, the Okubo Residence qualifies for Landmark Designation as follows:

FINDING: Criterion 1: Exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, architectural, or natural history;

FACTS: The California Alien Law of 1913 prohibited foreign born individuals from owning property. The 1918 decision in the case of California v. Jukichi Harada upheld the American-born Harada children's 14th Amendment right to equal protection included owning the property. The laws were later amended in 1920 and 1923. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the laws in a 1923 decision; however, with the Harada decision still in place, the Okubo Family was able to purchase the residence at 2365 Eleventh Street in the name of the oldest child. The Okubo Family were relocated to internment camps in 1942 as part of the Executive Order 9066 signed by Franklin Roosevelt. Despite the relocation, the family was able to retain ownership of the property until it was sold to their tenants in 1951. The residence showcases the Japanese community experience in Riverside including the fight against the Alien Land Laws and the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II; therefore, the residence is eligible for Landmark designation under Criterion 1.

FINDING: Criterion 2: Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state or national history;

FACTS: The residence at 2365 Eleventh Street is associated with the life of prolific artist Miné Okubo, who is recognized for her work that provided a first-hand experience in the internment camps. Miné received multiple awards and recognition, including the California State Department of Education naming her one of twelve women pioneers in The History of California (1800 to present) and received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Women's Caucus for Art of the College Art Association, in 1991. The residence is associated with Miné as the family lived in the residence from 1925 to 1942. It is the remaining home that has the longest period of association with Miné's childhood; therefore, the residence is eligible for Landmark designation under Criterion 2.

STRATEGIC PLAN

This item contributes to the Envision Riverside 2025 City Council Strategic Priority 2 – Community Well Being (Goal 2.3 – Strengthen neighborhood identities and improve community health and the physical environment through amenities and programs that foster an increased sense of community and enhanced feelings of pride and belonging citywide).

This item aligns with the following Cross-Cutting Threads:

1. Community Trust: This Landmark Designation request is being reviewed during a Public Hearing before the Cultural Heritage Board and the public is able to provide comments.
2. Equity: Historic property information associated with this designation will be added to the City's Historic Resources Inventory, which will be available to the public. This will allow information about the historic property to be available to all residents.
3. Fiscal Responsibility: No City General Funds are being allocated as part of this Landmark Designation.
4. Innovation: This Landmark Designation request made use of current research practices and looks at historic integrity based on best practices approaches.
5. Sustainability and Resiliency: This Landmark Designation will help to preserve the City's collective history for future generations.

PUBLIC NOTICE AND COMMENTS

A public hearing notice was mailed to property owners within 300 feet of the site. As of the writing of this report, no responses have been received by Staff regarding this proposal.

APPEAL INFORMATION

Actions by the Cultural Heritage Board, including any environmental finding, may be appealed to the City Council within ten calendar days after the decision. Appeal filing and processing information may be obtained from the Planning Division by calling 951-826-5800.

EXHIBITS LIST

1. Aerial/Location Map
2. Historic Designation Application
3. 2011 DPR Form
4. Current & Historic Photos
5. [City of Riverside Japanese American Historic Context Statement](#)

Prepared by: Scott Watson, Historic Preservation Officer

Approved by: Maribeth Tinio, City Planner