

HARADA HOUSE
AN APPRECIATION
Remarks Prepared for April 11, 2017
Meeting of the Metropolitan Museum Board
By Venita Jorgensen

Thank you for letting me speak to you about Harada House. I feel strongly about it. My name is Venita Jorgensen, I am a former member and chair of your Board. I am also the current President of the Friends of the Mission Inn and a resident of Ward One since 1969.

Not so long ago I sat where you are sitting now as a steward of Riverside's material culture represented by the collections of the Metropolitan Museum. My duty was, as yours is, to protect and preserve Riverside's historical objects and records for our fellow citizens. People remember history through objects as well as words. In our present era of fake news it is more important than ever to protect our historic sites because objects allow people to relate to the past in a tangible manner. Objects are evidence.

I first became aware of the injustice of our Japanese internment camps through an object. My mother gave me a Japanese doll that had been given to her by a classmate who had been incarcerated in the camps. The doll was all the more evocative since we often drove by the ruins of the gate to the abandoned Manzanar Relocation Camp, nine miles north of Lone Pine, California on Highway 395. For many years the building which was the Camp's theater was used as a truck shed for the Inyo County Road Department. This building now houses the Visitor Center of the Manzanar National Historic Site. The Site is run by the National Park Service and last year had 105,000 visitors.

While I was on the Board we had a wonderful exhibit of the massive amount of materials that came from the Harada House. Among these were the letters that Jess Stebler had written to Sumi Harada. He is the man who watched over their property and protected it during the war. He paid the tax bills, dealt with tenants and sent needed items to the Haradas in their camp. We have only his side of the correspondence, but it is a touching record of an ordinary man doing the right thing in troubled times.

The Harada House offers a rare glance at the fate of the internees through the life of one family. It literally contains the writing on the wall that recorded the forced departure of the Haradas. That scrawl bears witness to the reality of what happened. You can see it and reflect on the dangerous path the United States started down with Executive Order 9066.

When my husband and I traveled to Vienna, we saw another physical reminder of what happens when citizens are singled out. Just outside the apartment where we stayed was a brass plaque on the side walk. It read (in German), "Reflect on the 44 Jewish women and men, who in this house were forced to live collectively before being deported and murdered by the Nazis." Of course the building is gone due to the war. How much more fortunate we are to have the intact Harada house and its contents. But the point is the same, the site bears witness that an event took place, and it took place right where we are standing.

The Harada House is one of two National Historical Landmarks in Riverside. The other is the Historic Mission Inn Hotel & Spa. National Historic Landmarks are designated because they have significance for the whole nation, not just the immediate community. The Harada House and its collection is an unusually rich trove of objects that document the history of Japanese Americans in the United States. Consider that the Haradas had to keep fighting to preserve their property. They won the right to own the house in 1918, only to have all their rights wiped out in 1942. In 1988 President Reagan apologized to the Japanese Americans incarcerated during the war. But in 2016 politicians cited the internment camps favorably as a possible solution to fears of Muslim subversion. It is necessary to preserve the evidence of past mistakes

to keep the cycle of mistreatment from repeating. The voices of victims may go silent with age, but the evidence of the physical house still remains. That is why we must preserve it.

It is true that maintaining historical sites costs money, but the rewards of doing so can be large and lasting. Consider the fate of Riverside's National Historic Landmark Number One. The economic and cultural benefits the Mission Inn has brought to Riverside are undeniable, but at the time there were many who felt that it was too expensive to fix and should be torn down. Forty or more years later that idea seems absurd. To see what that destruction would have looked like, visit the Mission Inn Foundation Museum's current display with the picture of entrance arch being demolished. It took many years to get the right combination of circumstances to save the Inn, but in the end it was worth it. Patience and perseverance is what is needed to realize the potential of the Harada House. I ask you to persevere in your support of the Harada House.

**Leveraging Harada House
In Commemorating the
75th Anniversary of Japanese American Internment
Measure Z Funds**

2017 marks the 75th anniversary of Executive Order 9066 which ordered the forced internment of Japanese American citizens. Riverside has a rich connection with the history of the Japanese and Japanese Americans in California and the nation. In using Measure Z funds I would argue for supporting those institutions that have a unique connection to Riverside. The Harada House is one of those institutions, but it is not the only one. Please consider the constellation of sites of historical significance which surround Harada House. The following is a list:

The Mission Inn, Riverside's National Historic Landmark No. 1. The Frank Miller's friendship with Japan is well known. He traveled to Japan and collected Japanese artifacts for the Inn which are still on display. He was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun in 1929 by the Emperor of Japan.

The Riverside County Historic Courthouse. The historic decision that American born children of Japanese immigrants had the right to own property was established at this courthouse by the case *People of California vs. Harada* in 1916.

Dragon Marsh Metaphysical Supply Store. This shop on University Avenue is the site of the former Washington Restaurant owned by the Haradas. The restaurant was patronized by Jess Stebler who watched over the Harada's house during their internment enabling them to keep the house, unlike many other Japanese Americans families after the internment.

Harada House - Riverside National Historic Landmark No. 2. Sumi Harada lived in the house before and after the internment and she saved everything – uniforms, baby clothes, kites, letters. The house was given to the city with a rich collection of memorabilia.

The Center for Social Justice & Civil Liberties. This beautifully restored RCC building houses the Mine Okubo art collection and several displays which chronicle social rights and civil liberties experiences in Riverside, including the Japanese American internment. The Harada display features the only known photograph of Jess Stebler.

City of Riverside Cultural Heritage Board Landmarks No. 34 and No. 20. On opposite sides of the street at the corner of Sixth and Pine stand two stately Craftsman houses that have significance in the Harada case. On the North side is No. 34 - the Estudillo House, home of Miguel Estudillo. He represented the City in the case of the *People of California vs. Harada* in 1916. He later became City Attorney. On the South side is No. 20 - the home of Fred Stebler, the brother of Jess Stebler, the man who saved the Harada house in 1942.

La Sierra University Campus. In 1942 Erwin Cossentine, president of La Sierra, was unsuccessful in preventing the internment of five of his students. In spite of his vigorous efforts, soldiers on a bus arrived to relocate the students. As the students departed the entire student body gathered on the lawn to say goodbye. The La Sierra Department of Film and Television, under the direction of department chair Rodney Vance is making a film about this incident entitled: *One Small Stand – When America Interned Americans*. La Sierra student Jonathan Davidson wrote the screenplay. It is hoped the film will be finished in time to be shown at the October United Nations' commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the internment.

Now that new taxes have provided new money, it is time for the City of Riverside to accept its responsibility for the preservation and maintenance of the Harada House. This is how the City can participate in the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the internment.