

Los Angeles Korean United Methodist Church
2909 South Orchard Avenue; 1276 West 29th Street
CHC-2020-3286-HCM
ENV-2020-3287-CE

FINDINGS

The Los Angeles Korean United Methodist Church “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” for its association with the Korean American community in Los Angeles as the first permanent home of the Los Angeles Korean United Methodist Church. The property is also significant for serving as a social and cultural hub for Los Angeles’ Korean American community from 1945 to 1958.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Los Angeles Korean United Methodist Church meets one of the Historic-Cultural Monument criteria: it “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” for its association with the Korean American community in Los Angeles as the first permanent home of the Los Angeles Korean United Methodist Church. The property is also significant for serving as a social and cultural hub for Los Angeles’ Korean American community from 1945 to 1958.

The growth and development of Korean American Christian church institutions in Los Angeles was closely tied to the Korean independence movement from Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945), a paramount driving force within the small immigrant community. The Los Angeles Korean Methodist Church provided a safe haven for these activities, and grew to encompass myriad cultural, social, and economic functions.

The Church’s congregation flourished under the leadership of Reverend Key Hyung Chang, the congregation’s first bilingual pastor, who served from 1941-1947. His charisma and fluency in English led him to become a spokesperson for the Korean American community in Los Angeles, frequently advocating on its behalf to local and national religious and social organizations such as the Rotary Club and the U.S. Foreign Mission Board. Reverend Chang’s successful fundraising efforts eventually led to the purchase of the subject property in 1945.

The purchase of the subject property by the Los Angeles Korean United Methodist congregation in 1945 marked the end of a nomadic experience by the congregation spanning several decades. As a result of restrictions that immigrant communities faced on property ownership, such as California’s Alien Land Laws of 1913, the congregation found itself continuously relocating during the 1930s. Prior to the purchase of the property, the Los Angeles Korean United Methodist Church had rented space at several different locations including 1416 37th Drive in 1936, 1225 West Jefferson Boulevard by 1942, and the Normandie Street Japanese Methodist Church building in downtown Los Angeles in 1943. Following the sale of the subject property in 1959, the church constructed a new building at 4394 Washington Boulevard at Virginia Road (extant); however, by 1968, the congregation had outgrown this location and moved to 1068 South Robertson Boulevard. The church moved several more times throughout the 1980s, but by 1989, the church had settled in its current home at 7400 Osage Avenue in Westchester. Though the congregation only resided at the subject property for 13 years—and it has occupied its current space for the longest period to date—the purchase of the subject property is significant within the context of property ownership by a minority community in Los Angeles. The purchase marked the end of a lengthy undertaking by the congregation and their ability to prevail over racist policies Korean and other minority communities faced during this period.

The subject property also served as an important social and cultural hub for the first wave of Korean American immigrants and their second-generation children. Korean churches were defining elements of the community instrumental in supporting new arrivals, as evidenced by the extensive social, cultural, and financial offerings by the Congregation during its tenancy at the subject property. In addition to ministering to the Congregation's religious and spiritual needs, the Church provided housing, Sunday School, and English classes and served as an employment agency to its members. As the Korean American community in Los Angeles was relatively small in the years following the close of World War II, the subject property served as one of the few gathering places for the community during this period. Only after an increase in members from the second, post-war wave of Korean immigrants did the Congregation relocate to a new church building. Today, the subject property remains one of the last vestiges associated with patterns of early development within the Korean immigrant community of Los Angeles.

Despite interior and exterior alterations, the subject property retains sufficient integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association to convey its significance.