Filipino American Historic and Cultural Sites: Honored, Revisited, and Reimagined
Policy Brief presented by the Filipino American Historic Preservation Network

Introduction

Historic and cultural preservation plays an important role in providing education about the historical and cultural context of a community. Over the past decade, the scope of historic preservation practice has broadened to protect a greater array of cultural resources including historic districts, buildings, structures, sites, public works, transportation corridors, archaeological sites, heritage areas and corridors, cultural landscapes, objects and related built forms. In particular, cultural preservation has provided opportunities for participation in community life through festivals, events and performances, interactive classes and workshops, and a variety of other activities.

New preservation practices implemented since the 1980s are shaping our understandings of heritage and of the built environment in important ways. The new critical preservation practices raise fundamental questions about what preservation and heritage encompasses, who gets to be a preservationist, the functions of grassroots preservation in a democracy, and how best to research, conserve, and interpret both tangible and intangible heritage of a much broader range of North Americans. Critical preservation practices have provided powerful tools for local citizens and grassroots groups engaged in historical research and planning, as well as preservationists, planners, designers, and policy makers.

This policy brief provides examples of preservation strategies, challenges, and needs in Filipina/o American communities in California, and proposes a culturally-appropriate framework in rethinking historic and cultural preservation to address racial and economic justice issues in ethnic neighborhoods and to address preservation of the heritage of racial-ethnic or other marginalized groups. It offers challenges and strategies for preservationists, historians, ethnographers, and cultural landscape specialists need to rethink or reorient research and methods to produce a socially-just, inclusive, and equitable scholarly practice.

Most importantly, this brief explores how historic and cultural preservation strategies can be used to understand community context, celebrate community character, promote social justice, and ultimately create, reinforce, transform and enhance a sense of place in Filipina/o American communities.

Keypoint 1: Understanding the Unique Filipina/o American History & Community Context

In order to understand the unique community context for Filipino American communities, it is important to understand the complex history of Filipino Americans. For historic Filipino American communities and sites, there is a shared history of demolition, and displacement. Since the first major immigration wave of the 1920-30s, Filipino Americans were denied the ability to own homes or businesses.

The first Filipina/o arrivals in the continental United States came as slaves, workers, and sailors aboard ships engaged in the Manila Galleon Trade and in exploration
of the West Coast and New Spain, now California and Mexico. Filipinas/os began settling in Hawaii and in the United States as students, workers, and as immigrant families at the turn of the century, soon after the Philippines became a U.S. colony. In the 1910s and 1920s, Filipinas/os began settling in segregated neighborhoods near already established Chinatowns and Japantowns in the major West Coast cities and towns of Stockton, Seattle, San Francisco, San Diego, Salinas, all of these places being urban points of entry for Filipina/o immigrants. After World War II, naval bases in San Diego, Vallejo, and Virginia Beach became important centers of the Filipina/o population, as thousands of Filipinos joined the U.S. Navy as part of the US/Philippines Naval Bases Agreement.

Racial segregation in cities with significant Filipina/o American populations in the 20th century meant that Filipinas/os were relegated to the poorest neighborhoods, usually near Chinatowns and/or Japantowns. Filipina/o American community growth and the growth of Filipina/o neighborhoods and businesses were stymied by a number of factors. Through the mid-20th century, most early immigrant Filipinas/os moved constantly, as they were engaged in a migratory labor circuit from the Alaska salmon canneries to in farms up and down the West Coast and in the Midwest and Southwest. Additional factors which influenced community growth included an extreme sex ratio imbalance, discriminatory immigration policies that excluded Filipinas/os by 1934, and racist naturalization laws which barred Filipina/o citizenship. As a result, Filipina/o immigrants could not own land or vote. Filipina/o entrepreneurs struggled to compete against already established Chinese American and Japanese American-run hotels and restaurants. Furthermore, Filipina/o entrepreneurs found it difficult to establish businesses after the Great Depression.

Despite these challenges, Filipinas/os established thriving communities of small churches, labor unions, and small businesses such as restaurants, hotels, barbershops, grocery stores, movie theaters, and newspapers in several urban areas in the early 20th century. Among the most important of these were Stockton’s Little Manila, San Francisco’s Manilatown, and several neighborhoods in Los Angeles, near First Street and Temple Streets in downtown.

After World War II, urban redevelopment projects and freeway construction throughout the United States targeted urban ethnic neighborhoods for demolition. All of the significant Filipina/o American neighborhoods on the West Coast were affected by redevelopment, with some neighborhoods, such as Stockton’s Little Manila, almost completely destroyed. Thousands of Filipinas/os and their community institutions were displaced as a result of urban redevelopment.

The 1965 Immigration Act brought thousands of Filipina/o immigrants to the United States, among them highly educated nurses, doctors, engineers and other professionals; the act also allowed for family reunification for earlier immigrants. As a result, there is incredible class diversity within the Filipina/o American community. With the original urban Little Manilas and Manilatowns largely destroyed by urban redevelopment, the desegregation of suburbia and the availability of cheap suburban housing, these subsequent generations of Filipinas/os, immigrant and American-born, have followed the general post-war trend towards suburbanization. Suburban areas such as Daly City and South San Francisco, the suburbs of Los Angeles such as West Covina and Cerritos, the suburbs surrounding San Diego such as National City and Mira Mesa,
suburban New Jersey, and the Hampton Roads region in Virginia are among the areas that have experienced skyrocketing Filipina/o American populations.

**Case study: Little Manila (Stockton, CA)**

The Little Manila neighborhood, centered at the intersection of Lafayette and El Dorado Streets, bordered by Washington Street on the north, Hunter Street on the west, Sonora Street on the South and Center Street on the east, was home to thousands of Filipino immigrants in Stockton. More than 100,000 Filipinos immigrated to Hawaii and the U.S. mainland by 1946. Many of these immigrants found educational and employment opportunities in farming and farm labor, service, and in industry in San Joaquin County. From the 1920s until the 1970s, Filipina/o families, community organizations, churches, labor unions, restaurants, dancehalls and businesses thrived in Little Manila. By World War II, the city was home to the largest Filipina/o community outside of the Philippines. Stockton’s Redevelopment Agency and State Highway Division identified Little Manila as a prime area for urban “renewal” and freeway construction. From 1956 to 1999, redevelopment projects and the Crosstown Freeway destroyed dozens of downtown blocks, displacing thousands of people, families, businesses and institutions, and destroying historic, culturally significant structures and ethnic communities such as Little Manila, Chinatown, and Nihonmachi.

In October 2000, the Stockton City Council designated the Little Manila Historic Site, the nation’s first Filipino American historic district. However, despite this designation, the neighborhood is still under threat and demolition continued even after the area was designated as a historic district. Only three original buildings remain, and these are under the imminent threat of demolition. These three buildings are the last best example of a historic Filipino American neighborhood in the nation and were named to the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Places in 2003. In order to educate the local and national community about Little Manila’s historical significance, the Filipina/o American community in Stockton, led by the Little Manila Foundation, has begun a wide-ranging educational and promotional campaign. The campaign includes an afterschool educational program in Filipina/o American history in the local public schools, street signage and banners, local driving and walking tours, a website, a Filipina/o American history calendar, a book, *Filipinos in Stockton*, consulting on a PBS documentary, *Little Manila: Filipinos in California’s Heartland*, the production of an Off-Broadway play on Filipino American local history (*The Romance of Magno Rubio*), symposiums on local Filipina/o American history.

**Keypoint 2: Challenges in local historic preservation work**

In an era of profound change, the threat to these non-renewable historic resources is accelerating, requiring innovative planning solutions. These threats include:

- Diminished funding for preservation at the federal and state levels.
- The impact of gentrification on cultural resources.
- Lack of staffing and administrative support for local-, state-, and federal-level preservation-level programs targeting ethnic/racial groups and other marginalized
Case study: South of Market (Soma) (San Francisco, CA)

In San Francisco, the Filipino-American Development Foundation (FADF) has been working with SF Architectural Heritage to develop strategies for educating community and building awareness about preserving identified Filipino community assets since 2010. Since 2000, FADF has been leading SF neighborhood tours and sharing history and information about the Filipino immigrants that settled in San Francisco to visitors, students, and employee groups. In 2005, a local neighborhood planning task force identified the importance of the Filipino community to the fabric of the neighborhood and with SF Planning staff, proposed the Filipino Social Heritage District. A map was developed by FADF and a local neighborhood nonprofit architectural firm and presented to the SF Planning Commission in October 2011. The SF Planning Department has contracted with Page & Turnbull, a local preservation firm, to conduct oral history interviews of Filipino community members and leaders connected to Soma. The information learned will be used to update a context statement for the Soma, which will ultimately support the effort to establish the Filipino Social Heritage District.

In conjunction with these efforts, FADF was supported by the National Historic Preservation Trust to develop a self-guided walking tour brochure called Soma Pilipinas Ethnotour – exploring Filipino heritage in the neighborhoods of the South of Market. A new program is being developed, targeting the Filipino youth attending Bessie Carmichael School in Soma, called “Explore the City: Adventures in Art and Architecture”, which will introduce middle-school students to the inter-disciplinary field of historic conservation. Students will have the opportunity to travel to architecturally, culturally, and historically significant sites within San Francisco, participate in neighborhood tours, and engage in classroom activities led by SF Heritage staff.

Keypoint 3: Developing Success Factors for Local Preservation Projects

Preserving and enhancing the local identity, uniqueness, and arts and culture assets of a community require that local decision-making, planning processes, policies, and regulations reflect and support community character. This may include the following factors:

- A unique authentic identity
- Community support
- Strategic partnerships
- Inclusive cultural and strategic planning
- Anchor institutions and special events
- Marketing and promotion
- Strong amenities

Case Study: Historic Filipinotown (Los Angeles, CA)

For Los Angeles’s Historic Filipinotown, the best practices stem from community support, strategic partnerships with local elected officials and agencies, and inclusive cultural and strategic community-based planning. In 2002, Historic Filipinotown’s
municipal designation was achieved after a 30-year struggle to be recognized a historically and culturally important neighborhood. Los Angeles City Councilmember Eric Garcetti’s office established a Historic Filipinotown Community Advisory Committee with a diverse coalition of community leaders, planners, professionals, and concerned stakeholders to develop strategies in fostering community and economic development in the neighborhood. Through this committee, a community needs assessment was developed to identify cultural planning strategies that best reflect the neighborhood’s historic and cultural dynamics. Since the designation, civic and business groups in the neighborhood have very worked closely with the City to preserve the neighborhood’s ethnic heritage asset and utilize its unique character to promote heritage tourism, economic development and community revitalization. This includes streetscape projects, the establishment of cultural monuments and markers, and the recent designation as a Preserve America community. Other marketing efforts to draw in visitors to Historic Filipinotown include: Historic Filipinotown Festival (August), Filipino American History Month (October), Veterans Day March-Parade (November), and Historic Filipinotown Parol (lantern) Festival and Parade (December). Thousands of visitors are attracted to these annual events through marketing of heritage assets through walking/driving tours, street signage, websites, and promotional campaigns.

Los Angeles’s Historic Filipinotown is also part of a Preserve America partnership project, Asian-Pacific Islander Preserve American Neighborhoods (API PAN), which includes Chinatown, Koreatown, Little Tokyo, and Thai Town neighborhoods in Los Angeles. This project aims to build cultural identity and understanding within various Asian and Pacific Islander neighborhoods in Los Angeles and to reach out to the greater community through the provision of training materials and programs in historic preservation, cultural tourism, and hospitality services. The project includes a critical assessment of historic and cultural resources, development of hospitality training materials, training materials for communities to become self-sustaining heritage centers, and provides historic preservation professional development opportunities for community residents.

Keypoint 4: Identifying and Surveying Historic and Cultural Sites in the Filipino American Community

Recent cases of successful designations and ongoing efforts represent the growing presence of Filipino American places associated with community action, mobilization, and cultural legitimacy.

Historic Neighborhoods
Little Manila (Stockton, CA)
Manilatown (San Francisco, CA)
South of Market (SoMA) (San Francisco, CA)
Historic Filipinotown (Los Angeles, CA)
Salinas Chinatown (Salinas, CA)
International District (Seattle, WA)

Historic Sites
Daguhoy Lodge (Stockton, CA)
Filipino Plaza (Stockton, CA)
Filipino Christian Church (Los Angeles, CA)
Gintong Kasaysayan, Gintong Pamana (Filipino Americans: A Glorious History, A Golden Legacy) Mural (Los Angeles, CA)
Filipino Community Hall (Delano, CA)
Agbayani Village (Delano, CA)
Freedom Hotel/Carlos Bulosan Memorial Exhibit (Seattle, WA)
Local 7 Headquarters (Seattle, WA)
Filipino Community Building (Bainbridge Island, WA)
Sites in the Delta (Isleton, CA)

Cultural Sites
Filipino American World War II Veteran’s Memorial (Los Angeles, CA)
Remedios “Remy” V. Geaga Square (Los Angeles, CA)
Filipino American Veterans Memorial (Seattle, WA)
Filipino Memorial Project (San Jose, CA)

Recommendations: Reimagining Preservation- The Filipino American Community and the larger preservation movement

Although there are historic preservation approaches that focus on protecting and preserving historic and cultural sites, there are substantial gaps in understanding of how preservation efforts impact historic ethnic neighborhoods. As historic Filipino American neighborhoods continue to deal with changing economic and socio-cultural dynamics and threats of redevelopment and gentrification, many community residents, small businesses and local nonprofits turn to planning and policy approaches for help. However, marginalized groups still perceive the preservation movement as not representing their interests, particularly as discussion moves into the politics of race and place in historic preservation. The issues in historic and cultural preservation are particularly important for Filipino American historic neighborhoods and sites given the changing economic and demographic dynamics.

Recommendation 1: Build a Culturally-Appropriate Framework for Filipino American Communities

Traditional standards in historic preservation have been difficult for ethnic minority groups to preserve and protect their historic and cultural assets. In particular, Filipina/o American experiences and cultural needs are distinct. The diversity of our community -- and the diversity of the places that are special and unique to our communities -- demands that a framework for Filipina/o American preservation take into account the history of American colonialism in the Filipina/o American experience, the diverse backgrounds, class, regional and ethnic, of Filipinas/os, the diverse labor experiences of Filipinas/os, and the unique settlement patterns and lifestyles of early communities as well as the urban and suburban experiences of Filipinas/os in the mid-to-late 20th century.
Recommendation 2: Develop a Network of Preservationists in the Filipino American Community

Filipina/o American preservation activists and educators should develop a community online as well as gather periodically to share resources, support each community’s preservation endeavors, struggles and campaigns, and provide a support network for professional development and coalition-building.

Recommendation 3: Provide Education, Support and Resources for Filipino American Community Work in Historic and Cultural Preservation

Because of a lack of Filipina/o American studies and history material at every level of public school curriculum from elementary school through high school, and a lack of Filipina/o American studies at most universities, the general Filipina/o American public remains largely under-educated about their own community’s history. More outreach and education should be done in each community to ensure that community members feel as though they have a stake in cultural and historic preservation of important sites. Furthermore, preservationists must have better access to resources and be better trained in the processes of critical cultural and historic preservation. Local non-profit organizations play critical roles in development and implementing local preservation strategies. It’s important to help build capacity in young organizations by providing technical and funding support for these organizations that act as advocates, organizers, and technicians.

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