LOS ANGELES
CONSERVANCY

September 26, 2011

Ms. Martha Arana
Executive Office Board of Supervisors
Commission Services Division
Los Angeles County Historical Landmarks & Records Commission
500 W. Temple Street, Room B50
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: California Register of Historical Resources Nomination
Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery

Dear Ms. Arana:

Enclosed please find a California Register of Historical Resources ("California Register") nomination for the Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery, located at 4787 Hammel St. in unincorporated East Los Angeles, which will be submitted by the Los Angeles Conservancy and the Maravilla Historical Society. The Los Angeles Conservancy is the largest local historic preservation organization in the United States, with over 6,000 members throughout the Los Angeles area. Established in 1978, the Conservancy works to preserve and revitalize the significant architectural and cultural heritage of Los Angeles through advocacy and education.

We have sent you a copy of the nomination, pursuant to the nomination requirements established by the State Office of Historic Preservation and Public Resources Code Section 5024.1(f)(1). Los Angeles County has 90 days to review and comment on the nomination. The comments, if any, should be sent to: Los Angeles Conservancy (Attn: Marcello Vavala, Preservation Associate), at 523 West 6th Street, Suite 826, Los Angeles, CA 90014. We will forward the County's comments to the State Office of Historic Preservation along with the nomination.

In 1992, Governor Wilson signed AB 2881 into law establishing the California Register. The California Register is an authoritative guide used by state and local agencies, private groups and citizens to identify historic resources and to indicate what properties are to be protected, to the extent prudent and feasible. Properties listed in the California Register are considered historic resources subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

The Los Angeles Conservancy believes the Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery is eligible on the local level under Criteria 1 under the themes of Social History and Ethnic Heritage as an important, if not the most important, social center for the multi-ethnic Maravilla community from 1928 through 1989. The store, handball court, and

activities that took place there were a focal point for the early multi-ethnic community of Maravilla, and later the predominantly Mexican American community. The history of the court also illustrates the multicultural and multiethnic nature of the sport of handball. The Nishiyamas, Japanese Americans, played an important role in the history of the property and community. They sponsored numerous community functions at the court, posted local announcements, extended store credit to regular customers, and created a *de facto* social center for the small neighborhood.

The property exemplifies the cultural layers that have always been important to, not only the history of East LA but also, the history of Los Angeles. Additionally, the handball court is eligible at the local level under Criterion 3 under the theme of Architecture as an excellent, rare, and well-preserved example of a vernacular recreational building type—a handball court. It is the oldest known extant handball court in the Los Angeles region, and is a remarkable record of this vernacular recreational building type. The Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery possess all seven aspects of integrity. The recommended period of significance for the property is from the date of construction in 1928 through 1989.

If you have any questions regarding the nomination, do not hesitate to contact Marcello Vavala, Preservation Associate, 213-430-4217

Sincerely,

Adrian Fine
Director of Advocacy

cc: David Vela, Senior Field Deputy, Office of Gloria Molina, Supervisor, First District
Shannon Davis, Architectural Historian, ASM Affiliates

State of California — The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
PRIMARY RECORD

Primary #
HRI #
Trinomial
NRHP Status Code 3S

Other Listings
Review Code Reviewer Date

 ***Resource Name or #:** Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery
P1. Other Identifier:
***P2. Location:** ☐ **Not for Publication** ☒ **Unrestricted**
***a. County:** Los Angeles **and** (P2c, P2e, and P2b or P2d. Attach a Location Map as necessary.)
***b. USGS 7.5' Quad** Los Angeles **Date** 1966; revised 1981 **T** 1S **R** 12W; **¼ of** ¼ **of Sec** 32 ; S.B. **B.M.**
c. Address 4787 Hammel St. City Los Angeles Zip 92251
d. UTM: (give more than one for large and/or linear resources) Zone 11S, mE/ 392734.42 mN; 3767495.06
e. Other Locational Data: (e.g. parcel#, directions to resource, elevation, etc.) APN: 5235-018-012

***P3a. Description:** (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

The Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery is comprised of three sections: the court, the store, and a four-room residence attached to the store. The handball court, built in 1928, was not constructed in a particular architectural style but its form was dictated by its function and the materials were likely chosen because of their local availability. The El Centro Grocery and attached residence, constructed in 1946, was similarly constructed, in a simple vernacular form, using typical local materials without the application of stylistic elements.

The handball court, at the north end of the property, is the most architecturally distinct part of the site and comprises the largest portion of its footprint. It is a long rectangular space enclosed by high walls on the north and east, to the south by the northern wall of the El Centro Grocery, and to the west by a short wall with several attached sheds, a bathroom addition and a portion of the residence. The north and east walls of the handball court are all original, made entirely of brick believed to be from the nearby Davidson brick yard. On the interior side of the wall the brick was overlaid with stucco over concrete to create a smooth finish to afford the best handball surface.

(continued on page 5)

***P3b. Resource Attributes:** (List attributes and codes) HP2. Single Family Property, HP6. 1-3 story commercial building, HP36 Ethnic Minority Property (LA Latino and JA Japanese), HP39 Others (recreational sports facility)

P4. Resources Present: ☒ Building ☒ Structure ☐ Object ☐ Site ☐ District ☐ Element of District ☐ Other (Isolates, etc.)

P5a. Photograph or Drawing (Photograph required for buildings, structures, and objects.)

P5b. Description of Photo: (view, date, accession#)
View looking southeast at handball court and store/residence;
Picture taken September 2, 2010

***P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source:**
☒ Historic ☐ Prehistoric ☐ Both
1928 and 1946, county assessors records

***P7. Owner and Address:**
Tommy Nishiyama

***P8. Recorded by:** (Name, affiliation, and address)
Shannon Davis, Snr. Architectural Historian
Andrew Palmer, M. Architecture
ASM Affiliates, Inc.
260 S. Los Robles, Suite 106
Pasadena, CA 91101

***P9. Date Recorded:** September 2, 2010

***P10. Survey Type:** (Describe) Intensive

***P11. Report Citation:** (cite survey report and sources, or enter "none.") Historic Structures Report for the Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery, 4787 Hammel St., Los Angeles, California

***Attachments:** ☐ NONE ☒ Location Map ☒ Sketch Map ☒ Continuation Sheet ☒ Building, Structure, and Object Record
☐ Archaeological Record ☐ District Record ☐ Linear Feature Record ☐ Milling Station Record ☐ Rock Art Record
☐ Artifact Record ☐ Photograph Record ☐ Other (List):

State of California — The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

Primary #
HRI #

***NRHP Status Code** 3S

***Resource Name or #** (Assigned by recorder) Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery

B1. Historic Name: Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery
B2. Common Name: Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery
B3. Original Use: Recreation (Handball Court), Commercial and Residential
B4. Present Use: Community Center
***B5. Architectural Style:** Vernacular
***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
1928 (handball court) with additions in 1944 and 1947, 1946 (El Centro Grocery)
***B7. Moved?** ☒ No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown **Date:** N/A **Original Location:** N/A
***B8. Related Features:** None
B9a. Architect: Unknown b. Builder: Unknown
***B10. Significance: Theme** Social History, Ethnic Heritage, Architecture **Area:** Los Angeles, CA
Period of Significance: 1928-1989 **Property Type:** Handball Court, Commercial/ Residential **Applicable Criteria:** 1 and 3

(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

Summary:

The Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery is eligible on the local level under Criteria 1 under the themes of Social History and Ethnic Heritage as an important, if not the most important, social center for the multi-ethnic Maravilla community from 1928 through 1989. The store, handball court, and activities that took place there were a focal point for the early multi-ethnic community of Maravilla, and later the predominantly Mexican American community. The history of the court also illustrates the multicultural and multiethnic nature of the sport of handball. The Nishiyamas, Japanese Americans, played an important role in the history of property and community. They sponsored numerous community functions at the court, posted local announcements, extended store credit to regular customers, and created a de facto social center for the small neighborhood. The property exemplifies the cultural layers that have always been important, not only to the history of East LA but also to the history of Los Angeles. Additionally, the handball court is eligible at the local level under Criterion 3 under the theme of Architecture is an excellent, rare, and well-preserved example of a vernacular recreational building type—a handball court. It is the oldest known handball court in Los Angeles, and is a remarkable record of this vernacular recreational building type.

The Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery possess all seven aspects of integrity. The recommended period of significance for the property is from the date of construction in 1928 through 1989.

(continued on page 6)

B11. Additional Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) None

***B12. References:** See Continuation Sheet, Pg. 11

B13. Remarks: None

***B14. Evaluator:** Shannon Davis, Snr. Architectural Historian
***Date of Evaluation:** May 2011

Sketch Map with north arrow required.

Map courtesy of Google Earth. Red outline indicates the subject property.

(This space is reserved for official comments)

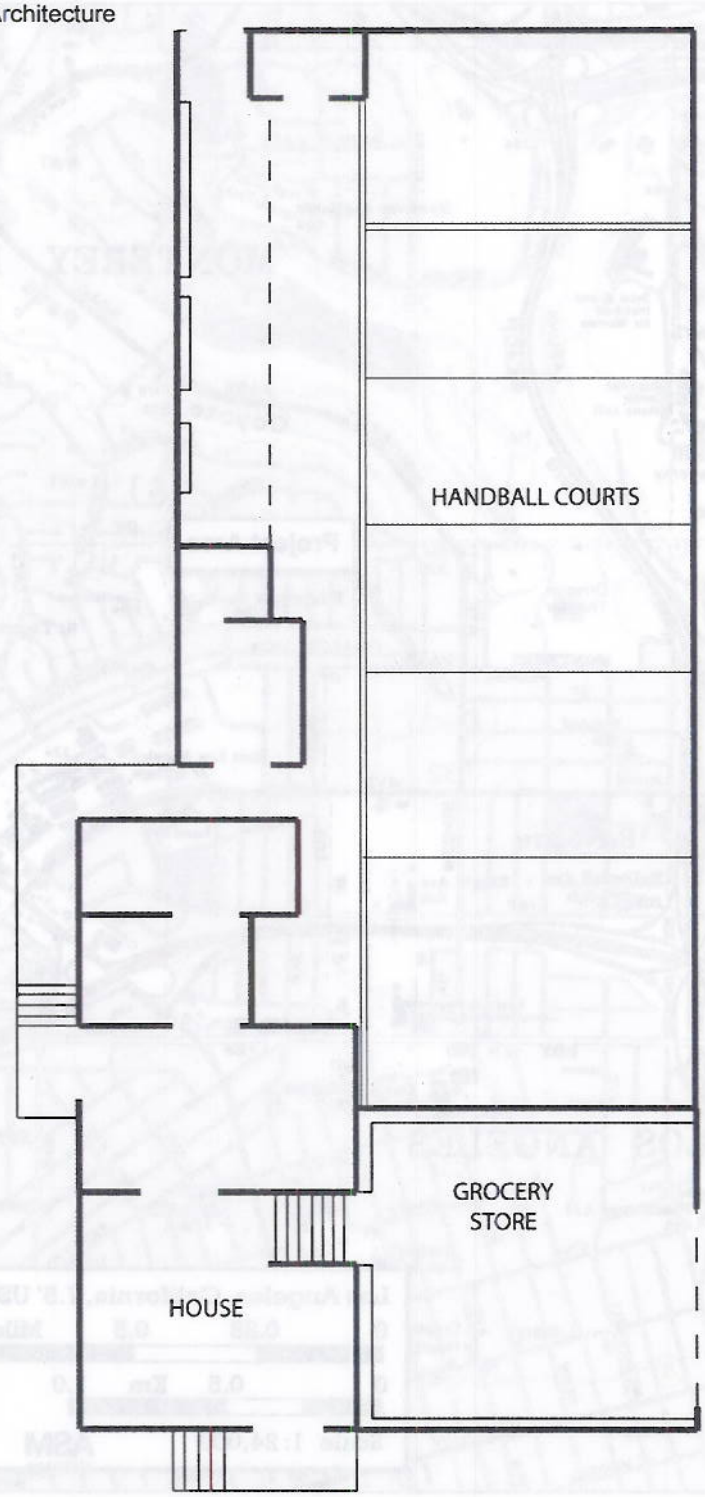
State of California — The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
SKETCH MAP

Primary # _____
HRI# _____
Trinomial _____

***Resource Name or #** Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery

Drawn By: Andrew Palmer, M. Architecture

Date of Map: April 2011



Top of sketch is oriented to the north

*Required Information

State of California — The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
LOCATION MAP

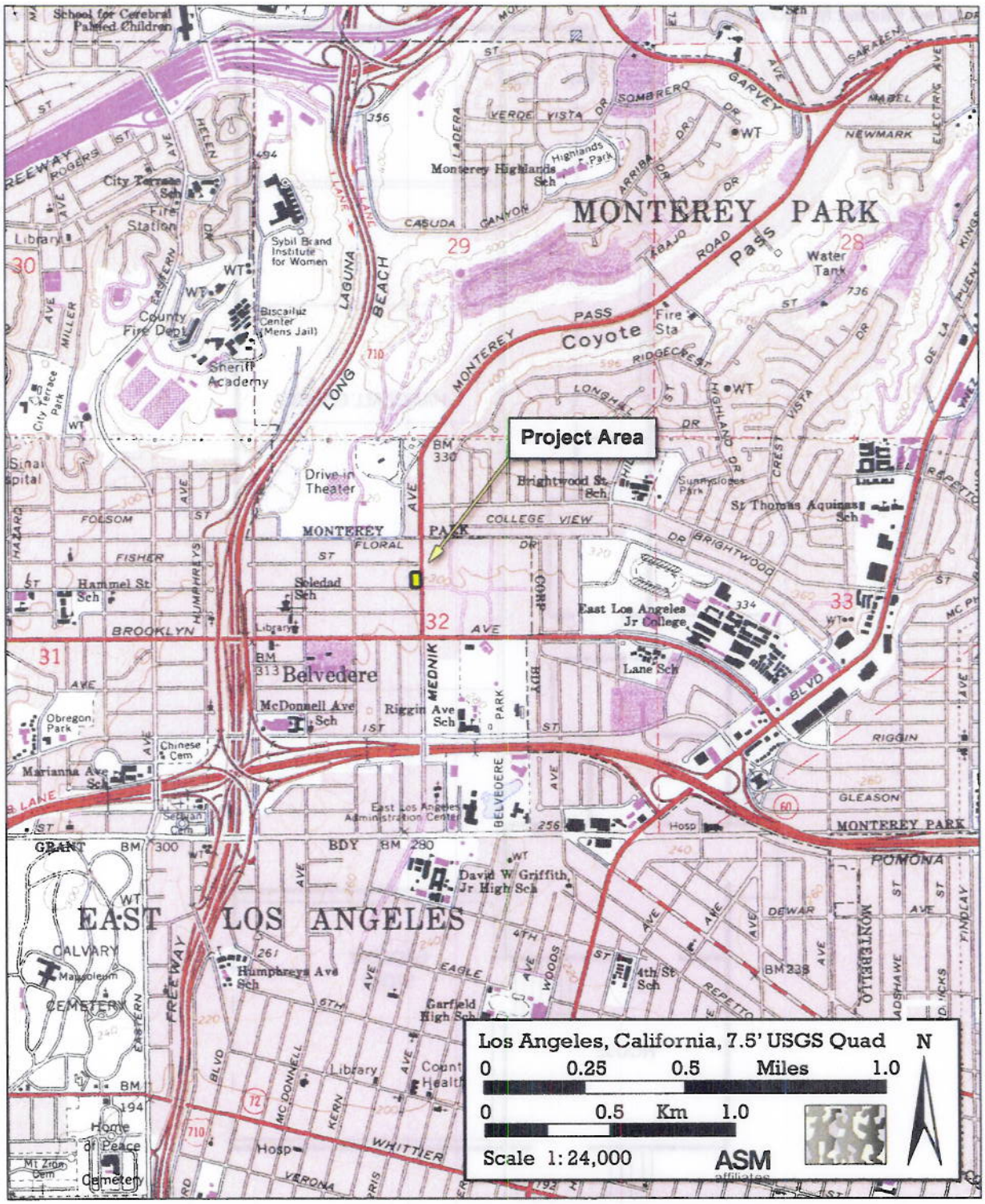
Primary # _____
HRI# _____
Trinomial _____

***Resource Name or #:** Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery

Recorded by: Shannon Davis, ASM Affiliates

***Date:** May 2011

☒ Continuation ☐ Update



*Required Information

***P3a. Description:**
(continued)

Chain link fencing extends from the west, north, and east walls to contain balls in the court area—fencing was added as early as 1944, although the current chain link fencing is believed to be from a later date. A sign reading "Maravilla Handball Court" is attached to the fencing above the north wall, believed to be added to the court in the 1970s, and repaired many times since (Bresenio 2010). Built into the west end of the northern wall is also a small room, believed to be an early addition.

As originally constructed in 1928, the court was comprised of two walls, the north and east walls (LA County Assessor 1928). At the time of its construction, the north wall was 22 feet long and the east wall was 62 feet long. The thickness of the walls decreased from bottom to top, starting at 24 inches at the bottom and decreasing to 16 inches at the top. The height of the east wall sloped from 28 ft high at the north end where it meets the north wall, to 8 feet at the southern end. The original east wall was extended to the south over time, as is evident by the current variations in height. It is likely that extension of the eastern wall were undertaken either by Martin Haro at some point in the 1940s as he is known to have made other additions to the court during his operation of it from 1943-1948. As he constructed the adjoining El Centro Grocery store in 1946, it is likely that the extension of the east wall was added to contain the court completely by bringing the east wall to meet the north end of the El Centro Grocery.

Later additions also include the western wall of exposed wood framing with built in bench seating, as well as several small storage/concessions buildings. A flat roof projection along the west wall also provided some sun protection for spectators. An original locker cabinet is located near one of the old concessions stands with names of some of the players on the locker doors.

The north façade of the El Centro Grocery creates the south interior wall of the handball court, It is currently decorated with a mural, created in the last 20 years, which appears to be in good condition (Bresenio 2010). The court itself is divided into a main tournament court at the north and several small practice courts along the east wall. Access to the court is gained through doors in the east and north walls, as well as through a door in the west wall of the residence. The court and its furnishings retain good integrity with some deterioration of materials due to exposure to the elements and lack of regular maintenance and repair.

Character-defining features of the handball court include the following:

- brick walls, especially that of the north wall, and northern most section of the east wall
- concrete floor
- wood framing of the west wall, including built-in benches
- open floor plan
- absence of roof

At the south end of the property, the El Centro Grocery store and attached residence, is a single story building constructed with stucco over wood frame, L-shaped and rectangular in form, with a flat roof and slightly curved parapet on the east, or main, façade. The western half of the building contains the residence, which is comprised of a living room, bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom with attached laundry room. The main entrance to the residence is on the south façade, which also includes a small elevated porch. A door on the west wall of the bedroom leads to the rear of the property and the handball court. A half-flight of stairs from the living room leads down into the grocery store, allowing room for a crawl space under the residence.

The El Centro Grocery is comprised of one rectangular room, with a door to the residence and a small awning window on the west wall. The main entrance to the store was previously located on the east wall facing Mednik Avenue. That entrance was recently destroyed when a car crashed into the east wall. Prior to the damage, this façade included a large double door and a central square window. A large section of the wall (about 7 feet by 10 feet in length) is currently covered by plywood boards nailed into newly installed wood stud frame, to secure and enclose the large opening created by the car. Two interior columns were also knocked out in the crash, but have recently been replaced. The grocery store still retains much of the furnishings including original cabinetry, shelving, and decorative signage. Although the damage to the east wall lessens the integrity of the building, this can be addressed through proper rehabilitation. The remaining fabric of the building and its furnishings are in good condition although they require some maintenance and repair.

Character-defining features of the building include the following:

- L-shaped, rectangular form
- flat roof
- eastern parapet
- stucco exterior walls
- plaster interior walls
- open floor plan of the store
- concrete floor of the store
- wood floors (pine) of the residence
- wood window frames and trim

The Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery site is surrounded by a mixed-density residential neighborhood, interspersed with a few locally-owned commercial buildings. Many of the original residential bungalows that historically surrounded the site remain, with the exception of an area directly to the east that contains a large, low-income, apartment complex. Other commercial buildings are located along Mednick Avenue to the north and south, as they were historically. From the date of the property's original construction, only the viewshed to the east has been altered (towards the large, low-income, apartment complex). However that new viewshed, encompassing the apartment complex, has been associated with the property for a large portion of the period of significance, and is not considered a significant change in setting.

B10. Significance:
(continued)

MEXICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY OF EAST LOS ANGELES

After Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821, California became home to numerous ranches because of the secularization of mission lands. During this period, Americans began to settle throughout California. In 1848, as a result of the Mexican-American war, the United States gained Mexican territory throughout the Southwest, including California. The discovery of gold later in 1848 prompted an increase in not only American settlers, but also an increase in foreign immigrants. As the demographics of California changed so did that of Los Angeles.

During the period of 1850 to 1870, American settlers and developers acquired much property from the old Californio ranchos throughout Southern California due to taxes, droughts, and floods. By the 1890s, Los Angeles had developed into an urban center. New immigrants arrived largely from the Midwest with the expansion of the railroads. The city quadrupled in the 1880s, but the Mexican population comprised less than 15 percent of the total population in 1900.

Over the course of the next 40 years, Los Angeles experienced a huge increase in immigration from Mexico that transformed the city's composition once again. During this period, Mexico endured much social unrest and a revolution that changed the face of Mexican society forever. In the period prior to and including the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) Los Angeles experienced a significant increase in the number of Mexicans immigrants settling in Los Angeles due to the conscription and the instability caused by the conflict (Romo 1983). From 1910 to 1920, the city's Mexican population grew from 5,000 to 30,000, many of whom settled in East Los Angeles (East LA). This period of immigration was pivotal in the creation of the East LA community where the industrialization of the old Mexican plaza area, known as "Sonoratown," and the development of interurban rail system enable the establishment of ethnic communities beyond the city center. The thriving Southern California agricultural sector needed labor, as well as the local canning, garment, gas works, and railroad industries. These industries provided jobs to the many unskilled and semi-skilled immigrants from Mexico (Romo 1983).

Unlike neighboring Boyle Heights, which became a settled community by the 1880s, East LA remained largely undeveloped until the 1920s when the vast rancho lands were eventually subdivided. East LA is located two miles east of the old plaza in downtown, east of the Los Angeles River. It's generally accepted boundaries are the Los Angeles River and Boyle Heights on the west, Monterey Park on the north, Montebello on the east, and the City of Commerce on the south (between the Pomona and Santa Ana Freeways) (Estrada n.d). Today, East LA is home to the largest Mexican American community in the United States (Benitez n.d.).

MARAVILLA NEIGHBORHOOD

One early East LA subdivision was Maravilla Park, a tract first platted in 1911, although significant neighborhood development did not begin until the early 1920s (Forman 1911 and Advertisement 1926). The initial 1911 subdivision was of Lot A, bounded by Ocean View St. (now Dangler Ave.) to the west, Brooklyn Ave. Extension (now Cesar Chavez Ave.) to the north, Riverside Ave. (later Fetterly Ave.) to the east, and Aliso St. Extension (now 3rd St) to the south. To the north, Lot B of Maravilla Park was subdivided at part of Tract 4824 a decade later in 1922 (Sumner and MacMillan 1922). By the time of the construction of the Maravilla Handball Court in 1928 (on the northern half of Lot 44 of Tract 4824), small bungalows had been constructed on the surrounding parcels, and the suburban neighborhood was growing.

Maravilla was initially a working-class, multi-ethnic community of immigrants from Mexico, Ireland, German, and Japan. However, by the end of World War II, the demographics had shifted so that Maravilla, like much of East LA, was predominantly home to Mexican Americans. Several churches were located in the neighborhood, but few community gathering places existed beyond that. In 1945, one of Southern California's earliest public housing projects for low-income families, the Maravilla Housing Project, was built on a large parcel of land across from the handball court. That housing project was rebuilt in 1974. Over the past 50 years, Maravilla has generally been a community of both Mexican Americans residents and new Mexican immigrants.

JAPANESE AMERICAN PRESENCE IN LOS ANGELES

Before East LA became largely a community of Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans, East LA was home to other immigrant populations, specifically Jewish, Armenian, Italian, Russian, and Japanese. The history of Japanese Americans in California is similar to that of the Mexican American community in terms of the racial persecution endured by both groups. The earliest Japanese immigrants settled in California during the Gold Rush. During the 1890s, Japanese laborers came to California to work on fruit and produce farms. Most Japanese immigrants settled in Little Tokyo, near downtown.

After this initial wave of immigration, laws to segregate and ban Japanese immigrants from settling in the United States (U.S.) were drafted. In 1906, the San Francisco school board ordered the segregation of Japanese American students. A year later, President Theodore Roosevelt made a "Gentlemen's Agreement" with the Japanese government that the U.S. would stop issuing passports to new Japanese laborers. Even with these restrictions, Japanese immigration continued, most notably by married women joining their husbands in the U.S., thus changing the demographic of the immigrant communities (California Department of Parks and Recreation 1998).

In and around Los Angeles, the Japanese community thrived because of their success in the produce farming industry. By the 1920s, a quota system was being encouraged to curtail immigration from Southern Europe, limiting the number of immigrants based on existing proportions of the population. This quota system was implemented with the Immigration Act of 1924. The Act further excluded all immigration for the Asian-Pacific triangle, including Japan. This policy continued until a change in immigration legislation allowed Japanese immigration again in 1965.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, prejudice towards Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans worsened. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 which authorized military commanders to exclude both citizen and non-citizens from designated areas. These "alien enemy" would be interred in camps throughout the war because they were thought to be a security risk. The uprooting of so many citizens caused a great movement of people that in part affected East LA's demographics, as those Japanese who did not live in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo lived in East LA.

HANDBALL AS A CULTURAL ACTIVITY

Handball is an important recreational activity for many cultures. Relative to other sports and activities, handball was inexpensive and accessible for the residents of lower-income communities such as Maravilla. Variations of handball have been played all over the world for centuries. Different forms of the game have been traced to ancient Egypt and Rome. The game also has origins in Mesoamerica as there was a ball game which was similar to modern handball that was played there as early as 1500 B.C. The modern version of handball is played barehanded in a court of one to four walls (completely enclosed). The game can be played by two or more players (more for double-matches or a three-player version). A server hits the ball against the front wall, and the receiver returns it. The ball remains in play until one of them fails to make a legal return. The game ends when the first player/team scores 21 points.

Irish immigrants brought this recreational activity along with other cultural traditions to the United States. The earliest reference to this game in Ireland comes from 1527. This gaelic handball closely resembles the modern game because it emphasizes the use of the hand instead of a paddle. Handball was also brought to New York by early Irish and Scottish immigrants. The earliest known handball court

built in the United States was located in San Francisco. An 1851 San Francisco directory lists Thomas Cullen's saloon and Shamrock Ball and Racket Court as an establishment on Market Street.

Handball courts, including Maravilla, were also used for the similar game of Basque pelota. Handball in Spain, especially the Basque region, became an important cultural tradition. Its origins are in the medieval French game of jeux de palme, which also developed into racquetball. This version of the game was spread by Basque immigrants who settled in North and South America. The original game is played with just the hand, but different versions include a paddle and a woven basket. This latter version is the well known jai alai. The game was also largely reserved for men. The Basque community in Los Angeles dates to the 1840s. Basque immigrants were primarily shepherds and settled in remote areas of the western U.S. in order to utilize the open grazing land. They settled in various parts of Southern California and by 1886, Los Angeles had a Basque community of 2,000. Basque immigrants brought with them their traditions and built hotels and courts (frontón) wherever they settled. The earliest extant example of such a court in the metropolitan Los Angeles region is the La Puente Handball Court and Club, in La Puente, California, founded in 1939 by local Basques in order to preserve their national customs (Frank 1955 and Euskal Kazeta Basque News 2010). Handball's association with the Mexican community stems from the ancient Mesoamerican form of the game and the introduction of the Basque game to the continent.

One of the earliest known handball courts in Los Angeles was located on North Main street in downtown Los Angeles, but has since been demolished (National Trust for Historic Preservation 2009a). Branches of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) at 715 S. Hope downtown and 1553 N. Hudson in Hollywood contained handball courts by 1927 and 1929 respectively—however both buildings have also been demolished (Los Angeles Directory Company 1927 and 1929). Other well-known courts existed at California State University at Los Angeles and East Los Angeles College, built much later than the Maravilla Handball Court, and since demolished. Other courts around the city were built later in the 20th century and in a less permanent manner. During the course of the research for this project, no extant courts older than Maravilla in the City of Los Angeles have been identified.

Beginning in the 1970s, many handball courts were converted to racquetball courts. The relatively new sport first emerged in the 1950s as a hybrid of tennis and handball (USA Racquetball 2011). Racquetball experienced a surge of popularity in the 1970s through the 1980s, coinciding with an increased interest in fitness and fitness centers, which included new built courts.

PROPERTY HISTORY

The Maravilla Handball Court was built in 1928 on Lot 44 of the recently subdivided Tract 4824 of Maravilla Park (Los Angeles County Assessors Office 1928). The original owner of the court was Joe Magelleney, who purchased the newly subdivided lot in 1925 (Los Angeles County 1928). Nothing further is known about Magelleney. The immediate neighborhood was not well developed during that time, and had only just received funds for basic infrastructure. According to the Sanborn Fire Insurance maps from 1928 and 1929, a store was located on the southern portion of the lot, confirmed by early assessments of the property that indicate a small improvement was located at the site prior to the construction of the handball court. That structure is presumed to have been replaced by the current El Centro Grocery.

Although no building permit exists for the handball court[1], the earliest assessors record from 1928 indicates the court was constructed early that year (Los Angeles County Assessors Office 1928 and Los Angeles County 1928). That date of construction is confirmed by the appearance of the court on the Sanborn Fire Insurance map of 1929. According to longtime community members, the handball court was built by local citizens using bricks from the nearby Davidson Brick Yard.

Table 1. History of Property Ownership

Owner	Date of Purchase
Joe Magelleney	1925
Aniceto Garcia	June 30, 1932
Jose and Conception Cobos	December 18, 1934
Martin and Lucy Haro	February 19, 1943
Jose, Francisco, and Quirina Chavira	March 15, 1948
Gust and Lupe Brinias	May 14, 1948
Gust and Gualalupe Brinias	March 21, 1963
Shigeru "Tommy" and Michiyo "Michi" Nishiyama	September 1, 1971

[1] In general, permitting in unincorporated areas of Los Angeles was not required until 1933, post-construction of the handball court.

Joe Magelleny sold the property to Aniceto Garcia in 1932, who sold it shortly thereafter in 1934 to Jose and Conception (Concha) Y. Cobos (Los Angeles County 1935 and Deed of Trust 1943). The extent of their involvement with the handball court is unknown. Early city directories do not indicate who lived at the property prior to the 1950s (Los Angeles Directory Company 1929 and 1942). What is known is that the Cobos purchased a house across the street from the handball court at 4808 Hammel in 1938, and also owned other property elsewhere in Los Angeles. (Deed of Trust 1938). It may have been during the Cobos ownership that the Maravilla Handball Club, a mens-only handball club, was founded, believed to be in the early 1930s.

In 1943, Martin and Lucy Haro, Mexican immigrants, purchased the court and owned the property until 1948. The Haros played an important role in the property's early history and were early Maravilla residents. In 1925, the Haros lived at 4719 Hammel, just down the block from where the handball court was built three years later. They were still residing in Maravilla, at 314 N. Carmelita in 1943 when they purchased the handball court (Deed of Trust 1943). Recollections from their decedents indicate the Haros may have been involved with the property in the 1930s prior to their purchase of it, possibly managing the original store on the site for the Cobos (National Trust for Historic Preservation 2010). After purchasing the property from the Cobos, the Haros made improvements to the court including a fence (1944) and storage buildings (1947) and, most significantly, built the adjoining El Centro Grocery store and small residence in 1946. The new store quickly became an integral part of the small community. Annual handball tournaments were held at the court during this time and were attended by players from other states and Mexico (National Trust for Historic Preservation 2009a).

In March of 1948, the Haros sold the property to Mexican Americans Jose, Francisco, and Quirina Chavira (residents of the neighborhood since the 1920s, and owners of the lot directly to the north) (Grant Deed 1948a and Los Angeles County 1954). The Chaviras quickly sold the property one month later to Gust and Lupe Brinias (Grant Deed 1948b). The Brinias owned the property for 15 years before selling it to Gust and Gualalupe Brinias in 1963 (presumed to be one or more of their children) (Los Angeles County 1964).

In 1971, Shigeru "Tommy" and Michiyo "Michi" Nishiyama purchased the Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery (Los Angeles County 1964). The Nishiyamas were Japanese Americans who had moved to Maravilla after World War II, and began living at and operating El Centro Grocery in the mid-1950s (presumably as renters) (Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company 1956 and Bresenio 2010). Tommy and Michi Nishiyama continued to operate the grocery store and the court until 2006, and have the longest association with the property of any of its owners or stewards. Michi and Tommy were born in and grew up in Washington state but moved to Los Angeles in 1940-41 (National Trust for Historic Preservation 2009b). Following her internment at Minnidoka, a Japanese relocation camp in Idaho, Michi reunited with and married her long-term boyfriend Tommy, and the couple moved to Maravilla and started a family.

By this point Maravilla had become a predominately Mexican American community, but regardless of their different ethnic and cultural background, the community embraced the Nishiyamas. Under their stewardship, the store and court evolved into a community focal point and gathering place, a place to post announcements, connect with neighbors, and for music and dancing. Tommy and Michi sponsored numerous community functions at the court including Christmas parties, organized trips to places such as Laughlin and Las Vegas, posted local announcements, extended store credit to regular customers, and created a de facto social center for the small neighborhood. Tommy played handball with many of the regular handball players, members of the still active Maravilla Handball club. Michi was locally famous for the sandwiches she made behind the grocery counter. The Nishiyamas became so entwined in local society that numerous neighborhood residents recollect that they were often the subject of dinner table conversations. Residents of the Maravilla Housing Project across the street were among those residents, and today recall that the store and handball court played an important role in their lives, not only as a social center, a safe place for children and adults to play, but also for the generosity of the Nishyamas (Briseno 2010, Lopez 2010). Surviving members of the Maravilla Handball Club recall that handball thrived at Maravilla through the 1980s and that during that time (late 1920-1980s) no other significant community centers existed in the small community (Sienze, et all 2011).

By the 1980s, the Nishyama's son married and moved away, and their daughter had died at an early age. As the dynamics of their family changed, the frequency of the community parties that they hosted began to wane. Many of the regular patrons of El Centro Grocery and the Maravilla Handball Court were moving to suburban neighborhoods further away. Of those continuing and new families in the neighborhood, younger residents showed less interest in handball than in the past and the game of racquetball was becoming increasingly popular. Some racquetball players used the Maravilla court, although it was never modified for that game (Sienze, et all 2011). Michi and Tommy continued to operate the store and court, however it was not the significant social and recreation center it was previously (Lopez 2010). In 2006 Michi passed away; Tommy followed a year later, after which the doors of the Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocere were closed. In the interim, a car crashed into the east side of the store, and squatters temporarily took up residence inside. The Maravilla Historical Society has now leased the property from the Nishiyama's son, who lives in nearby Orange County. The current owner is interested in selling the property to an entity, such as the Maravilla Historical Society, that will preserve the property (Becerra 2010).

The recommended period of significance for the property is from the date of construction in 1928 through 1989. Although the handball court and El Centro store continued to serve the community until the recent deaths of the Nishiyamas, the period when this community center was most vital and active ended by the 1990s. Surviving members of the Maravilla Handball Club recall that handball thrived at Maravilla through the 1980s. Changes in the dynamics of the Nishyama family lead to less frequent community events by that point as well. By the end of the 1980s, many of the regular patrons of El Centro Grocery and the Maravilla Handball Court had moved to suburban neighborhoods further away. Of those continuing and new families in the neighborhood, younger residents showed less interest in handball and more interest in other activities such as racquetball.

The Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery possess all seven aspects of integrity. The location of the building and court remains intact, as they have not been moved. A majority of the physical elements of the court and store remain so that they retain integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. Although some changes to the original setting have occurred, such as the multi-family dwellings located across Mednik, those alterations have now been associated with the property for the majority of its period of significance and as such the property retains its integrity of setting. The property retains its integrity of feeling and association as it continues to express the physical features that collectively convey the property's historic character and the link to its historic associations.

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Recorded by: Shannon Davis, ASM Affiliates

***Date:** May 2011

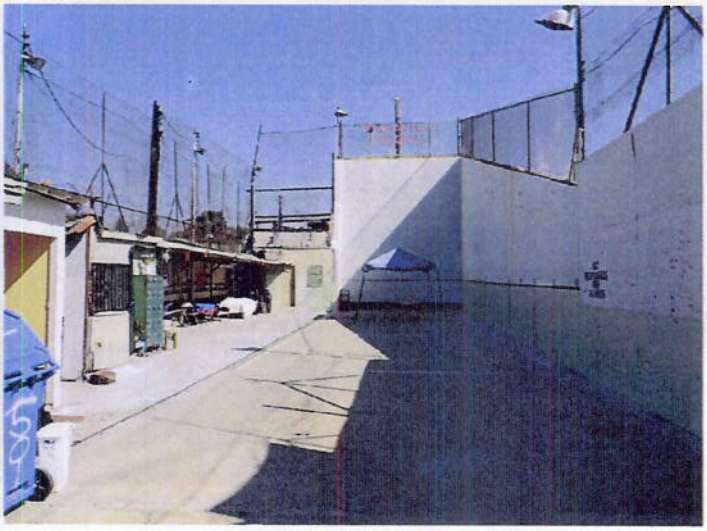
☒ Continuation ☐ Update

Photographs

View of east façade of Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery.

View of original north and east walls of Maravilla Handball Court.

East façade of handball court, view looking north.



Interior of Maravilla Handball Court, view looking north

Photographs

Interior of Maravilla Handball Court, view looking south.

Interior of west wall and storage building at northwest corner of handball court.

West wall of Maravilla Handball Court, note built-in benches.

West wall of Maravilla Handball Court, view looking south.

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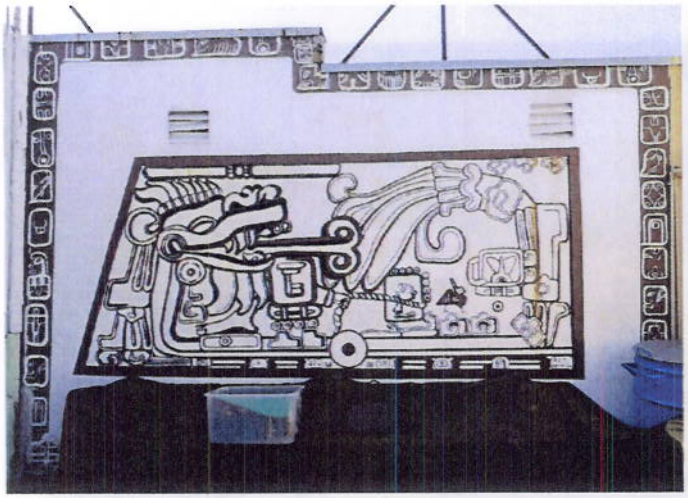
Photographs



Mural adorning interior south wall of Maravilla Handball Court.

South façade of El Centro Grocery, with main entrance to residence on this façade.

Interior of living room of residence, view looking north.

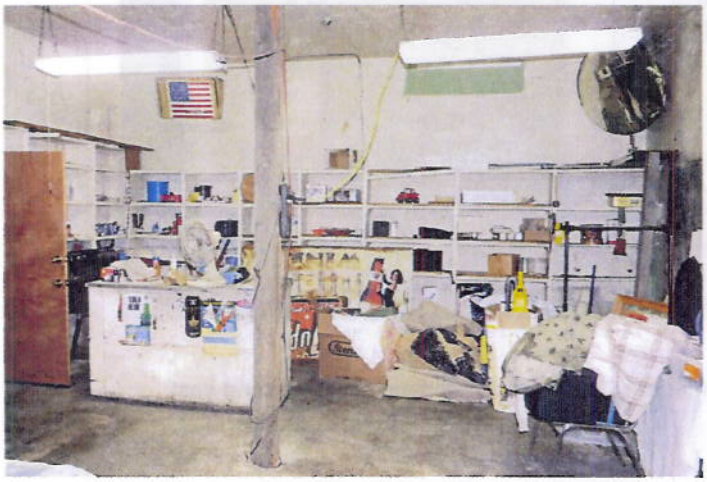
Interior of bedroom of residence, view looking east.

Recorded by: Shannon Davis, ASM Affiliates ***Date:** May 2011 ☒ Continuation ☐ Update

Photographs

Interior of kitchen and bathroom of residence, view looking north.

South façade of El Centro Grocery.



Interior of El Centro Grocery, note built-in shelving.

Entrance to El Centro Grocery from residence.