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If you have any questions, please contact the Commission Office at (213) 978-1300.

Date: July 20, 2020

To: Cultural Heritage Commission

From: Michael Mekeel
Heritage Properties LLC

Subject: **Report on Repair of Historic Designated Stairs (Monument No. 535) along Beachwood Drive in Hollywood and Request for Response**

At your last meeting I asked for your assistance in correcting the horrific "Restoration" by the Department of Public Works of a portion of one of the Hollywoodland Historic Designated Stairs (Monument No. 535). The work is being done by a private contractor, Commercial Coating and Paving, in accordance with a Scoping Plan and Work Order No: E1908746 dated 6/15/2021 and prepared by the City Architect.



It is clear the City Architect's restoration plans were not followed by the contractor.

Many City Departments are meeting and talking about a solution to this issue. To provide a "roadmap" for a solution, I documented the historic stair design and materials in detail; identified the precise errors in the work by Commercial Coating and Paving; and provided the needed basis for the demolition of the failed work and for a proper reconstruction conforming with the Secretary of the Interior Standards.

I have not had a response except to be told that the Departments are meeting internally to address the problem. My work -to cut through and resolve the basic issues --should enable this to come to a great conclusion. The plans and specifications I provided are:

- "As-Built Plan" showing what the contractor actually built, which does not correspond to either the Work Order or the Historic Granite Stairs.
- "Restoration Plan" I recommend showing how to correctly re-build the Historic Granite Stairs.
- "Section A" through the stairs showing the profile of the Historic Granite Stair versus the stair that the contractor built.
- "Step Detail" showing the risers and treads in detail; how the historic granite stairs were probably built; and can be re-built.
- Specifications describing specific materials, prequalifications, and contractual issues that are unique to the restoration of the Historic Granite Stairs.

I want to see this erroneous work replaced entirely, and I want to help ensure other Hollywoodland stairs are repaired meeting the Standards. The Hollywoodland neighbors and I have exceptional contributions to make, but the process fails to build on what we know and can do.

But there is a larger issue this "bust" reveals. Somehow this smaller City-owned monument it did not get the contracting expertise it deserved. Large City public historic buildings get their needed experts it seems. Not this.

I asked that you contact the Public Works Commission so that the administrative disconnect -- whatever it is -- can be addressed.

1. Immediately hire the needed professionally-qualified team that can take over this work, prepare needed plans and specifications, and move on with demolishing the non-conforming work at the Hollywoodland Historic Granite Stairs, and building the correct reconstruction.
2. Establish the prequalification for hiring the competent professionals and contractors needed to manage the maintenance, repair and restoration this kind of City-owned historic public work Citywide.
3. Involve expert stakeholders and neighbors in the entire process.

I want to emphasize that I am a significant stakeholder in Hollywoodland; I have both a financial, civic and emotional interest in this beautiful historic community—identified as historic in Survey LA—hopefully one day an HPOZ.

1. I am an architect licensed for 40 years. I have restored some of the regions most important landmarks, including Frank Lloyd Wright's La Miniatura and the Beverly Hills Waterworks.
2. I served 12 years as a Board Member of the Hollywoodland Specific Plan DRAB. Also, I served as the architect and Chairman of the Whitley Heights HPOZ.
3. I own the Toberman House, Historic-Cultural Monument #769.
4. I previously designed and built a home in Hollywoodland compatible with the area's historic character. I am again a Hollywoodland property owner, designing and building another home which will coincide with the 100 year anniversary of Hollywoodland.

I look forward to continuing to work with you to protect the historic fabric of the City of Los Angeles.

Michael Mekeel, Architect
Offenhauser Mekeel Architects
Heritage Properties LLC
310-659-6600
mmekeel@oma-la.com

Good Morning.

My name is Michael Mekeel. I am a stakeholder in Hollywoodland as a property owner and developer, an architect specializing in historic restoration and a previous Board Member of the Hollywoodland Specific Plan DRAB. I own the Toberman House, Cultural-Historic Monument No. 769.

I am updating you on the horrible "Restoration" of the Historic Granite Stairs (Monument No. 535) in Hollywoodland. As you can see from the images in the letter I submitted to you two weeks ago and again this morning the work bears no resemblance to the original stairs. The restoration of the Historic Granite stairs in Hollywoodland was in the wrong hands and that needs to change.

I ask you once again to contact the Board of Public Works and ask them to improve their process of pre-qualifying professionals and contractors to restore city owned historic structures, not just for this specific project but for the repair and restoration of all the historic stairs in Hollywoodland and any other historic fabric in the city. It is all at risk of destruction by a Public Works Department that does not have the knowledge to a steward of this valuable resource.

Thank You.



Planning CHC <chc@lacity.org>

RE: CHC-2022-3207-HCM, Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak -- SUPPLEMENTAL Significance Narrative + addendum and bibliography, submitted by West Adams Heritage (attached)

Laura Meyers <lauramink@aol.com>

Thu, Jul 28, 2022 at 2:23 PM

Reply-To: Laura Meyers <lauramink@aol.com>

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July 28, 2022

Dear Cultural Heritage Commission, Commission Staff and the Office of Historic Resources:

I am forwarding this previous email dated May 26, 2022 (below) to which is attached West Adams Heritage Association's (WAHA) Supplemental Significance Statement for the proposed Historic Cultural Monument, the Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak and Johnson Family Residence - CHC-2022-3207-HCM. The story of this property reveals important legacy history for our community, and of course we support its designation as a City HCM.

As you are aware, we were asked to set aside the HCM nomination we were working on and instead work with (e.g., supplement) Susan and Christian, who unbeknownst to us (and we unbeknownst to them) had also been working on an HCM nomination. The attached and previously-submitted historical background and context statement, supplemental significance statement, and supplemental bibliography was designed to be included in the final report for the Commission to consider.

We would also request that it be included in the report and materials that are to then be transmitted to the City Council by the Commission, if the Commission votes favorably on the application, as we hope they will.

We are resubmitting it now since it was not included in the final report for the now-scheduled August 4, 2022 hearing at the Cultural Heritage Commission.

WAHA will be writing a stand-alone letter addressing this further, but for now please do once again include it in the "Supplemental Docs" additional materials column on the Commissions, Boards and Hearings website as a timely submission.

Thank you very much,

Laura Meyers and Rina Rubenstein

[Quoted text hidden]



Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak_1156 S Hobart_CHC-2022-3207_Supplemental Significance Statement_WAHA.pdf
5090K

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, CONTEXT AND SUPPLEMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak is an icon for its neighborhood, towering over the tops of the community's one- and two-story homes, and readily visible from a nearby elementary schoolyard. Passersby may not know its history as a sapling grown in a German forest in 1936, and then gifted to an Olympic gold medalist, who carried it 6,000 miles home to Los Angeles, where it was planted in his parents' backyard, and still honors his memory. They may not know of the pioneering Black family who nurtured their son's tree for another six decades. But they can see and feel its presence, and enjoy the shade cast by its 50-foot canopy.

The nomination of the Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak and the Johnson family home seeks to designate both the tree and the entire property where it has been rooted for nearly nine decades. The extended Johnson family – not just Cornelius, but his parents and grandparents, siblings and cousins – together tell an important Los Angeles story.



As we move to acknowledge L.A.'s multi-faceted histories and celebrate its mosaic of cultures, it's important to note not only struggles and suffering, but also triumphs and accomplishments. Cornelius Johnson's family home and the Olympic Oak help demonstrate that our city was built not only by the wealthy and famous, but also by working-class men and women whose names may be unknown but whose dreams created a home and a community. The house at 1156 So. Hobart Blvd. may be a modest, vernacular bungalow but it is also a window into a lesser-documented chapter in L.A.'s African American heritage, and the history and growth of the city as a whole.

S.C. Johnson¹ quite literally built his own house in 1905, on land that had been beyond city limits when he, his mother, his future wife, and his mother-in-law came to California in the early 1890s, part of a stream of restless and ambitious African Americans from the South. They came without money or much education (neither of Cornelius's grandmothers could read or write). They worked hard, often at menial jobs; saved money, built homes, and invested in real estate; they raised families and made sure their children got an education. They paid their taxes, voted in elections, supported a thriving Black press, joined churches and clubs. Their families grew and succeeded. They were the essential workers of their day, and their stories are essential to our historical understanding.

And in the Johnson family's case, their family included a great athlete, who would bring honor to his country, his city, and his heritage.

The Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak is now a mature, healthy, majestic 86-year-old oak tree. Rising 46 feet high, it serves as a living memorial to one of Los Angeles's greatest home-grown athletes. The Olympic Oak is also emblematic; it represents, some might say, a triumph of good over evil.

In 1936, Cornelius Johnson was one of 18 African American athletes who represented the United States at the infamous Nazi Olympics in Berlin. On the first day of competition, as Johnson won gold in the high jump, he also set an Olympic world record that stood until 1952.



¹ A note about names: There seems to be a great deal of flexibility as to the spelling of names and precision of dates. Cornelius's father is referred to as Shadrick, Shadrach, Sherderick, Shadreak, Shedwick, Shade, Cedric, and several other variations; he signed his name as S.C., which is how his obituary referred to him. We have chosen to use "S. C." Cornelius's paternal grandmother was Charlotte or Charlotta; his maternal grandmother was Bessie, Betty, or Bettie Cooper; his sister was Perlita or Pearlita. When Cornelius's sister Ruby filed a legal affidavit in 1966 for her brother Theodore, whose 1904 birth certificate had not specified a given name, she chose different versions of their parents' names than what they'd submitted at the birth. Cornelius's maternal aunt's marriage license refers to her on one line as Maud and another as Maude. She was married to Clarence Waters, but was later known as Maude Johnson, though it's unclear why she used that name.

Hitler and the Nazis wanted to use the 1936 Olympics as propaganda to show their glory to the world. The German Olympic organizers promised a set of gifts to every gold medal-winning athlete: a wreath of oak leaves, the gold medal itself, an oak sapling, and a handshake from der Fuhrer himself.

The Berlin Olympic Committee called the specially-grown saplings a "beautiful symbol of German character, power, strength, and hospitality." This symbolism ties to a long history of venerating the oak as a sacred tree reaching back to Celtic and Germanic tribes in Roman times. In the 20th century, the oak became the favorite badge of right-wing Germans and their nationalism. The National Socialists continued this line and used the oak as a symbol for the strength and endurance of the nation under Nazism.

Of course, Hitler had every expectation that only Aryan athletes would win gold medals. On the first day of competition, he did visibly clasp the hands of the German and Finnish gold medalists. But later in the day, when Cornelius Johnson won the high jump, Hitler left the stadium, thereby avoiding shaking Johnson's hand.

Johnson and his teammates who won silver and bronze in the event all stood on the medal stand, Cornelius clutching his oak. These young men also led a daring protest against the Nazi government that hosted the games. Hitler left his very visible loge box about five minutes before the last medal ceremony of the day, the ceremony for the three American men's high jump medalists: Cornelius Johnson (gold medal), David Albritton (silver) and Delos Thurber (bronze). Johnson and Albritton were Black.

While on the victory stand for the high jump event, Johnson, Albritton and Thurber performed the Bellamy or Flag Salute (arms outstretched, palms facing up), which was, from 1892 until the 1940s, the official stance for the American Pledge of Allegiance, performed by schoolchildren as well as adults.² In the opening ceremonies, delegations from other countries had given the Nazi or Olympic salutes. The gesture of the high jump medalists was forever frozen in time in the pages of the *Official Report of the XIth Olympic Games*.

² Stefani, Raymond T., "Johnson, Albritton, and Thurber's Patriotic and Defiant Bellamy Salute in Response to Hitler's Snub at Berlin in 1936" *The Sport Journal*, September 22, 2015

<https://thesportjournal.org/article/johnson-albritton-and-thurbers-patriotic-and-defiant-bellamy-salute-in-response-to-hitlers-snub-at-berlin-in-1936/>

In 1892, Francis Bellamy published the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag (1). To accompany the recital of that pledge, Bellamy provided instructions for a salute to the American flag. "At a signal from the Principal the pupils ... face the flag. Another signal is given: each pupil gives the flag the military salute – right hand lifted, palm downward, to a line with the forehead. Standing thus, all repeat together slowly 'I pledge allegiance to my Flag...'. At the words 'to my flag' the right hand is extended gracefully, palm upward, toward the flag..." (Note that "to my flag" is now worded "to the flag of the United States of America".) If we search for "Bellamy Salute" using Google Images and Google Videos, we will find a number of photos and videos showing American school children of the 1920s to early 1940s performing the military salute followed by extending the arm.



*Medal Ceremony for the Men's High Jump:
From left to right, Thurber, Johnson, and Albritton, performing the two steps of the Bellamy Salute*

Upon Johnson's return to Los Angeles, his Olympic Oak tree was planted at his family home on Hobart Boulevard (where he had grown up, and on land owned by his grandmother beginning in 1896). It was, and is, an enduring monument to his own win, and a remembrance of a time when Black athletes from the U.S. symbolized victory over the racist, supremacist Aryan credo of the Nazi government that sponsored the 1936 games.



Back stateside, 1936 USA Olympic gold medalists Cornelius Johnson (left), Jesse Owens and Forrest Townes show off their oaks

This tree needs and deserves our protection as a landmark to make its story known to wider audiences.



Additionally, Cornelius Cooper Johnson’s parents, and grandparents on both sides, were pioneers in the Los Angeles black community. They had arrived in Los Angeles in the early 1890s. By 1897, Charlotte Johnson, Cornelius’s grandmother, and S.C. Johnson, her son and Cornelius’s father, had purchased land and settled into a Victorian cottage on a large lot at the northeast corner of Pellissier (soon renamed “Hobart”) and 12th Street.

S.C. Johnson was born in Reconstruction-era North Carolina in 1870. In Los Angeles he worked as a plasterer – sometimes credited as the first licensed African American plastering contractor in Los Angeles – who in later decades worked on commercial buildings including the former May Company on Wilshire Boulevard, as well as fancy estates designed by architect Paul R. Williams.

In 1903, S. C. Johnson married Pearl Lucille Cooper, and soon built a new house next door to the original cottage. This bungalow at 1156 S. Hobart is where S.C. and Pearl raised five children, including Cornelius Johnson, and where the family planted the Olympic Oak tree.

For almost a century, until 1994, the property was owned by the Johnson family. It is now threatened by Los Angeles’s rapid development.

The principal HCM nomination includes a proposed monument description of both the tree and the house. This supplemental document expands on the significance statement, historical background, and historical context, to amplify the Johnson Family Home and the Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak’s significance.

DESIGNATION CRITERIA:

The Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak and the Johnson Family Home property in its entirety is eligible for designation as a Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument.

The three criteria for HCM designation, stated in the Cultural Heritage Ordinance Section 22.171.7, are listed below:

- 1. Is identified with important events of national, state, or local history, or exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community;*
- 2. Is associated with the lives of historic personages important to national, state, city, or local history; or*
- 3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction; or represents a notable work of a master designer, builder, or architect whose individual genius influenced his or her age.*

The Cornelius Johnson Olympics Oak Tree qualifies as an HCM under Criterion No. 1, as it is identified with an important event of international, national and local history, e.g., the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, in Nazi Germany.

Hitler intended the Berlin Olympics to be a showcase for Germany's athletic prowess and, specifically, Aryan culture, and it was. In advance of the games, he announced that every gold medal winner would receive a gift of an oak sapling in commemoration of the victory won in Germany.

The oak sapling was not chosen randomly. For centuries, the oak tree was linked with pride to Germany, as a national symbol standing for endurance, fortitude, loyalty, reliability, and, above all, strength. Oaks were and still are depicted in artwork, literature, and on German coins. But for Hitler, the massive size and strength of the chosen variety of German oak variety symbolized the greatness of the "Fatherland."



The oak has been used as a symbol in German currency. Unity, justice and freedom were evoked by the oak on the Weimar Republic's 5 Mark coin. After Germany's defeat in World War II, the currency was reformed, with new symbols indicating a fresh start. The mighty oak tree, used for centuries to symbolize nationalism and power, shrank to a little oak sprig held in her hands by a pregnant woman (left). Today, an oak sprig is depicted on a German Euro coin (right).



In 1937, the *XIth Olympic Games Official Report* noted that one-year-old seedlings (the *Report* referred to the species "quercus pedunculata"³) were acquired in the Spring of 1935 from the Schleswig-Holstein marsh district, and then specially cultivated. "They were planted in special soil, trimmed repeatedly, rendered immune to weather changes, treated with special preparations against diseases and tended carefully throughout this period. Grown to hardy young plants, they were transplanted into specially prepared pots adorned with the Olympic Bell and the inscription, *Grow to the honour of victory! Summon to further achievement!*, and, following their presentation to the victor, were packed in convenient, specially constructed cartons for their journey to his home country. They constituted an attractive symbol of German character, strength, endurance and hospitality."

The tree at 1156 S. Hobart Blvd., one of **129**⁴ oak saplings distributed to the athletes, was presented to Cornelius Johnson, who won the high jump on the first day of competition. Today, the Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak tree symbolizes the propaganda of the games, which, in hindsight, may be one reason the world turned a blind eye to the underlying evil that we now know resulted in the deaths of 6 million Jews, 1 million Roma, and 5 million others (homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Slavs, the physically and mentally disabled, socialists/communists and other political opponents) during the Holocaust.

³ The Olympic Oaks have been referred to as both "Quercus rober" and "Quercus pedunculata." According to the Royal Horticultural Society (<https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/51913/quercus-pedunculata/details>), the terms are synonymous. Commonly called both "English Oak" and "European Oak," these hardy trees are native to regions throughout Europe.

⁴ Some sources refer to 130 saplings distributed.

Olympics historian Bill Mallon estimated that 49 Olympians were killed in the Holocaust. Some of them were athletes who had competed against Johnson and his teammates. One example is Jozef Noji, who died at the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. Noji was one of Poland's best distance runners through the 1930s, winning Polish titles for five straight years between 1935 and 1939. At the 1936 Berlin Olympics, he finished fifth in the 5000 meter race, just four seconds outside the medals, and 14th in the 10,000 meter. He was shot dead in 1943 at Auschwitz ostensibly for smuggling a letter. Also in 1943, the Czech runner Vaclav Hosek, a 1936 Olympic steeplechaser, was shot dead while trying to escape from a concentration camp.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, in its exhibition on the 1936 Olympics that debuted in 1996, and is now online, notes that "Germany emerged victorious from the XIth Olympiad. Its athletes captured the most medals overall, and German hospitality and organization won the praises of visitors. Most newspaper accounts echoed a report in the *New York Times* that the Games put Germans 'back in the fold of nations,' and even made them 'more human again.' Some even found reason to hope that this peaceable interlude would endure. Only a few reporters, such as William Shirer, regarded the Berlin glitter as merely hiding a racist, militaristic regime. As the post-Games reports were filed, Hitler pressed on with grandiose plans for German expansion. These included taking over the Olympics forever."

Importantly, **the Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak Tree also represents Hitler's spurning of the U.S. African American athletes.** Although over time, the "story" regarding Hitler's rebuffing of America's black athletes described Jesse Owens as the individual who was snubbed, Owens had not yet competed in a final race and it was in fact Cornelius Johnson whose congratulations from Hitler never came.

On the first day of the games, after honoring German and Finnish medal winners, whose victories in competition aligned with his belief in Aryan superiority, the Nazi leader left the stadium when it became clear that Johnson and his African American teammate, Dave Albritton, were excelling at the high jump. United Press correspondent Henry McLemore reported that Hitler "didn't have time for Cornelius—so the first playing of the *Star Spangled Banner* (and I am still tingling from the sound and sight of America's song and flag) had to be accompanied without him [Hitler]." New York Times correspondent Arthur J. Daley deduced that "press box observers chose to put two and two together and arrive at the figure four. In this they may be correct, but there will be enough future Negro winners to warrant delaying passing judgement for the present."

But there would be no further clues as to why Hitler left the viewing box, the "Honor Loge." Later that evening, Belgian Count Henri de Baillet-Latour, president of the International Olympic Committee, was reportedly so angered by Hitler's actions that he told the Nazi leader to choose: Either shake every gold medalist's hand, or shake no one's hand. Hitler chose to shake none at all.

This Olympic Oak tree can also be seen to memorialize the racism in America, **exemplifying an important aspect (albeit negative) of the nation's social history.** The successes of the 18 African American athletes on the U.S. team in 1936 helped to discredit Nazi racial theories -- but did little to dampen American racism at home. Even when the African American athletes were praised for their triumphs on the field, the laudatory coverage was laced with demeaning racial stereotypes. With a few exceptions, the America these athletes returned to remained unchanged for their paths in life: Jim Crow, few job opportunities, etc.

In a recording visitors to the Holocaust Memorial Museum's exhibition can listen to, John Woodruff later spoke about his experiences:

My only objective was any time I got into a race was to win. And that's what I did. Determination. That's what it takes. Light a fire in the stomach. I was winning for me and I was winning for the country. Me first, then the country. It was very definitely a special feeling in winning the gold medal and being a black man. We destroyed his [Hitler's] master race theory, whenever we start winning those gold medals. So I was very proud of that achievement and I was very happy, for myself as an individual, for my race, and for my country.

After the Olympics, we had a track meet to run at Annapolis, at the Naval Academy. Now here I am, an Olympic champion, and they told the coach that I couldn't run. I couldn't come. So I had to stay home, because of discrimination. That let me know just what the situation was. Things hadn't changed. Things hadn't changed.

Andrew Maraniss, in his 2020 book, *Games of Deception*, argues that “the performance of these black athletes didn’t change those who believed in white supremacy, in either Germany or the United States. In their minds, there was no way for black people to win; the truth didn’t matter. Stereotypes and hate were so deeply ingrained that any fact or fiction could be used to confirm them. If black people performed poorly, that “proved” white people were superior.” But “If black people were victorious, that ‘proved’ they had unfair advantages as a subhuman race.”

An important note: **Although rarity is NOT a specific criterion for landmark designation in Los Angeles’s Cultural Heritage Ordinance, the tree is also a rare survivor.**

Of the 129 trees awarded in 1936, only a handful in America are alive today, nearly 86 years later. According to a *Los Angeles Times* article in 2007, “the fate of many of the Olympic oaks is unknown, but [only] one of two planted on the USC campus survives to this day as a living legacy to record-breaking Trojans discus champion Ken Carpenter.” The second surviving Los Angeles tree is, of course, the Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak.

The *Times* reported that “...others reportedly were destroyed during and after World War II because of anti-German sentiment and the oaks’ ‘Hitler Tree’ reputation, while a few of the 24 that were awarded to U.S. gold medalists were victims of urban sprawl, inattentiveness or carelessness. One never made it through U.S. Customs. A few died of natural causes, which was the fate of the other USC tree -- the one awarded to the record-setting 400-meter relay team consisting of Owens, Ralph Metcalfe and Trojans alums Foy Draper and Frank Wykoff.”

Ann Shelton is recognized as one of New Zealand’s leading photographic artists. A decade ago, she embarked on a worldwide journey to photograph the oak seedlings, which, she noted, “would be forever associated with the ‘breach of civilization’ that the Nazi-tainted Olympics foreshadowed.” She found “40-odd” trees, this photo set now comprising an ongoing project she calls “*in a forest*.”

Shelton observes that:

“the social narratives of the trees are also incredibly diverse. Seedlings were given to a Jewish Hungarian freedom fighter, to a Sturmbannführer (the SS equivalent of a German Major), to a Finnish poet, to men who subsequently went missing in action and to [U.S.] African American athletes.... Some of the seedlings died in Customs or were stolen from hotel rooms. Other grown trees were rescued during invasions or were chopped down to make room for vegetable gardens after the war. These trees have since entered the historical vernacular as complex and highly conflicted signs; embodiments of memory and marks of forgetting.”

These few remaining Olympic oaks around the world, and fewer still in the United States, tell several stories, as Shelton observes. “Considered in their original context, they stand for the German political regime of National Socialism, and on this level they represent a failed attempt to globally assert the National Socialist ideology.”

Shelton continues: “At the same time, and on a more basic level, they reflect the sporting pride of the nations whose athletes brought them home.”

The Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak tree also qualifies under Criterion No. 2, for its association with Olympic Gold Medalist Cornelius Cooper Johnson, the pioneering African American athlete who set a record in the high jump at the 1936 Olympics and also, importantly, was one of 18 African American Olympians on the U.S. team.

In his time, Cornelius was the world’s greatest high jumper.

It was Johnson who, upon winning gold on the first day of competition, was snubbed by Hitler, who exited the stadium and thereby refused to shake his hand. Johnson’s 1936 record-breaking high jump at 6’8” remained the top score at the Olympics and Olympic trials for two decades, until the 1950s. Johnson carried the tree with him after the Berlin Olympics to other European cities, where many members of the U.S. team participated in further competitions, and then he carried it across the Atlantic on the ship, bringing it home to Los Angeles for planting in his family’s back yard.

Although Cornelius Johnson's athletic accomplishments (his victories were many, and celebrated) were not ignored in his lifetime, collective memory faded quickly, obscured by his early death (in 1946).

Johnson grew up in what we now call the Mid-City/Koreatown area of Los Angeles (when he was a youth, it was still “Pico Heights”). He attended Berendo Junior High, where his prowess on the field was noted early. By the time he matriculated to Los Angeles High School, “Corny” Johnson was already one of the best high jumpers in California. At L.A. High he excelled at the high jump and track, including sprints and relays. He won many competitions and had not yet graduated when he competed in the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 1932.

His skill and talent were frequently noted in local newspapers; his career was followed with interest, although not always free of casual racial slurs and stereotyping.

Johnson, still a high school junior, tied for first place at the 1932 U.S. Olympic Trials in track and field, and then won a jump-off. At age 18, he had made it to the U.S. Olympics, one of only four African American athletes on the U.S. men's team, and the youngest member of the U.S. delegation. Competing in the high jump at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, less than three miles from the Johnson home, Cornelius finished in a four-way tie for first place, clearing 6 feet 5 1/2 inches. A jump-off to determine gold, silver and bronze left Johnson in fourth place – although if current sporting competition rules were in place at that time, he would have won the silver medal.

Between 1932 and 1936, he won multiple national championships and eight career titles, including the Amateur Athletic Union outdoor championship outright in 1933 and 1935, tying for the title in 1932, 1934 and 1936. In 1936, Johnson became the world indoor record holder in the high jump at 6' 8 15/16" and co-holder of the outdoor world record of 6' 9 3/4". In 1994 he was inducted into National Track and Field Hall of Fame in Indianapolis. He was also inducted into the California Community Colleges Track and Field Hall of Fame in 1998.

Cornelius Cooper Johnson holds an important place in track and field record books. But that is not the only reason why the life of this significant historic personage is important to local, national and global history.

Famed as an athlete, Cornelius Johnson infamously was rebuffed by Hitler.

As noted above, many people have attributed Hitler's cold-shoulder to a different 1936 Olympics athlete, Jess Owens. Owens was one of the most-remembered and the break-out star of African American athletes at the Berlin Olympics. He won four gold medals -- in the 100-meter sprint, 200-meter sprint, long jump, and 4×100 relay -- and his accomplishments, wrote Maraniss in *Games of Deception*, "would be celebrated as a powerful rebuke of Adolf Hitler. A black man's incredible success in a crucible of hate served as the ultimate rejection of the idea of white supremacy."

Yet that is not the complete story, said Maraniss:

"...This conventional wisdom is an oversimplification on two levels. First, Owens wasn't the only African American star in Berlin, even in his own events. In the 100, black teammate Ralph Metcalfe finished just one-tenth of a second behind him to win the silver medal. In the 200, black teammate Mack Robinson [Jackie's older brother] won the silver, four-tenths of a second behind Owens. Metcalfe joined Owens on the 4×100 relay team. In all, the U.S. team earned 14 medals in Berlin, eight of them gold, one-fourth of the U.S. medal count. The entire African American contingent, not just Owens, took the world by storm. Perpetuating the idea that Owens alone shined not only robs others of their due, but leaves the impression that African American greatness at the '36 Games was an exception rather than the rule."



In any case, as Steven J. Niven recounts in an article published in TheRoot.com, on the Berlin Games' opening day, the Nazi leader *did* invite the winning medalists of each of the first three events to his personal box, where he was seen congratulating them. But Hitler pointedly left the stadium immediately before the award ceremony for the day's final event, the high jump.

Here is Niven's description of the incident:

In 1936, at the trials for the Berlin Olympics, Johnson became the first African-American high jumper to set a world record, clearing 6 feet 9 3/4 inches. Johnson was still being interviewed on the radio about his great jump when Albritton matched the same mark a few minutes later. A *New York Times* sports reporter, Arthur Daley, confidently predicted that the "lanky" Johnson, "one of the greatest jumpers of all time" and unbeaten since the 1932 Olympics, was the favorite for gold.

In Berlin, the high jump was scheduled for Aug. 2, the first day of track and field competition at the Olympic Stadium. Reports of the games suggest that most of the 100,000 crowd, including Hitler in his box, paid most attention to the victories by the host nation in the women's javelin and the men's shot put, and by Finland's 1, 2, 3 in the 10,000 meters. Hitler could be seen to be clearly delighted by such "Aryan" victories—the Finns were even blonder and more blue-eyed than the Germans. Only the rousing cheers from the crowd as Jesse Owens won his 100-meter heat appeared to disturb Hitler's buoyant mood as the day's events drew to a close.

By 6 p.m., the high jump field of 40 had been reduced to four. The three Americans and a Finn all cleared a new Olympic record of 6.5 feet. German director Leni Riefenstahl's film of the games shows the long-limbed Johnson limbering up for his final jumps, looking relaxed. Albritton needed three attempts to make 2 meters. Corny Johnson made every one of his jumps with ease. Unlike Albritton, who confessed his nerves to his friend Jesse Owens, Johnson was, as usual, calm and focused. Johnson went on to set a new Olympic record height of 6 feet 8 inches. Albritton earned the silver and Thurber the bronze.

Following the medal ceremonies in the men's shot put and 10,000 meters and the women's javelin, Hitler had invited the German and Finnish medalists to be feted at his private box, where he was seen openly congratulating them. American journalists in the stadium then began to wonder if Hitler would welcome Corny Johnson, at least, as he had the previous winners just minutes earlier. Their answer came quickly after the medal ceremony at which the Stars and Stripes was raised on all three podiums: Hitler had left the building. There would be no glad-handing with the Führer.

What happened next is revealing. The U.S. Olympic Committee does not appear to have protested Hitler's snub of the American athletes, but Count Henri de Baillet-Latour, the president of the International Olympic Committee, was incensed. The Belgian aristocrat saw Hitler's early exit as a direct insult to the games' lofty commitment to fair play as well as a violation of protocol. It is unclear whether the count viewed the matter in terms of race or as a snub to a member country, the USA, but he forthrightly demanded that Hitler either congratulate all medalists or none. Seeking to avoid a public relations nightmare, Hitler backed down. He agreed to stop welcoming any of the medalists into his box for the rest of the tournament. At the time, most American newspapers, except the New York Times and some of the black press, accepted the official Nazi explanation for Hitler's early exit, namely that he was hungry and trying to beat the traffic.

Despite the behind-the-scenes drama, Cornelius Johnson was honored in front of a still-crowded stadium. In photos, he is seen on the winner's podium wearing a wreath of oak leaves, the gold medal around his neck, and clutching his Olympic oak sapling, the winner's prize.

After the Games in Berlin, Johnson and some of the other U.S. Olympians toured Norway and other nearby European countries, competing in demonstration track meets. In Oslo, the Los Angeles Times reported that the U.S. touring team "swept the three concluding races." The 4-man 1000-meter relay team – Mack Robinson, John Woodruff, Al Fitch and Cornelius Johnson – actually may have set (a non-recorded) world record, finishing at a reported 1m. 53.1s time.

Archie Williams, gold medalist in the 400-meter race, described this in a later oral history, published as *The Joy of Flying: Olympic Gold, Air Force Colonel, and Teacher*, and conducted in 1993:

After the Olympics, we went back to England. They had some kind of Commonwealth Games. This was an exhibition race. Then from London we went to Amsterdam, Rotterdam and some damn other "Dam" place. [laughter] Then we went to Norway and Sweden. What the idea was, was making up these exhibition teams. This guy here, Carpenter. [points to photo] Ken Carpenter was on the team. Ralph Metcalfe, Speck [Forrest] Towns, Dave Albritton. That's Jimmy Brooks. He's from Chicago I think. That's Mack Robinson. That's me. That's Jimmy LuValle. That's Dave Albritton; I talked to him the other night. Cornie [Cornelius] Johnson from Compton. We went to Oslo; we went to Stockholm. To a whole bunch of those towns over there. They had exhibition meets; you would run against the local high school kids. It was just a kind of ceremony type thing. We stayed over there until, well, hell. The whole [rest of the] team came back right after the Olympics. We were over there for almost a month. When we got back, there was nobody at the boat to meet us, not even the deckhands. But it didn't matter.

Once the athletes returned to America, some members of the U.S. Olympic team met with President Roosevelt. But despite their successes in Berlin, the African American athletes were not invited to the White House event. This additional snub was not rectified until September, 2016, when President Barack Obama held a reception at the White House for the Olympians' families, to honor the U.S. athletes for paving the way and, he said, providing symbols of hope in 1936. Said the President:

“It wasn’t just Jesse. It was other African American athletes in the middle of Nazi Germany under the gaze of Adolph Hitler that put a lie to notions of racial superiority – whooped ‘em – and taught them a thing or two about democracy and taught them a thing or two about the American character.”

In Los Angeles, however, the citizenry did put on a fete for their returning athletes. Cornelius Johnson, Jimmy LuValle (bronze medalist in the 400-meter race) and Mack Robinson (silver medalist in the 200-meter race) were invited to a “civic reception” at the Second Baptist Church in South Central Los Angeles. Mayor Frank Shaw, USC’s Dean Cromwell, UCLA coach Barry Trotter, and *Sentinel* Newspaper publisher Leon Washington were among the city leaders who welcomed them home.

But the America these and the other African American athletes returned to was not a welcoming one in terms of employment opportunities. Many struggled to establish stable careers, including Robinson, who came home to a job cleaning sewers in Pasadena. Later promoted to street cleaning, Robinson wore his Olympic jacket to keep warm while working as a sweeper. Even Jesse Owens had a tough time. He arrived home to ticker tape parades and radio show interviews; an admirer had even tossed a suitcase with \$10,000 into his open car, a story recounted in a later article penned by sportswriter Jim Murray. But by 1937 he was traveling with a black band, and racing horses and trains in sideshow events.

As for Cornelius Johnson, after the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin his athletic career waned, his dominance over the high jump diminishing rapidly. Although no one else beat his record, neither did he achieve it again. In 1937 he finished fourth in that year’s indoor AAU championships, won by Ed Burke, and he lost to Albritton in the outdoor AAU contest. In 1938, he tied for a first place, but only reached the height of 6’6”. There is no certainty that Johnson would have qualified for either the 1940 or 1944 Olympics, but both were cancelled due to World War II.

Johnson settled into a job with the U.S. Post Office, and then in 1945 he signed up with the Merchant Marines as a ship’s baker. A year later, while at sea, he suddenly became ill, and died of unknown causes while en route to a hospital.

Given his shortened life, Cornelius Johnson did not have a chance to directly influence another generation of young athletes (or civil rights activists seeking equal opportunities on sporting fields in America), and therefore may not technically rise to the level of a “Significant Person” as described in SurveyLA’s *Guidelines for Evaluating Resources Associated with Significant Persons in Los Angeles*.

However, his story remains compelling. The Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak is clearly associated with Johnson. He grew up in the house where the tree was planted, and still lived there at the time of its planting; his tree is directly associated with his productive life (he earned the tree as a result of his victory in the high jump at the 1936 Olympics); and it is associated with a person whose life story illustrates the challenges that faced, and still face, African Americans in this country.

Cornelius Johnson was a champion and a hero on the athletic field, a victor regardless of the color of his skin. But the color of his skin changed the course of the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, and our historical memories of the event. To Hitler, Johnson was a pariah; his victory and athletic prowess crushed in Hitler's goal to fully affirm the superiority of his constructed Aryan "race" and identity. When Hitler declined to shake Johnson's hand, and thereafter (to avoid a public relations fiasco) rejected shaking the hand of any Olympic athlete subsequent to Johnson's win, it changed in one small way the course of Olympic history.

The Johnson Family Home, where the Cornelius Johnson Olympics Oak Tree is planted, is also eligible for designation under Criterion 1, for its association with an early and important African American family in Los Angeles. The story of the Johnson Family House is a window into a lesser-known chapter in L.A.'s African American heritage, and the history and growth of the city as a whole.

The Johnsons on Cornelius Johnson's paternal side, and the Coopers, on his maternal side, each arrived in Los Angeles in the early 1890s, departing (respectively) North Carolina and Texas at a time when Jim Crow laws were making it increasingly difficult for black families to thrive.

When Charlotte Johnson, a widow, and her adult son, S.C., initially arrived from Raleigh, N.C. in 1891, they settled in a residential pocket just southeast of Downtown (in today's Arts District), between two railroad lines, on a not-quite-rural parcel with a small one-story house, chicken coops and room for a garden. Johnson had worked as a cook in North Carolina throughout the 1880s, but in Los Angeles she eventually became a laundress. S.C. Johnson worked then, and later, as a plasterer.

In the late 1890s, the area where the Johnson family set down roots a few years after their arrival in Southern California, was on the edge of the country, before Los Angeles stretched out its municipal arms and absorbed it. **The place was called Pico Heights**, an independent township west of the city proper, and just east of a dirt path that later was renamed "Western Avenue." To the north of the Johnson property were the sheep grazing lands of the Pellissier family. To the east were cultivated barley fields, interspersed with a few small subdivisions. To the west, the Los Angeles Country Club's Western and Pico links golf course was soon laid out. There were few houses yet built this far west. One was the Peet House at 1139 S. Harvard Blvd., HCM #272, just behind the Johnson property. Another was Charlotte Johnson's new home, an 1890 Queen Anne Victorian cottage⁵ at 1152 S. Pellissier (Hobart), on what was then the same property as 1156 Hobart was eventually built.

⁵ This house was identified in SurveyLA as a rare remaining example of an intact late 19th century residence in the Wilshire Community Plan; it has subsequently been demolished.

Pico Heights



Looking north on Western from Pico in 1894; to the east (right) the Pellissier Tract had just been laid out but no houses were yet built.



Cyclists headed east on Pico from Western, 1895. Pellissier Tract on the left horizon line

During the late 1880s, Los Angeles experienced a population explosion (growing from 11,183 counted residents in 1880 to more than 50,000 in 1890). The year 1887 has been referred to as “The Year of the Paper Towns,” given that so many would-be developers and sub-dividers announced new tracts and townships that within a few years would cease to exist.

In his paper *The Great Los Angeles Real Estate Boom of 1887*, presented to the Historical Society of Southern California in 1915, Joseph Netz noted that when Los Angeles finally had a competitive railroad connection to the East Coast and parts in between, local boosters went into high gear extolling Southern California’s benefits and attractions. At first, it was tourists who poured into Los Angeles. Then, wrote Netz, “The fields of green and the homes of flowers and fruits, the balmy air, the brilliant sunshine pouring down its invigorating warmth upon the body and vitalizing the blood, suggested to these people the value of the land as a home.” New residents arrived to the region by the hundreds, then the thousands, and then the tens of thousands, Netz observed.

Real estate speculation ran rampant. “All values were merely fictitious,” wrote Netz. “Fakes, frauds and stool pigeons of every sort were used during the excitement of the later frenzy by the speculators, which were engendered by professional promoters.... There were few cash sales during the boom. Most of the land was bought on contract, one-third or one-fourth down, balance in semi-annual payments, was a common method. Another method was a small payment down, balance in small monthly payments.”

Auction Sale of Real Estate.

—Mammoth Auction Sale!—

—OF THE—

FAMOUS PELLISSIER TRACT!

At the Terminus of the Celebrated Electric Railway,

—RUNNING REGULARLY, AND NOW A GRAND SUCCESS!—

On Wednesday, March 23, 1887,

—AT 11 O'CLOCK A.M., ON THE PREMISES.—

BY ORDER OF THE LOS ANGELES LAND BUREAU, A CORPORATION.

Will sell the above well-known desirable property,

Now Subdivided Into 205 Beautiful Building Lots!

EASTON & ELDRIDGE, AUCTIONEERS.

A fine lunch will be served on the grounds at commencement of sale.

This is a grand opportunity of purchasing a home for from \$100 to \$300, on easy terms, close to business and Electric Railroad. Terms, one-third cash, balance in six and twelve months. Interest on deferred payments, 10 per cent.

This beautiful tract of land is bounded by Ninth, Pico, L and O streets. The soil cannot be surpassed for productiveness. The view and climate are unequaled. Don't fail to attend this mammoth sale and secure a lovely home.

ANY INFORMATION REQUIRED WILL BE GIVEN BY
GEORGE W. FRINK, PRESIDENT OF THE
LOS ANGELES LAND BUREAU,
NO. 20 WEST FIRST STREET.

Not surprising, many of the paper towns collapsed, due to lack of sales or sales that resulted in defaults, bankruptcies and tax sales. So it was with Pico Heights in the late 1880s, which was complicated further by the collapse of the original venture to build a new electric train from Downtown to the township.

Still, developers laid out roads, rebooted the streetcar line, and continued to advertise easy purchase terms and the new subdivisions’ easy access to Downtown. They offered free rides and lunches to attendees of the auctions selling lots. One of the landowners, Germaine Pellissier, laid out the tract⁶ where the Johnson family eventually purchased (a decade later) their plot of land.

The future of Pico Heights appeared brighter by the mid-1890s. In January 1895, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that “quite a little boom is going forward in that pleasant section of Los Angeles known as Pico Heights, which has been somewhat under a cloud since the days of ’86-’87, when it was laid out with great hurrah by the company

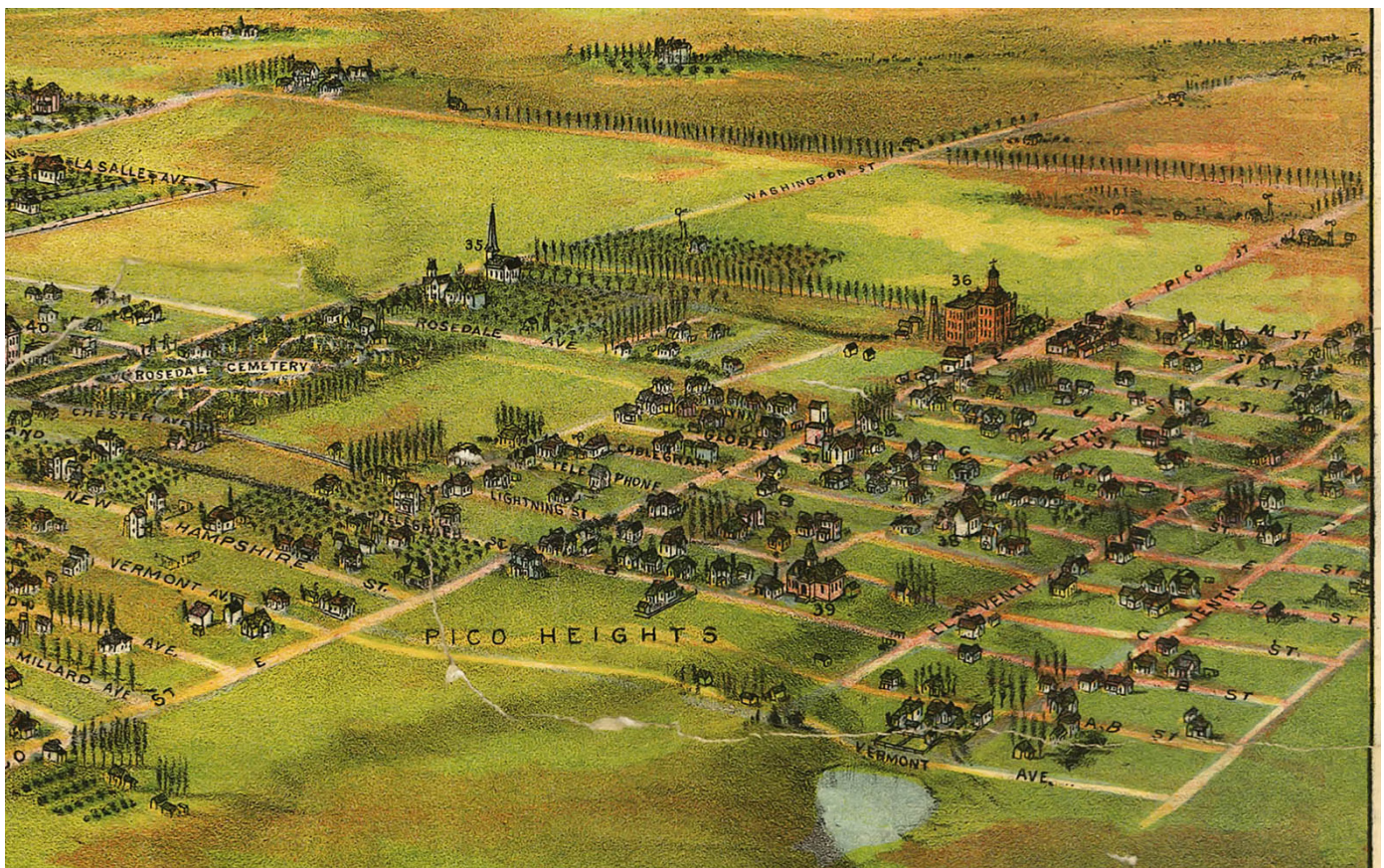
⁶ In 1913, Pellissier’s heirs established another self-named tract, Pellissier Square, on the remnant of the ranch at what is now Western and Wilshire, erecting the Pellissier Building (now Wiltern Theater) a decade later.

which ran a primitive electric line out that way and sold off over 1,000 lots on the lottery plan, giving away houses, or money to build houses, with some of the lots.” (The Electric Railway Homestead Association had acquired 280 acres west of Vermont, between Ninth and Pico, laying out 1210 lots, each priced at \$290, \$20 down and \$10 per month.)

The *Times* continued, “A number of flimsy cottages were put up here and there, and those, combined with the poor service on the [rail]car line, have tended to keep the section back until recently.”

By 1896, Pico Heights had a few doctors, lawyers and real estate men, not to mention a deputy assessor; but far more carpenters, bricklayers, and other laborers, according to voter registration records. In March of that year, these voters decided in favor of annexation to the City of Los Angeles, 149 to 117 against. The *Times* had noted that temperance-minded citizens advocated against annexation, fearing saloon establishments would arrive with L.A.’s more lax rules (they were correct; on the north side of Pico at Pellissier, German immigrant Saul Schultz soon opened a small beer garden.)

Within months after annexation, City officials decided to rename the streets. Up until 1896, the streets north of Pico were lettered (B through M, with the exceptions of “Pellissier” and “Cahuenga,” previously renamed in the westerly Pellissier Tract) and on the south side of Pico they were named, but not the same names as now (example: Cablegram, Telephone and Lightning Streets).



Pico Heights in 1894 (Birdseye map)



The Johnsons purchased a Victorian cottage (circled in blue) circa 1897. On the 1894 Birdseye map, it was on L street, a block to the right of the large building labeled as "36." The street was later "Pellissier" and finally "Hobart"

Improvements came slowly to Pico Heights. There were concrete sidewalks and even a fire hydrant but the roads were unpaved. In September 1898, the Los Angeles Golf Club's "The Convent Links" opened. Located on a 40-acre string of vacant lots behind the brick convent, on what would later be Hobart Boulevard south of Pico to Washington. The electric train on Pico ended a half a mile or so east of the clubhouse. Golfers often paid Bruce Jones (*see photo below*) 5 cents each way for rides on Pico from the trolley in his horse-drawn wagon to the golf course.



Bruce Jones and his horse-drawn wagon, early 1900s

Less than a year later, having already outgrown the site, the Los Angeles Country Club purchased a nearby 107-acre site of "high, rolling grazing land" at a cost of \$250 an acre. The property had a barranca, lying 20 feet below the prevailing level, that snaked through the land from east to west, ranging from five and ten yards wide and four to twelve feet deep.

In Pico Heights's early years, there were hen houses and barns in the area. In 1889, one neighbor sued another for breaking the "Two Cows" ordinance by keeping eleven dairy cows in her yard. The block of Pellissier Street where the Johnson property was located was paved in 1899 "at an estimated cost of \$1.44 per front foot." In 1902, a neighbor was arrested for maintaining a brickyard on the street; the following year the street was renamed Hobart Boulevard.

The 1900 census shows that the other heads of households on the 1100 block of Pellissier were born in Delaware, England, Germany, Ohio, Sweden, Massachusetts, and Michigan (racial designations are unclear). The 1910 census shows a similar mix of migrants, with about half marked as Black or Mulatto. (By 1920, they had been joined by neighbors born in Japan, Hawaii, Denmark, and Norway, with four households designated as Black; two as White; and two as Japanese.)

As development progressed around the enclave, Pico Heights was becoming a suburb that was now described in advertisements as "the finest location for a home around Los Angeles" attracting the "best class of citizens." But what did "best class" mean?

In 1906, an African American philanthropist named Hillard Stricklin learned the answer.

Stricklin announced plans to build a home for "aged negroes" in Pico Heights. The *Los Angeles Times* then reported on the matter, with the headline, "Pico Heights Is All White." At first, neighbors did not take him seriously, thinking he was "a man with little money and big pretensions." But when workers and building materials appeared at the site, neighbors panicked and protested the project. A resolution was finally reached when neighbors agreed to buy the property for \$20,000 and Stricklin built the home in another neighborhood (described as a "quarter... where the majority of the negroes already live"). The *Times* stated that "Pico Heights residents may breathe easier. Hillard Stricklin ... says he won't start up his home for aged colored people ... out of consideration for the feelings of citizens who feel squeamish over the thought of having black-skinned neighbors."

Nonetheless, Pico Heights did not have official (or unofficial) racially-restricted housing covenants, despite some of its "squeamish," upstanding citizens wishing they could hold back the color line. At the time of the 1900 census, there were still but a handful of African American families in the neighborhood, including the Johnsons. Over on Fedora lived Capt. Edward Lee Baker, an African American Medal of Honor recipient in the Spanish-American War. Another African American resident was Bruce Jones, who operated the horse and wagon "taxi." Within a few years, the neighborhood also housed prominent Black residents Louis Blodgett (well-known contractor, later president of Liberty Savings and Loan), and his wife, Nellie Allensworth Blodgett; dentists Alice Watkins Garrott and Alva Curtis Garrott; and civil rights lawyer Willis O. Tyler.

As a sidenote: Japanese Americans had also begun to move to Pico Heights by 1900. The "Uptown" (Uemachi or Uwamachi) enclave soon was centered on Fedora and surrounding streets, including Hobart, between San Marino and Pico. The Japanese Episcopal Mission moved onto Mariposa in 1911; the Japanese school on Fedora was founded in 1915. The church was renamed St. Mary's and still operates to this day as a Japanese congregation even though there was a formal effort to expel them in 1919 – the Electric Home Protective Association was organized by white owners specifically to get rid of Japanese. They managed to scare some out, but many remained.

By 1942, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order No. 9066, the Johnsons were renting 1152 S. Hobart (Charlotte Johnson's former home) to a Japanese American family, Sanji Yoshinaga, his wife and four children – who were relocated to Jerome and Rohwer Centers in Arkansas (Sanji did not survive).

Thus while Pico Heights may not have been as an enclave that we would describe (from a 21st century perspective) as welcoming to diversity, people of color did settle there.

The Johnson-Cooper Clan Exemplifies African American Success Stories in Los Angeles

In fact, Los Angeles in the last decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th was more hospitable to Black Americans than other parts of the country. The Civil Service opened to them; the first Black police officers were hired; businesses were established and a few small fortunes were made.

In 1909, on the 100th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth, the *Los Angeles Times* devoted a special section to the "Emancipated Race," with essays by Booker T. Washington and Col. Allen Allensworth, and articles spotlighting religious life, education, soldiers and officers, homes and businesses, clubs and societies. A long article in the section profiled "Negro Professional Men in the City," and an even longer one highlighted "The Negro Woman...Both Refined and Cultured in Life," including a profile of Cornelius's maternal grandmother, Betty Cooper, praised for her hard work, frugality, and real estate acumen. The author, Kate Bradley Stovall, noted:

"Several widows with their savings have bought valuable property and held it while they reared and educated large families. A striking example of the thrift of a negro woman is the case of Mrs. Betty Cooper of West Twentieth street. With three small daughters to support she came to Los Angeles about eighteen years ago. She instilled into the minds of her daughters the possibilities of buying and holding Los Angeles real estate. With the assistance of her daughters, Mrs. Pearl Johnson and Mrs. Birdie Bright, she now owns a large lot on Twentieth street, between Flower and Figueroa streets, improved with a handsome ten-room residence. She has several pieces of income property, one the old homestead in Georgetown, Tex., which she has retained all these years; another, a modern residence, located in Pico Heights, one of the most beautiful residence districts in Los Angeles."

Growing racism was becoming evident in Southern California, but nonetheless the black press promoted Los Angeles, wrote author and historian Hadley Meares in 2018 in *Curbed L.A.*, "as a place of new beginnings and relative freedom. And, compared to the Jim Crow South and overcrowded North, there were more opportunities for black and brown people than in most parts of the country."

In 1902, Jefferson Edmonds, editor of *The Liberator*, asserted that "California is the greatest state for the Negro." He later declared that "the hospitable white people" treated blacks kindly and paid them good wages. A decade later, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in *The Crisis*, the N.A.A.C.P.'s influential magazine:

“Los Angeles was wonderful. The air was scented with orange blossoms and beautiful homes lay low crouching on the earth as though they loved its scents and flowers. Nowhere in the United States is the Negro so well and beautifully housed, nor the average efficiency and intelligence in the colored population so high. Here is an aggressive, hopeful group-with some wealth, large industrial opportunity and a buoyant spirit.”

However, racial inequity was also a constant. In Los Angeles, “Legalized discrimination was less codified than in the Jim Crow South, affording black migrants...a level of economic opportunity unheard of in the Southern cities from which they hailed,” observed Ismail Muhammad, in his article “Walking with the Ghosts of Black Los Angeles” (www.lithub.com). “What Du Bois would not or could not say, lest the California myth dissolve: this prosperity was contingent, wholly at the mercy of the city’s white power brokers.”

Cornelius Johnson’s family vividly illustrates this important but seldom-remarked chapter of Los Angeles history.

The large influx of African Americans in the 1940s is commonly known as the Great Migration, but they were preceded by large groups of Black Americans, including the Johnsons and the Coopers, who migrated from Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Georgia from 1890 - 1910 to escape Jim Crow and the racial violence and bigotry of the South. In the relatively welcoming atmosphere of Los Angeles, they were able to rise economically to the point where - despite working almost exclusively in physical labor and domestic service - they could acquire wealth, purchase property, and build community through Black-owned businesses, churches, clubs, and newspapers.

Homeownership among Blacks in Los Angeles by 1910 reached over 36% - the highest rate in the nation. In those days before pervasive racial restrictions and covenants, they could live in many parts of the growing city. The blocks around the Johnson home became a cluster of relatively prosperous Black families, later interspersed with Japanese Americans and, later still, immigrants of many backgrounds.

The Johnson family house illustrates one of the great stories of Los Angeles: In one generation, Cornelius’s grandmothers could go from slavery into opportunity, respectability, and freedoms undreamed of in the Jim Crow South from which they fled. Although eclipsed in the rest of the 20th century by setbacks and struggles on the long road towards true equality, the success of the California Dream for at least some African Americans deserves to be told and celebrated.

The modest residence at 1156 S. Hobart must have witnessed countless family gatherings over the years when Cornelius was growing up there. Besides his parents and the five Johnson children, Cornelius’s paternal grandmother Charlotte Johnson (c.1851 - 1936) lived next door at 1152 S. Hobart; his maternal grandmother Bessie Cooper (1851 - 1934) and his cousins lived across the street at 1147-1149 S. Hobart. Later his older sister Perlita made her home up the block, at 1128 S. Hobart. His aunt Maude lived three blocks away in a home her husband built at 1157 S. Ardmore; his cousin Birdielee (who later had a LAUSD school in Jefferson Park named after her) lived around the corner at 3126 W. 11th St. They were all part of a rich, diverse neighborhood that had blossomed on the western edge of the city at the very end of the 19th century, and continue to flourish for most of the 20th.

Charlotte Johnson was raised in the slave-holding state of North Carolina before the Civil War, though it's uncertain exactly when, where, and under what circumstances she was born. In each document – census, marriage, death certificate – her year of birth is different. S.C. later gave her maiden name as Hayward and her birth year as 1858; more likely it was around 1851. In 1880, she lived in Raleigh with her husband Charles, her mother-in-law Mary, and her two children (Shade, age 11, and Ida, age 9). The Johnsons were the only Black family on the street.

Her neighbor was a large white family, headed by a Civil War veteran who had been born poor but was now supported by rich relatives.

Charlotte gave her occupation as cook or laundress through most of her life, and all the census-takers recorded that she could neither read nor write. By 1891 she was widowed and in Los Angeles with her son Shadrick (we don't know what happened to Ida). By 1897 she was living at 1152 S. Pellissier (later Hobart); by the time of the 1900 census, she owned the property, free of a mortgage. A bird's eye map of the area in 1894 shows a scattering of houses, with only open fields beyond Charlotte's house; a photograph looking east from Western shows no houses at all on the gently sloping hill leading up to her street. By the time of the 1920 Census, when Charlotte still lived at 1152 Hobart with four lodgers (all African Americans), the neighborhood was completely built up.

In 1903, S.C. married Pearl Lucille Cooper, and in 1905 he was issued a building permit for a five-room frame residence at 1156 S. Hobart, which was a split from his mother's lot at 1152. As an experienced contractor, said to be the first licensed Black plasterer in California, he likely built the new house himself. In 1904 their son Theodore was born, followed by Lawrence in 1905, Pearlita in 1907, Ruby in 1911, and Cornelius in 1913.

S.C. and Pearl Cooper Johnson were respected enough to merit a description of one of their dinner parties in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1903, when they hosted ten guests to entertain a visitor from Riverside. In 1913, Cornelius's older brothers Theodore and Lawrence made the front page of the *Los Angeles Herald* when they wrote to the chief of police to ask that he protect Santa Claus from robbers on his gift-giving rounds. In 1927, Cornelius's sister Pearlita was photographed on one of the family trips to their vacation home in Lake Elsinore, a popular resort for African Americans in the 1920s.

Pearl's entry in the 1948 *Negro Who's Who in California* mentions her charitable and club activities, as well as her having been Queen for a Tournament of Roses float. Her hobby is listed as riding. S.C. is listed as retired and devoting much of his time to his hobby of hunting.

Pearl Cooper Johnson had also made the journey from the Deep South (Texas) with her mother, Bettie (also referred to as Betty or Bessie) Cooper, and her sisters Birdie and Maud. Family lore says that Pearl's father, William H. Cooper, was a Buffalo Soldier and was buried in the National Cemetery in Westwood; the records are inconclusive. His army pension card shows the alternate name Henry L. Harris and states that he served in the 137th Infantry, with filing dates of 1912, 1914, and 1917. In 1912, the *Liberator*, an African American newspaper in Los Angeles, reported that William "is here on a visit to his family whom he has not seen for 28 years." In the 1897 city directory, Bettie, Pearl, and Maud were listed as domestics and Birdie as an ironer in a commercial laundry. Bettie's census records over the years show that she, like Charlotte Johnson, could neither read nor write.

Bettie Cooper and her daughters were prominent enough that Birdie, then 23, was chosen to read the Emancipation Proclamation at the large 1900 Emancipation Day Freedman's Jubilee observance, as noted in the *Los Angeles Times*. Birdie was the only woman named in the extensive coverage of the event.⁷

In 1909, the *L.A. Times* spotlighted Bettie as a prominent successful investor in real estate, including rental property in Pico Heights, and noted that she built a "handsome ten-room residence" on a large lot she owned on 20th Street at Figueroa.

In 1925, Bettie moved the existing house at 1147 S. Hobart (across the street from the Johnson House) to the back of the lot, and hired young (and later famous) Black architect James Garrott to build her a new six-room home. She was apparently strong-willed; the architect filed a plan change stating that "The building is now being erected. It was not erected according to plans filed at City Hall, but the owner wanted a few changes and made them without the consent of the building department."

We don't know if Pearl's sister Maude had children. Birdie and her husband Jason Bright died in 1917 and 1919 – exceptions to the longevity of the Cooper and Johnson families – but their three daughters, raised by their grandmother Pearl, lived successful lives. Marjorie Bright McPherson was a teacher; she married a physician and lived in a large house with a pool and servants' quarters seven blocks west of Hobart. Birdielee Velores Bright was a lifelong educator; an LAUSD elementary school in West Adams is named after her.

When the *Los Angeles Sentinel* paid tribute to Pearl on her 95th birthday in 1970, they described her as popular and "quite a charmer." And Pearl's son Cornelius – grandson of two entrepreneurial Black women born in the time of slavery who amassed property in early Los Angeles – had represented the United States in two Olympic Games, becoming the world's greatest high jumper.

⁷ From "The Walls Have Fallen: Emancipation Days in Black California," by W. Gabriel Selassie I:

"The 1900 program reveals little about the feelings of local black women because only two women appeared in local reports. Miss Birdie Cooper read the Emancipation Proclamation, while an unnamed woman gave what the reporter described as one of the best remembrances of slavery. A double blindness of both race and gender rendered local black women almost invisible. The little we know of Birdie Cooper is about her mother, Betty. Widowed and alone, Betty Cooper came to Los Angeles around 1891 with daughters Pearl and Birdie. In a testament to the tenacity of black women, Betty worked and saved and, in time, purchased property on 20th Street between Figueroa and Flower Streets, in what is now the hub of the city's downtown business district, and erected a ten-room residence. A believer in the value of real estate, Cooper also acquired income property, eventually purchasing a second residence in Pico Heights, then considered one of the most beautiful neighborhoods in Los Angeles. Birdie Cooper's wealth may explain her inclusion in the program [...]."

THE “NAZI” OLYMPICS OF 1936

Los Angeles to Germany and Back Again

The Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak is a tangible link to events that took place nine decades ago, and half a world away. In 1936, Corny Johnson took home the gold, and this oak tree, for his record-setting high jump in the Berlin Olympics, hosted by Germany’s Nazi regime. Before he embarked on that journey to Europe, the American sports world (along with other parties) was embroiled in a very public debate about whether or not this country should even participate in the Olympic Games – a discussion that directly touched upon the goals and dreams of U.S. Jewish and African American athletes. Today, the Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak, and the home Cornelius grew up in and returned to, are identified with a momentous event that helped change the course of history.

Walking Up to the Games

In its time, and still today, the 1936 Olympics in Berlin had profound political ramifications. For Adolph Hitler, the event was an opportunity to showcase the Third Reich’s Aryan athletes as the best in the world – embodying German / Nazi excellence on a global stage. Germany won more medals than any other country (89: 33 gold, 26 silver, 30 bronze), far outstripping the United States (56 total). Importantly, it also won a sort of respect, legitimizing the Nazi regime, if only temporarily, in the eyes of many in the world.

Today, most historians view the 1936 Games as portending later Nazi evil, offering a view to the future where the Nazis used propaganda to disguise unspeakable crimes.

For the 18 U.S. African American athletes, like Cornelius Johnson, the 1936 Olympics evoke a different historical story. On the one hand, their victories in track and field were widely celebrated as victories for American democracy, vitality and what today we might call resiliency. Combined, ten of the African American athletes won 14 medals in 13 track and field events (a team of four men, two black and two white, took gold in the relay). But facing racism at home, after several years of pressure from multiple sources to boycott the competition – at times overshadowing their personal goals — and dealing with the use of blatantly racist language in newspapers describing their medal-winning efforts, for the African American athletes the 1936 Olympics bestowed a different sort of legacy. Afterwards, four-time gold medalist Jesse Owens said “the good guys won” – they had overcome Hitler’s “anti-Negro, anti-Jew viciousness.” But of course they had not, given the lens of hindsight. And their competitive victories had no impact on America’s Jim Crow laws and de facto policies.

As Archie Williams, gold medalist in the 400-meter race, later observed, the German public was welcoming, displaying good sportsmanship and cheering the Americans’ victories. “They idolized us,” recounted Williams. But, “When I came home, somebody asked me, ‘How did those dirty Nazis treat you?’ I replied that I didn’t see any dirty Nazis, just a lot of nice German people. And I didn’t have to ride in the back of the bus over there.”

The Years Before the 1936 Games

The chronicle of the Berlin Olympics begins well before that year's Games opened. The 1936 Olympics, both Summer and Winter, were awarded to Germany in 1931, a decision that reflected an international pledge to reintegrate Germany into the family of nations after the 1916 Games slated for Germany were cancelled (due to WWI) and Germany was subsequently banned from participating in the Games in 1920 and 1924.

But after being given the opportunity to host the 1936 Games, the Weimar Republic collapsed under the weight of the Depression (by 1932, two-fifths of the German workforce, or some six million people, were unemployed), with the resultant rise of and takeover by the Nazi Party.

Germany had returned to Olympic competition in 1928, and did very well, coming in second in terms of the number of medals earned, topped only by the U.S. In 1932, after the Olympics in Los Angeles where America's black athletes performed well (as did the German team), Nazi periodicals derided the decision to allow whites and blacks to compete together. In his journal article, "Darktown Parade: African Americans in the Berlin Olympics of 1936" (*Historically Speaking*, November/December 2007), author David Clay Large explained:

They had also objected to "Aryans" competing with "racial inferiors" like Slavs, blacks, and Jews. The Nazi objection to competing with blacks was particularly relevant because black athletes, having had a modest presence in the Olympics of 1920 and 1924, performed especially well in the Los Angeles Games of 1932. African-American runners Eddie Tolan and Ralph Metcalfe excelled in the sprints, with Tolan setting a world record in the 100-meter race and an Olympic record in the 200-meter event.

For Nazi ideologues, it was a disgrace that white athletes had deigned to compete with the likes of Tolan and Metcalfe.

And looking toward the 1936 Games, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the Nazi Party's principal organ, editorialized: "Blacks have no place in the Olympics. Unfortunately, these days one often sees the free white man having to compete with blacks for the victory palm. This is a disgrace and a degradation of the Olympic idea without parallel, and the ancient Greeks would turn over in their graves if they knew what modern men were doing with their sacred national games.... The next Olympic Games will take place in Berlin. Hopefully, the men in control will do their duty. Blacks must be excluded. We demand it."⁸

⁸ David Clay Large expanded these points in his book, *Nazi Games: The Olympics of 1936*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007):

Although [Carl] Diem and [Theodor] Lewald left Los Angeles at once impressed by the Americans and determined to outdo them in 1936, a powerful constituency at home [in Germany] was broadcasting its contempt for the Olympic movement in general and for the developments in Los Angeles in particular. On July 31, 1932, a day after the L.A. games began, Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party scored a spectacular victory in the national parliamentary elections, garnering 230 (out of 608) seats and thereby becoming the largest faction in the Reichstag. The Nazis' perspective on all manner of topics, including the Olympics, now had to be taken very seriously indeed. And what was that

As late as 1932, Hitler himself called the modern Olympic Games “a plot against the Aryan race by Freemasons and Jews.”

Hitler, of course, never was fond of the idea that racial inferiors would need to be allowed to compete at a German-hosted Olympics. He also did not favor working in alliance with other European countries – the Nazis had pulled out of the League of Nations in October, 1933. However, not long after assuming power, Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels urged Hitler to change his tune in regard to the Olympics. Hitler was convinced by Goebbels that the Olympic Games would be a time to show the strength of the new Nazi Germany to the world, and that hosting the Games might bring a much-needed propaganda boost to the fledgling Third Reich. The festivities would be exciting, and Nazi leaders anticipated that the Germans, as a master race with great physical prowess, would surely dominate in every aspect of athletic competition.



The government drew up bold plans for an impressive Olympic track and field stadium that would seat 110,000 spectators, and spent millions on the construction of a complex of modern buildings, including several gymnasiums, covering a 325-acre sports complex. The Olympic Village, with athlete residences containing apartments and recreation rooms, and multiple dining facilities, was laid out on 130 acres and was designed to later become a first-class officer’s training camp after the Games. (Indeed, training for the Olympics was also seen as training for the military – another reason Jews and other “inferiors” were not permitted to train at Aryan-only facilities.)

perspective? Like the nativist German Turnerschaft, which in the 1920s called for a “National Olympiad” in place of the multinational festival, the Nazis had always shown disdain for international sporting contests, preferring purely German competitions and fitness programs. In the early twenties they had objected to Germans’ competing with athletes from the Allied countries, which had imposed the “yoke” of Versailles on the fatherland. They had also objected to “Aryans” competing with “racial inferiors” like Slavs, blacks, and Jews.

The Nazi objection to competing with blacks was particularly relevant because black athletes, having had a modest presence in the Olympics of 1920 and 1924, performed especially well in the L.A. games of 1932. U.S. runners Eddie Tolan and Ralph Metcalfe, labeled “the Sable Cyclones” in the American press, excelled in the sprints, with Tolan setting a world record in the one hundred-meter race and an Olympic record in the two hundred-meter event. R. M. N. Tisdall, one of Britain’s first black Olympians, won the four hundred-meter race.

Commenting on the blacks’ success, American comedian Will Rogers proposed that the slave traders must have operated with the Olympics in mind, “for these ‘senegambians’ have just about run the white man ragged.” A German journalist tacitly acknowledged the black runners’ superiority by hailing the German sprinter Arthur Jonath, who finished behind Tolan and Metcalfe in the one-hundred-meter race, as the fastest white man in the world. The Turnerschaft and the Nazi press, however, took the uncompromising view that “Aryans” like Jonath should not have deigned to compete at all with the likes of Tolan and Metcalfe. A Turner newspaper labeled it a “disgrace” that white men had entered the field with “wooly-haired n*****s with protruding lips.”

At the same time, Germany's *Reichssportführer* (literally, "Sports Leader") Hans von Tschammer und Osten saw sports as a means to boost morale, improve workers' productivity, harden the spirit of every German, and encourage the citizenry (*but only some of them*) to feel as if they were a part of an important national purpose. He declared: "German youth leadership is only for Aryans and not for Jews" – a vision that became reality within months of Hitler's becoming chancellor, as German sports federations purged Jewish members. Jews were banned from city playgrounds, public swimming pools, and horse racing.

It was efforts such as these which began to cause some concerns among other nations.

To counter that, Nazi officials hosted opulent parties for Olympic officials and dignitaries from many nations, in an effort to draw participants. And, in order to further appeal to other countries invited to participate in the Olympics, the Nazi government also backed away from the earlier Nazi positions on Jewish and black athletes, promising to welcome to Berlin "competitors of all races." Along with newspaper promotions, radio and film spots, the Propaganda Ministry promoted the Olympics within Germany with colorful posters and athletic imagery, drawing a link between the Third Reich and ancient Greece – all in an effort to attract visitors from inside its borders and from around the world.



However, observers in the U.S. and elsewhere continued questioning whether it would be moral to support Olympic Games that were hosted by the Nazi government. At that time, Avery Brundage, head of the American Olympic Committee (AOC) in 1933, issued a statement: "The very foundation of the modern Olympic revival will be undermined if individual countries are allowed to restrict participation by reason of class, creed, or race." (As we will see, Brundage later flipped positions, blaming opposition to holding the Games in Berlin on Communist agitators...and worse: he alleged the existence of a "Jewish-Communist conspiracy" to keep America away from the Olympics.)

A Boycott is Proposed

As reports of Nazi racism and the regime's persecution of Jews spread around the world, boycott movements surfaced in numerous countries, including France, Sweden, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, Great Britain and the United States. Most proved anemic. But a robust debate swirled in the U.S., spearheaded by a variety of organizations – Jewish, Black, Catholic, Socialist, and some devoted to sports. This did cause some worry to the Nazis.

By 1935, racist public policies had systematically eradicated Jews, homosexuals, Romas and other non-Aryan pariahs from most aspects of German life. The regime had passed discriminatory measures to keep Jews from entering universities, and from practicing such professions as law, medicine and teaching. The debate in the U.S. heated up. In August 1935, some 20,000 people crowded into New York's Madison Square Gardens for an anti-Nazi and pro-boycott rally.

Just a month later, Germany announced the infamous Nuremberg Laws, which stripped Jews, Gypsies (Romans) and Afro-Germans (Blacks) of their citizenship rights, along with their rights to intermarriage.

Days before that action, an interfaith group meeting in New York had called for an American boycott of the Berlin Olympics. Then, on October 1st, the National Council of Methodist Youth issued a plea to religious leaders across America to “shun” the Games, urging a change in the Games’ location or for members of churches and synagogues to refrain from participating. The pastors wrote an open letter addressed to “pastors and parishes of Catholic, Protestant and Jewish churches and synagogues in the United States,” noting that “the treatment by the present Nazi leaders of Jews, Protestants and Catholics in Germany is reasonably well known to Americans.... [T]his treatment offends the ideals of justice and democracy which are dear to the hearts of all freedom-loving Americans.”

The statement continued: “Not only would the games bring a much-sought tourist trade to Germany, but the meeting in Berlin would greatly enhance the prestige of the Nazi regime within Germany and would give the Nazis a chance to spread Fascist propaganda among the [Olympic] delegates. On the contrary, the changing of the seat of the 1936 Olympics would be one of the most effective means of expressing the moral indignation of civilized people at the return to barbarism of the present terrorist rule in Germany.”

Judge Jeremiah T. Mahoney, president of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), became an ardent opponent of participating in an Olympics held in Germany. He joined other prominent Catholic leaders, including New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, Massachusetts Governor James Curley, and New York Governor Al Smith in efforts to support a boycott, and to not send a U.S. team to Berlin. La Guardia hosted a rally advocating for a boycott. “Our athletes, I hope, will refuse to lend respectability to Hitler and his followers,” he said. “The American people, it would seem, are not in favor of sending their athletes to the meeting in Berlin.”

The U.S. Ambassador to Germany, William E. Dodd, also joined the chorus supporting a boycott, as did Ernest Lee Jahncke, former Secretary of the Navy. After Jahncke, a member of the IOC (International Olympic Committee) wrote “it will be a calamity, in my opinion, if America does participate, for it now appears as if the Olympic idea can be saved only by the refusal of Americans and of other peoples to have anything to do with the games if they are held in Germany,” he was expelled from the body.

Not surprisingly, the American Jewish Congress and the Jewish Labor Committee similarly supported a boycott.

The nation’s black press, as well as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), also strongly favored a boycott. The *Amsterdam News*, in letters to eight of the African American Olympic hopefuls, including Jesse Owens, urged the athletes to strike a blow against Hitler by refusing to go to Berlin. The letters stated, “Despite the limitations placed upon you as members of a minority group, you have fought your way to the top. You have challenged and vanquished the myths of racial superiority and inferiority....The *Amsterdam News* however wishes to call your attention to another opportunity – the greatest in your brilliant careers. An opportunity to challenge the force which seeks to destroy everything you have devoted your best years to building. A force which seeks to deny the universal equality you have so laboriously established. This force is Hitlerism.”

The newspaper then pleaded with the athletes: “The *Amsterdam News* begs you to refuse to participate in the Olympic Games in Germany in 1936...We make this protest not only [for] the 204,000 Negroes in Harlem, the 12,000,000 Negroes in America, and the countless darker exploited colonials throughout the world. We speak in the name of humanity, of civilization, of all forces of enlightenment which are threatened by Adolph Hitler and barbaric Nationalist philosophy.”

The *Amsterdam News* was not alone in supporting the boycott. In Los Angeles, the *Sentinel* raised its voice as well. “It is plain that the Olympic Games are going to be used by Adolph Hitler to further his campaign of hatred and discrimination against the Jews, Catholics and other minority groups,” the *Sentinel* editorialized. “The fact that the Jews are the chief sufferers from his campaign of intolerance should not deter Negroes from taking a leading part in the drive to move the Olympics.”

The newspaper acknowledged that “America’s skirts are far from clean in respect to discriminationWe have always appealed to fair-minded people to aid us in our battle against persecution. Now that other groups are appealing for our help, we ought to set an example.”

Jesse Owens initially considered the *New Amsterdam* call to shun the Olympics, and even issued a protest statement of his own. But he soon reconsidered, announcing he would not join a boycott. Walter White, executive director of the NAACP, sent a telegram urging Owens to alter course again. White admitted that pointing “the finger of scorn” at other countries for racial bigotry was hypocritical of Americans. But White also stated that stopping dictators was more important.

White had also drafted a much longer letter to Owens, retained in the NAACP archives, that was never sent.

In it, White emphasizes that it is his “firm conviction” that the issue of participating in the Berlin Olympics “transcends all other issues” – even if boycotting would be a personal sacrifice. Moreover, he wrote, “the very preeminence of American negro athletes gives them an unparalleled opportunity to strike a blow at racial bigotry.” (*see full text below*)

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Official Organ: The Crisis



December
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Olympics

Did not send

My dear Mr. Owens:

Will you permit me to say that it was with deep regret that I read in the New York press today a statement attributed to you saying that you would participate in the 1936 Olympic games even if they are held in Germany under the Hitler regime. I trust you will not think me unduly officious in expressing the hope that this report is erroneous.

I fully realize how great a sacrifice it will be for you to give up the trip to Europe and to forego the acclaim which your athletic prowess will unquestionably bring you. I realize equally well how hypocritical it is for certain Americans to point the finger of scorn at any other country for racial or any other kind of bigotry.

On the other hand, it is my firm conviction that the issue of participation in the 1936 Olympics, if held in Germany under the present regime, transcends all other issues. Participation by American athletes, and especially by those of our own race which has suffered more than any other from American race hatred, would, I firmly believe, do irreparable harm. I take the liberty of sending you a copy of the remarks which I made at a meeting here in New York, at Macca Temple, last evening. This sorry world of ours is apparently becoming in a fumbling way to realize what prejudice against any minority group does not only to other minorities but to the group which is in power. The very preeminence of American Negro athletes gives them an unparalleled opportunity to strike a blow at racial bigotry and to make other minority groups conscious of the sameness of their problems with ours and puts them under the moral obligation to think more clearly and to fight more vigorously against the wrongs from which we Negroes suffer.

But the moral issue involved is, in my opinion, far greater than immediate or future benefit to the Negro as a race. If the Hitlers and Mussolinis of the world are successful it is inevitable that dictatorships based upon prejudice will spread throughout the world, as indeed they are now spreading. Defeat of dictators before they become too firmly

How do your Senators and Congressmen stand on the Costigan-Wagner Anti-Lynching Bill?

ENDORSED BY THE NATIONAL INFORMATION BUREAU, 215 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

NAACP Secretary Walter White to Jesse Owens concerning the 1936 Olympic games, December 4, 1935. Typed letter. NAACP Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (082.00.00) Courtesy of the NAACP [Digital ID # na0082p1]

//www.loc.gov/exhibits/naacp/the-great-depression.html

#2 - Mr. Owens

December 4, 1935.

entrenched would, on the other hand, deter nations which through fear or other unworthy emotions are tending towards dictatorships. Let me make this quite concrete. Anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic and anti-Negro prejudices are growing alarmingly throughout the United States. Should efforts towards recovery fail, there is no telling where America will go. There are some people who believe that a proletarian dictatorship will come. I do not believe this will happen and the course of history clearly indicates that it is not likely to happen. Instead, it is more probable that we would have a fascist dictatorship.

It is also historically true that such reactionary dictatorships pick out the most vulnerable group as its first victims. In the United States it would be the Negro who would be the chief and first sufferer, just as the Jews have been made the scapegoats of Hitlerism in Nazi Germany. Sinclair Lewis, in his last novel, *IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE*, has written what seems to me to be a very sound picture of what may happen.

I have written at greater length than I had intended at the outset. I hope, however, that you will not take offense at my writing you thus frankly with the hope that you will take the high stand that we should rise above personal benefit and help strike a blow at intolerance. I am sure that your stand will be applauded by many people in all parts of the world, as your participation under the present situation in Germany would alienate many high-minded people who are awakening to the dangers of intolerance wherever it raises its head.

Ever sincerely,

Secretary.

Mr. Jesse Owens
Ohio State University
Columbus,
Ohio.

WW:CTF

Letter from NAACP Secretary Walter White to Jesse Owens concerning the 1936 Olympic games, December 4, 1935. Typed letter. Page 2. NAACP Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (082.00.01) Courtesy of the NAACP
[Digital ID # na0082p2]

But the proposed boycott was derailed, by a number of factors. Even as notables such as Jahncke urged a ban and warned that the Olympics “require fair play and the spirit of sportsmanship, and I find these utterly lacking in the German preparations,” in the sports world there was a wide-held belief that sports and politics should remain separate. This belief was in the face of polling in late 1935 showed that 43% of Americans actually favored a boycott or moving the Olympics to a different locale. But keeping politics and sports in separate spheres allowed many sports leaders to look the other way from the Nazi regime’s anti-Semitism and discrimination. They were “seduced,” historians now often say, by empty promises that the Nazis would fairly allow Jewish athletes to vie to be on German teams, which undermined a primary argument in favor of the boycott.

In the end, one man played an outsized role in securing America’s participation in the Olympics -- one could say as another propaganda master who shrewdly manipulated public opinion.

Avery Brundage in 1935 argued forcefully that the internal affairs of Germany should not be utilized as a consideration that might keep American athletes from pursuing their dreams. Even though it was Brundage who, in 1933, first questioned U.S. participation if the Nazis barred German Jews from that nation’s teams (stating that “I do not think the International Olympic Committee can dodge this issue”) he had long since changed his mind – after, of course, being wined and dined in Berlin by Nazi officials in 1934.

On June 4, 1934, Brundage was requested by the American Olympic Committee to go to Germany to “investigate charges to the effect that Nazi policies have debarred Jewish athletes from participation in training for the 1936 Olympic games,” reported the *Jewish Telegraph Agency*. “The United States will decline to participate in the games if in Mr. Brundage’s judgment Germany has not kept its pledge of complete freedom of opportunity for Jewish athletes.” The motion had been seconded by Charles Ornstein, of the Jewish Welfare Board.

However, after visiting Germany that summer, Brundage came home to give a speech on “German Day,” October 4, 1934, in which he now lauded the “heroic struggle of the German people” who had overcome the demoralized spirit of five years previous and were now bound to triumph. Brundage was now fully supportive of the United States participating in the 1936 Olympics. Anyone who had the opposite view, he said many times, must be overly influenced by “the Jews,” who “have been clever enough to realize the publicity value of sport.”

Over the next year, Brundage repeated two main themes as the tug-of-war over an American boycott continued. His first adage: no matter what, the success of the Olympic Movement required that it avoid entanglement in religious or political issues. The Olympic Games were “for athletes, not politicians.”

Second, and more ominous: Brundage blamed Jews in America, especially the “vocal” New York Jews, for much of the controversy. Scholar Carolyn Marvin said that Brundage “confided to his friends” that his partisan goal in supporting a successful Berlin Olympics was to advance democracy against Communism and against “the misguided politics of Eastern liberals in league with Jewish interest groups.” He said, “We must force the Jews who wish to use the Games as a weapon to strike the Nazis to mind their own business and let sport alone.”

Brundage's chief opponent, Judge Mahoney, rebutted: It was the Nazi regime, he said, who were guilty of manipulating the Olympics for political gain. The Nazis had failed to provide credible proof that German Jews would be allowed to compete, Mahoney argued. He argued that Brundage, in whitewashing the true situation in Germany, was in effect doing the bidding of a foreign country. "The Nazi government wants more than American participation in a sporting contest," Mahoney asserted. "It wants to bring the American dollar into the very weakened Nazi treasury. And it wants to picture Hitler with Uncle Sam standing behind him and saying, 'We are with you, Adolph!'"

But in the end, Brundage prevailed, albeit by a razor thin margin, when the AOC voted, 58 $\frac{1}{4}$ to 55 $\frac{3}{4}$, to not boycott the Berlin Olympics.

Let the Games Begin

On July 15, 1936, the delegation of 384 U.S. Olympic athletes and staff boarded the S.S. Manhattan, a luxury liner based in New York, bound for Hamburg, Germany and the Olympic Games. A band played as they set sail. Among the team members (the largest U.S. team ever) were 18 African American athletes.

They were assigned staterooms together, four men to a room, but otherwise all activities aboard ship were integrated. (Archie Williams remembered, "it was sort of like saying, 'We want to make sure that you are with your own kind.' In fact, I didn't have as much in common with some of these kids as with the white kids I went to college with. But I did feel there was a lot of racial prejudice, a feeling that they looked at us as different.")

Several athletes later recalled how impressed they were by the abundance of the food – both aboard ship and, later, in the Olympic Village. When the ship landed at Hamburg, the lavish red carpet treatment began. A band greeted the arriving American athletes; then everyone was transported to the centuries-old city hall, a building steeped in tradition. City officials gave speeches – in German – and the U.S. team was given ceremonial keys to the city.

Then, recalled Archie Williams, "we got on the train and when we got to Berlin the same thing happened. On the street the people immediately recognized us. They would come up to us for autographs and they would want to talk and invite you in to have a cup of coffee."

The "Jews Not Welcome" and other anti-Semitic signage forbidding Jews and other "undesirables" entry into various parts of Berlin had been removed from restaurants, hotels and public places. International tourists saw smiling Brownshirts and SS officers. For the athletes, each residence "cottage" had two stewards on duty at all times.

The opening ceremony on August 1 included more than 5,000 athletes representing 51 nations. A chorus of 3,000 Germans sang the national anthem, *Deutschland Uber Alles*, followed by the Nazi anthem, *Horst Wessel Lied*. The dirigible, the Hindenburg, flew over the stadium, flying the Olympic flag. Thousands of white pigeons were released. The Olympic torch arrived, having been carried by a relay team of 3,000 runners from Olympia, Greece – the first time in modern Olympic history this had been done.

By the time the Games concluded on August 16, more than 3 million tickets had been sold, and another half million passes issued to athletes, press, and honored guests. The Berlin Olympics were widely acknowledged to be the most lavish games to that date, and many visitors and journalists at the event were lulled by the vision of a peaceful, tolerant Germany. It would not be long before the world realized that the glorious facade of the Games camouflaged the racist, militaristic character of the Nazi regime.

Beyond the pomp and circumstance, the narrative of the Berlin Games is important to our understanding of the history of this era. Germany's athletes did win the most gold medals. But the Americans, and specifically the African American members of the U.S. team, took the greatest number of medals in track and field events, the popular heart of the Olympics. Cornelius Johnson's record high jump, Jesse Owens's four gold medals, Archie Williams' gold medal-winning sprint, and all the other medals earned by Team USA's black competitors proved that the world's greatest athlete was not an Aryan.

DIVERSITY:

As a part of its current efforts to broadly counter systemic racism and implicit bias, the City of Los Angeles has expressed twin goals of increasing the diversity of designated historic resources and pushing toward social justice and equity.

In early 2021, the National Trust for Historic Preservation issued a strongly-worded statement regarding justice and equity in historic preservation, describing a vision where this nation's landmarks would reflect America's complete history of all of its people.

"The National Trust believes that every American should be able to see themselves, their history, and their potential in our collective story and in our national landscape.

***This belief is at the core of our vital mission to tell the full American story.** With historic preservation we're saving the places, memories, and stories that reflect the diverse people who make up our country...we are honored to be able to highlight places that tell the story of all Americans, including women, people of color, and others whose contributions to our cultural heritage are often overlooked.*

Yet just a small fraction of the sites on the National Register of Historic Places represent women and people of color. As a nation, we have work to do to fill in the gaps of our cultural heritage. That's why the National Trust for Historic Preservation shines a long-overdue spotlight on generations of trailblazers by saving the places where they raised their voices, took their stands, and found the courage to change the world. We can tell a fuller American story. It's a story that does justice to the contributions of women, people of color, and all Americans in shaping our nation and leading us forward. And it's a story that stirs us all to take pride in our shared heritage and inspires us to create an even more perfect union for generations to come."

This 2021 statement echoes former National Trust President Stephanie Meeks’ 2009 speech – given during a conference in Southern California – when she declared that “it is a time of transformational change in America.” By the year 2050, she said, and possibly decades sooner, the United States will be a country that is majority minority. Yet few designated landmarks, locally or federally, then or now, reflect this diversity. Meeks urged preservationists and historians everywhere to “reconsider what is important, taking into account the layers of history,” when landmarking this country’s heritage places.

Today, the oak stands in a densely populated working-class neighborhood almost devoid of tree cover and open spaces. There are only two small parks within a mile of the property. Los Angeles ranks 74th of 100 American cities in park access. At a time when Angelenos are increasingly aware of a concept called “Tree Equity,” Council District 10’s neighborhoods rank among the lowest in Los Angeles, with a tree canopy coverage percentage (for the district overall) of 15.46%, compared to the nearby Hancock Park area (former CD4 at the time of the inventory survey) of 36.66% -- twice as many trees. The protection of mature trees, both in the public realm AND significant trees including the Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak, is a key step to closing LA’s Urban Forest Canopy Equity Gap.

The Johnson Family home and the associated Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak Tree together call attention to a family story of migration, hope, determination, and community, along with reminding us of the challenges and opportunities, the sometimes miraculous, often perilous, journey minority athletes have faced in this country.

This potential Historic Cultural Monument, if designated and added to the City’s roster of landmarks, shines a light on the heterogeneity of a Los Angeles neighborhood; celebrates the lives and accomplishments of individual African American citizens; and commemorates stories of racism both in America and in Europe.

In terms of evaluating the merits of whether a cultural resource ought to be recognized, that means at times digging deeper, learning more, respecting the “other” and above all, listening to the core of the story. Modest and vernacular houses, like the Johnson Family home, and even trees, can tell hidden stories. Without recognizing homes like these, and designating them so future generations can learn their stories, the City will be destined to continue the pattern of racial disparity in historic preservation.

INTEGRITY:

The Johnson Family Home retains sufficient integrity to tell the story of the family that owned the property for more than a century. Integrity is “the ability of a property to convey its historical associations or attributes,” and the Johnson home, while humble, very much looks the same today as it did when S.C. Johnson and Pearl Cooper Johnson were raising their children – and when Cornelius began jumping higher than anyone else.

The key question is: Would the Johnson family members who lived there recognize it as it is today? The answer is Yes. Indeed, the primary alteration, e.g. the enclosure of the original front porch to become habitable interior space, was constructed by the family (Cornelius's father) early in the 20th century, when Cornelius was just a boy and the family was growing.

Specifically: The physical structure is in the same **location** as when built. The exterior design of the main building **retains its form, plan, space, structure and style, from day of construction** (although the front porch is partially enclosed). The **setting**, the former Pico Heights / Pellissier Tract, has certainly had intrusions but since this is a corner property its essential character remains in the same relationship to its setting as before. Most of its **materials and its workmanship are intact** to when the Johnson family members were the owners. The **building's physical features retain their "feeling,"** and historic sense of the particular period in time.

CONCLUSION:

The Johnson Family home and the Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak Tree deserve to be preserved and treasured as living symbols of Los Angeles's history and hopes.

An enduring cliché of Los Angeles is the Hollywood hopeful with a dream of sudden stardom. The truth of Los Angeles is the migrants escaping repression and poverty, who came here armed with hope and energy, and made their dreams come true.

The Johnsons and Coopers were among thousands of families who have come to Los Angeles seeking a better life, through economic and social opportunities unavailable to them in their original homelands, but their scion, Cornelius, was one of a kind: a home-grown, publicly educated son of the city who – through talent, hard work, and perseverance – became the best high jumper in the world, recognized and celebrated far beyond his city and country. Similarly, the house may be one of many modest original vernacular, owner-built family homes from the very early 20th century (although numbers are shrinking), but the Olympic Tree is utterly unique. Together, they can serve as examples for us all.

The Olympic Oak reminds us of the worst that mankind is capable of, with its undercurrent of racial hatred and prejudice. At the same time, the tree celebrates the triumph of the Olympic spirit and values of friendship, excellence, respect, courage, determination, inspiration and equality, highlighted in the story of one of Los Angeles's greatest athletes.

As Los Angeles prepares to welcome the world to the 2028 Olympic Games, Cornelius Johnson's Olympic Oak recalls the past and embodies hopes for the future.

Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak and Johnson Family Residence – CHC 2022-3207-HCM

1156 S. Hobart Blvd., Los Angeles 90019

Submitted by West Adams Heritage Association, Laura Meyers and Rina Rubenstein

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Hobart

Inte. Sec. 1. of - 5-10-22
Ward 4

Applicant must indicate the Building Line or Lines clearly and distinctly on the Drawings.

Application for Erection of Frame Buildings OF CLASS "D"

Application is hereby made to the Superintendent of Buildings of the City of Los Angeles, for the approval of the detailed statement of the specifications and plans herewith submitted for the erection of the building herein described. All provisions of the Building Ordinances shall be complied with in the erection of said building, whether specified herein or not.

(Sign here) S. C. Johnson

Los Angeles, Cal., 190

Location: Lot 1 Block 9

Assessor
Please
Verify J. C. Johnson OK Lewis

District No. 29 M. B. page 11 F. B. page 210

Engineer
Please
Verify J. C. Johnson OK Lewis

No. 1156 Hobart Boulevard Street

- Purpose of the Building Res
- Is any part to be used for store or other business purposes? If so, state what
- Owner's name Shedrick Chan Johnson
- Owner's address 115-2 Hobart Blvd -
- Architect's name S. C. Johnson
- Builder's name 115-2 Hobart Blvd -
- Builder's Address 115-2 Hobart Blvd -
- Estimated Cost of the Proposed Improvements, \$ 1200
- Will the building be erected on the front or rear of lot? Front
- How to be occupied? 1 Family If for dwelling, state the number of families in each house
- Size of lot? 46 feet front; 46 feet rear; 135 feet deep.
- Size of building? 30 feet front; 20 feet rear; 5-0 feet deep; number of stories in height 1; height from curb level to highest point?
- What is the character of the ground: rock, clay, sand, filled, etc. clay
- Will the foundation be laid on earth, rock, timber or piles? Batch
- Will there be a cellar or basement?
- Will basement or cellar be of brick, stone or concrete?
- What will be the depth of foundation walls below curb level or surface of ground?
- Of what will foundation walls be built? 8" Brick
Give thickness of foundation walls; front 8" inches; sides 8" inches; rear 8" inches; party 8" inches. Thickness and width of footings 12-12
- Will interior supports be brick partition walls or piers, iron columns or wooden posts?
Give size of same
If piers, give thickness of cap stones or plates
bond stones or plates

Permit No. 6404

1156 S. Hobart - 1907 Permit for minor repairs

All applications must be filled out by applicant

Ward 4

Applicant must indicate the Building Line or Lines clearly and distinctly on the Drawings.

BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS
DEPARTMENT OF BUILDINGS

Application to Alter, Repair or Demolish

Application is hereby made to the Chief Inspector of Buildings of the City of Los Angeles, for the approval of the detailed statement of the specifications and plans herewith submitted for the alteration, repair or demolition of the building herein described. All provisions of the Building Ordinances shall be complied with in the alteration, repair or demolition of said building, whether specified herein or not.

(Sign Here) S. C. Johnson

Los Angeles, Cal., APR 11 1907 190

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF PRESENT BUILDING
CITY ASSESSOR: Please Verify

REMOVED FROM	REMOVED TO
Lot <u>2</u> Block <u>4</u> Ward <u>4</u>	Lot <u>2</u> Block <u>4</u> Ward <u>4</u>
Tract <u>Pellissier</u>	Tract <u>Pellissier</u>
	<u>OK Hallard</u>
	<u>OK Kelly</u>
Book <u>1</u> Page <u>17</u> F. B. Page <u>17</u>	Book <u>1</u> Page <u>17</u> F. B. Page <u>17</u>

CITY ENGINEER: Please Verify Street Number

From Street No. 1152 Hobart Blvd. To Street No. 1152 Hobart Blvd.

- Owner's name Mrs. S. C. Johnson
- Owner's address 115-6 Hobart Blvd.
- Architect's name S. C. Johnson
- Builder's name S. C. Johnson
- Builder's address 115-6 Hobart
- Estimated cost of the Proposed Improvements, \$ 75.00

To put in 2 windows and
change partition in a few
places.

Permit No. 2106

301g, Form 1

3

All Applications must be filled out by Applicant

BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS
DEPARTMENT OF BUILDINGSPLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS
and other data must also be filed

Application to Alter, Repair or Demolish

To the Board of Public Works of the City of Los Angeles:

Application is hereby made to the Board of Public Works of the City of Los Angeles, through the office of the Chief Inspector of Buildings, for a building permit in accordance with the description and for the purpose hereinafter set forth. This application is made subject to the following conditions, which are hereby agreed to by the undersigned applicant and which shall be deemed conditions entered into the exercise of the permit:

First: That the permit does not grant any right or privilege to erect any building or other structure therein described, or any portion thereof, upon any street, alley, or other public place or portion thereof.
Second: That the permit does not grant any right or privilege to use any building or other structure therein described, or any portion thereof, for any purpose that is, or may hereafter be prohibited by ordinance of the City of Los Angeles.
Third: That the granting of the permit does not affect or prejudice any claim of title in, or right of possession in, the property described in such permit.

REMOVED FROM		REMOVED TO	
Lot _____	Block _____	Lot _____	Block _____
Tract _____	Tract _____	Tract _____	Tract _____
Book _____	Page _____ F. B. Page _____	Book _____	Page _____ F. B. Page _____
From No. _____	1156 S. Hobart Blvd		Street _____
To No. _____	North east corner 12		Street _____

(USE INK OR INDELIBLE PENCIL)

- What purpose is the present Building now used for? Res. 1 fam
- What purpose will Building be used for hereafter? Private Home
- Owner's name Sc Johnson Phone West 1890
- Owner's address 1156 Hobart Blvd
- Architect's name North Phone _____
- Contractor's name Private Owner Phone _____
- Contractor's address 1156 Hobart Blvd
- VALUATION OF PROPOSED WORK (Including Plumbing, Gas Fitting, Sewers, Copper, Aluminum, Painting, Finishing, etc.) \$ 600.00
- Class of present Building D No. of rooms at present 32
- Number of stories in height One Size of present Building 32' x 60'
- State how many buildings are on this lot one 1 fam
- State purpose buildings on lot are used for Domestic life
(Restaurant, Hotel, School, or any other purpose.)

STATE ON FOLLOWING LINES EXACTLY WHAT ALTERATIONS, ADDITIONS, ETC., WILL BE MADE TO THIS BUILDING:

3 x 14 addition to dining room Apartment
 3 x 16 addition to bed room 3 x 5 addition
 to kitchen 4 x 14 addition to front bedroom
 enclose present front porch into bed room
 extend rear of rear front porch two hallways

I have carefully examined and read the above application and know the same is true and correct, and that all provisions of the Ordinances and Laws governing Building Construction will be complied with, whether herein specified or not.

OVER

(Sign here) Mad Sc Johnson
(Owner or Authorized Agent.)

FOR DEPARTMENT USE ONLY		
PERMIT NO. <u>24835</u> <u>24836</u>	Plans and Specifications checked and found to conform to Ordinances, State Laws, etc. <u>H. P. Johnson</u> Plan Examiner	Application checked and found O. K. <u>H. P. Johnson</u> Chief Inspector
		RECEIVED JUL 24 1922 J. E. B. B.

1156 S. Hobart - 1922 Permit for remodel and repair, second page

13. Size of new addition 4 x 16 No. of Stories in height 1

14. Material of foundation 12 Size footings 6 x 12 Size wall 6 Depth below ground 6

15. Size of Redwood Mudalls 2 x 6 Size of interior bearing studs 2 x 9

16. Size of exterior studs 2 x 4 Size of interior non-bearing studs 2 x 3

17. Size of first floor joists 2 x 6 Second floor joists 2 x 6

18. Will all provisions of State Dwelling House Act be complied with? Yes

I have carefully examined and read the above blank and know the same is true and correct, and that all provisions of the Ordinances and Laws governing Building Construction will be complied with, whether herein specified or not.

(Sign here) Mrs. S. C. Johnson
(Owner or Authorized Agent)

There are many references to Cornelius Johnson throughout his career, in sports and local news. Even when expressing admiration for his feats, newspapers frequently referred to his race as well as his physique, especially in his early years. Some examples:

Cornelius Johnson, a Los Angeles high school Negro stripling (San Bernardino Sun, July 2, 1932)

the Los Angeles Negro boy, Cornelius Johnson (San Bernardino Sun, August 1, 1932)

Cornelius Johnson, Negro, captain elect of the Los Angeles High School track team (Oakland Tribune, May 2, 1933)

Cornelius Johnson, L. A. High's great colored jumper (San Pedro News Pilot, May 8, 1933)

Cornelius Johnson, great Negro star (Oakland Tribune, May 21, 1933)

Cornelius Johnson, Los Angeles Negro high school youth (Oakland Tribune, July 1, 1933)

Cornelius Johnson. Los Angeles Negro prepster (Oakland Tribune, July 6, 1933)

Cornelius Johnson, the sepia-colored high-jumper (Corsair, February 28, 1934)

Cornelius Johnson of Compton Junior college, Negro youth (San Bernardino Sun, March 4, 1934)

Cornelius Johnson, the willowy Negro from Compton Junior College (Oakland Tribune, April 12, 1934)

Cornelius Johnson, tall, lean Negro high jumper (San Bernardino Sun, April 15, 1934)

Cornelius Johnson, elongated negro high jumper (San Pedro News Pilot, April 28, 1934)

Cornelius Johnson, Dusky Compton Junior college star (San Pedro News Pilot, May 8, 1934)

Cornelius Johnson, lithe Negro from Compton Junior College (Oakland Tribune, May 11, 1934)

Cornelius Johnson, the lanky Negro jumper (Oakland Tribune, May 23, 1934)

Cornelius Johnson, long legged Negro youth (San Bernardino Sun, June 4, 1934)

Cornelius Johnson, a confident Negro from Compton Junior College (Oakland Tribune, June 7, 1934)

Cornelius Johnson, colored high jump ace (Daily News, June 7, 1934)

Cornelius Johnson, the Compton Negro (Oakland Tribune, July 1, 1934)

Cornelius Johnson, Negro sensation (San Bernardino Sun, December 24, 1934)

"Abraham Lincoln Won 1936 Olympic Games: Colored Athletes to Play Larger Part Than Ever in Track Classics to Come," by W.L. Stanton. *Los Angeles Times*, August 17, 1936: A14.

Abraham Lincoln Won 1936 Olympic Games

Colored Athletes to Play Larger Part Than Ever in Track Classics to Come

BY W. L. STANTON
Caltech Coach

Abraham Lincoln won the 1836 Olympics, not Avery Brundage nor U.S.C. Without the Civil War there would have been no Jesse Owens, Cornelius Johnson, Ralph Metcalf, Archie Williams and others of the same hue.

Of course, we can go farther back and say if there had been no slaves, the white race in the United States would have had to uphold our interests in the 1936 Olympics, which would have been too bad! The United States without the Negroes, Germany without the Jews, and little Finland would have made a meet close enough to go see.

HOLLAND SAD

Holland's chagrin is lamentable. Had the Dutch slave traders not sold the Negroes to the American colonists, Holland would have been the 1936 victors.

How long this supremacy of the Negro will last depends upon two things: First, will the Negro become like the white man under our American culture? Our schools and colleges are already having their effect. Negroes, they say, are frequently in the white man's barber

shops to have the kinks taken out of their hair. If the Negro can be kept from becoming soft, we have hopes for more Olympic championships.

Second—even though the present generation of Negroes becomes soft under our culture, there are still millions more in Africa waiting to become civilized. Slavery being taboo, we could extend our enthusiasm for athletics, and Uncle Sam, by a system of subsidizing, bringing them in duty-free and educating them here. This at a glance looks like good business for it would eliminate the expense of sending missionaries to Africa.

We might have competition in this subsidizing. Most of the European nations have African colonies which have not been exploited yet for Olympic purposes.

COLONIAL WAR

Italy may have had this in mind in subduing Ethiopia. Germany will insist now on having her colonies back, seeing their possibilities. France, too, has her French colonials, though somewhat mixed with their white blood. If the United States enters the field, not having any colonies in Africa, she will—or Uncle Sam will—have to resort to proselyting as well as subsidizing, a procedure not unknown to us.

If Africa should thus be exploited, the 1940 Olympics will be a contest of Negroes with the white men acting as officials, which jobs they will not part with easily.

But should the Negro's rise not be confined to his legs but should go to his head, the white man's job of officiating is doomed.

Sample newspaper coverage of Cornelius's pre-Olympic career, 1932-1933

Santa Cruz Evening News, July 18, 1932, page 7

Sport Shots

By BEN BLACK

* * *

Black Invasion

The Black Invasion — it hit the Stanford oval Saturday and left a trail of brilliant performances in its wake.

Big cullu'd man Metcalf showed the way in the 100 and 200-meter races(while little cullu'd man Tolan bounced out of the massed runners at the tape to take a second in both events.

In the broad jump Ed Gordon, big darky from the University of Iowa, went out over 25 feet, just behind Barber of U. S. C. who won the event.

In the high jump Cornelius Johnson (middle names "George Washington") tied for first place in spite of being a mere high school kid from Los Angeles. Gene Beatty, prime favorite in the 400-meter hurdles, might

have added another first place for the honor of old Alabammy had he not gotten too ambitious and knocked over a flock of hurdles, ending up sprawled in the cinders.

In the stands the darkies swarmed like bees, big ones, little ones, fat ones and thin ones, until it began to take on the appearance of the Somali hinterland.

* * *

Los Angeles Daily News, May 3, 1933, page 8



AS THE CROW FLIES

By R. A. CRONIN

CORNELIUS JOHNSON set a new world's interscholastic high jump record in the all-city track meet Monday. That was only part of Cornelius Johnson's exploits. Cornelius won the 220 yards in 22 flat; he ran the anchor lap of the relay team, which his team won. Cornelius Johnson is from Los Angeles high school, which won the meet with ease. They topped the others by 12 points. If more points had been necessary Cornelius Johnson would have unlimbered his 6 feet, 4 inches of ebony and made 'em. He's good in a lot of other events.

If you were fortunate enough to have witnessed the Olympic Games high jump you will recall that Cornelius Johnson tied all the rest at the high point of 6 feet, 6 inches, but faded to fourth place in the jump off, which was won by McNaughton, with Van Osdal second and the Filipino, Toribio, third.

There is no telling what this senior from L. A. high will do with a little more experience. If nothing in the matter of ankle or leg strain befalls him, he ought to set a new world's record for high jumping. He took the high school record away from Willis Ward, now a sophomore at the University of Michigan, who jumped 6 feet, 6 inches. Willis Ward is just as much of a brunet as Cornelius Johnson, but Willis failed in the trials for the Olympic team.

* * *

Sample newspaper coverage of Cornelius's pre-Olympic career, 1936

"Local Olympic Timber," by Frank Fitch. *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1936: A12

LOCAL OLYMPIC TIMBER

BY FRANK FINCH

If you were obliged to single out one Los Angeles athlete certain of winning a berth on the American Olympic team you'd have to step right up and place your paw on the sepla shoulders of that elastic stick o' licorice, Cornelius Johnson.

There are none more consistent than this elongated ebony leaper, whom Dean Crowmell unqualifiedly selects as the first man who will clear seven feet.

Johnson himself believes that he will set a new world's outdoor record of 6ft. 11in. at Berlin this summer, eclipsing Walter Marty's mark of

Won National A.A.U. indoor championship in 1935 and 1936.

Tied world's indoor record in 1936 A.A.U. meet at 6ft. 8 15-16in.

Johnson lays claim to being one of the heaviest top-flight jumpers in history. Standing 6ft. 3in. in



Cornelius Johnson, Olympic jumping hope.

6ft. 9 1/2 in. Incidentally, the Fresno kangaroo hasn't mastered Mistuh Johnson since the spring of 1932. (Parallel case is Champion Jimmy Braddock and Joe Louis!)

TWO EUROPEAN TOURS

Johnson, who toured Europe the past two summers without ever once being defeated, undoubtedly is the greatest jumper yet developed. Here's a list of his major achievements since 1932, when he was an 18-year-old junior at Los Angeles High:

Tied for 1932 Olympic crown at 6ft. 5 1/2 in., but lost to Duncan McNaughton in jump-off, placing fourth.

Holds world's unofficial scholastic record.

Won National A.A.U. outdoor championship in 1932, 1933, 1934 and 1935.

He says that within twenty-five years some super-jumper will clear what he says is the maximum possible height—7ft. 2in., but the trick, in "Corny's" opinion, will have to be performed by a man at least 6ft. 6in. tall.

PLANS LONG REST

Having just finished his second eastern indoor tour of the season, Johnson will now take a long rest before making his Olympic bid. He says his greatest competitors will be Al Threadgill of Temple, Ed Burke of Marquette and Marty.

A topnotch trio, to be sure, boys and girls, but, as Oscar Otis, the selector of steeds, would rate Top Row. "Johnson is standout, set for smashing effort."

Cornelius Johnson's Record of Death, Seattle, February 15, 1946

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CORONER'S REGISTER

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

RECORD OF DEATH

Residence of deceased SS Santa Cruz City of Cornelius Johnson Place where death occurred On arrival Harbor E. Hospital

Date reported 2-16-46 Time reported 12:09 M. Name of person reporting case Mr. Cronin Relationship Step. Steward Address Harbor E. Hospital Phone 2030

Police notified through Officer Victor Wilcox of Central Station. Police Officer at scene

Sex Male Color or Race Negro Single, Married, Etc. (Write the word):

If Married, Widowed or Divorced, Name of Husband or Wife

Date of Birth—Month August Day 21 Year 1902

Age 43 Yr. Mo. Days. If less than one day Hrs. Min.

Occupation—Trade, profession or kind of work done as Baker

Employer—Name and Address Grace Line 2 Pine St

Date Deceased last worked at this occupation (Mo. and Yr.)

Birthplace (city or town) Los Angeles State or Country Calif

Relatives notified yes Date 2/15/46 By Telegram

Employer checked for relatives Date By

Draft Board checked Date By

O. A. P. checked Date By

Veteran Discharge here

Union checked—Benefits Date By

Body permitted to go to Funeral Directors

Request of Relationship

Body received at Morgue yes Time 2:58 M. Temp. of body

Body removed—Time 6:10 Date 2-18-46 By N.P. Baines Asst. Funeral Director

Funeral Director Johnson Funeral Home Address 783 1/2 4th St. S.F.

Order signed by Ruby J. Barton Relationship sister

Body delivered by J. M. Gossard Date 2-18-46 6:20 A. Deputy

Public Administrator notified no Date Time M.

Industrial Accident Commission notified Date Time M.

Room sealed no Date Seal released

Photo taken no Date By Mask taken

Fingerprints taken yes Forwarded U. S. Veterans' Bureau Neg—Pos

Police Record, Local Neg—Pos Cal. Neg—Pos F. B. I. Neg—Pos

Body placed in cold storage—Date and compartment

IN CASE OF ACCIDENT, SUICIDE, ETC.

Date and Time Place

Nature of supposed accident or suicide

INFORMATION RELATIVE TO INSURANCE

Insurance—Accident Straight Life

Beneficiary Relationship

HISTORY OF CASE (supposed facts to be proven at inquest):

The deceased was employed as ship's baker on board the Steamship Santa Cruz owned by Grace Line Company and moored at Pier #37. From history received the deceased was acting wild and jumping around the deck at about 2:50 AM, 2/15/46. Central Station was notified and Officers Victor Wilcox and J. Carpenetti responded and when they went aboard found the deceased was jumping around furiously and attempted to quiet him down and both officers held him and while trying to take him from the ship deceased broke away and with the aid of W. H. Beckwith, Night Officer, and Lawrence Riordan, Ship's Electrician, they subdued him. He was taken to the Harbor Emergency Hospital where he was pronounced dead on arrival at 3:16 AM.

Scars, Birth marks, other distinguishing marks

Height 5-7 Weight 161 Color of Eyes Brown Color of Hair Black

San d + Mail yes Deputy

To secure and on WITNESSES

Name	Address	Remarks
<u>W. H. Beckwith</u>	<u>Central Station</u>	
<u>J. Carpenetti</u>	<u>"</u>	
<u>W. H. Beckwith</u>	<u>93 Buena Vista Terrace, Night Officer in Charge</u>	
<u>Lawrence Riordan</u>	<u>S.S. Santa Cruz, Pier #37</u>	
<u>Weston J. Dunham</u>	<u>Medical Corps, Fort Mason</u>	
<u>Ruby J. Barton</u>	<u>1816 Park Ave., Berkeley, Calif.</u>	
<u>Geo. Littlejohn</u>	<u>Grace Line, 2 Pine St. Employer</u>	
<u>R. J. Belli</u>	<u>1156 S. Hobart St. I.R.</u>	
<u>John Johnson</u>	<u>1156 S. Hobart St. Father</u>	
<u>Miss A. Barasa</u>	<u>Los Angeles, Calif.</u>	
<u>Edward Butler</u>	<u>Grace Line, 2 Pine St. Marine Staff</u>	
<u>H. B. Summay</u>	<u>2358 - 2nd St. Long Beach, Calif.</u>	

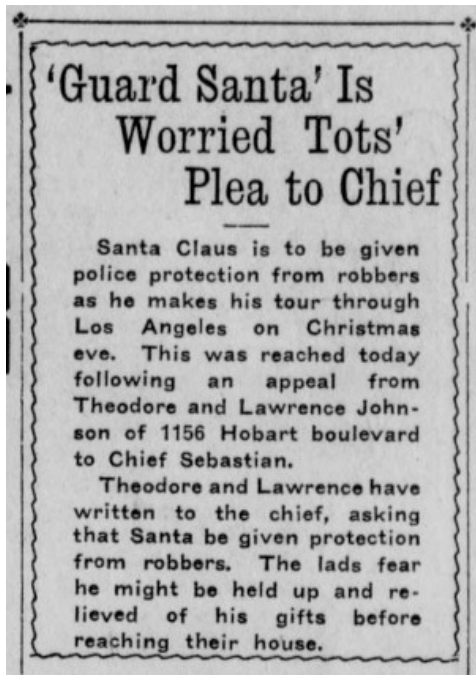
Johnson and Cooper Family Trees - Cornelius Johnson's grandparents, parents, aunts, and cousins

Based on census records; birth, death, and marriage documents; and contemporary newspaper reports

Charles Johnson Born c. 1837		Charlotte Johnson c.1851 - 1936 Born North Carolina Possible maiden name Hayward		William Henry Cooper (possibly aka Henry L. Harris) ? – d. after 1912		Bessie Neal Cooper 1851 – 1934 Born Arkansas	
Ida born c.1859	S.C. 1869-1948 born Raleigh, NC	Pearl Lucille Cooper Johnson 1875 – 1970 Born Texas	Maude Cooper Waters (later Johnson) 1880-1957	Clarence W. Waters c.1879-?	Birdie L. Cooper Bright 1877-1919	Jason William Bright 1864-1917	
		<i>married 1903</i>	<i>married 1908 (2nd marriage for both)</i>		<i>married 1900</i>		
	Theodore Charles Johnson 1904-1987 Lawrence Shaderick Johnson 1906-1944 (m. Lillyan; daughter Beverly) Pearlita Lucille Brooks 1907-1961 (m. Bienville Brooks 1935) Ruby Elizabeth Braxton 1911-1988 (son James A., born c.1939) Cornelius Cooper Johnson 1913-1946		?		Consuelo V. Bright Hinton 1903-1993 Marjorie Eloise Bright McPherson 1906-1958 Birdielee Velores Bright 1911 – 2009		

Johnson Family – misc. sources beyond census and directory records

1913 - Christmas story about Cornelius's older brothers (Los Angeles Herald, December 18, 1913, p. 1)



1927 - Cornelius's sister Pearlita at Lake Elsinore (from "Lake Elsinore: A Southern California African American Resort Area During the Jim Crow Era, 1920s-1960s, and the Challenges of Historic Preservation Commemoration," by Alison Rose Jefferson)



Figure 19. Memorial Day, Lake Elsinore, May 30, 1927. Standing, left to right: LaVera White, Edith Kaiser, Joe Allen and Anita Monroe. Seated, left to right: Pearlita Johnson and Lillian Middleton. LaVera White Collection/Arthur and Elizabeth Lewis Collection.

1940 - Cornelius Johnson's draft card (accessed via Ancestry.com)

U.S., World War II Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947 for Shedwick C Johnson
California > Jewell-Jolley > Johnson, Chester-Johnson, Doyle

SERIAL NUMBER 1714	1. NAME (Print) Cornelius Cooper Johnson (First) (Middle) (Last)		ORDER NUMBER 2288
2. ADDRESS (Print) 1156 S. Hobart Blvd Los Angeles Cal (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)			
3. TELEPHONE RO 1751	4. AGE IN YEARS 27	5. PLACE OF BIRTH Los Angeles Cal (Town or country) (State or country)	6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP U. S. A.
7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Mr. Shedwick C. Johnson (Mr., Mrs., Miss) (First) (Middle) (Last)			8. RELATIONSHIP OF THAT PERSON Father
9. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON 1156 S. Hobart Blvd Los Angeles L. A. Cal (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)			
10. EMPLOYER'S NAME Shedwick C. Johnson			
11. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS 1156 S. Hobart Blvd. Los Angeles Cal. (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)			
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.			
REGISTRATION CARD D. S. S. Form 1 (over)		Cornelius C. Johnson (Registrant's signature)	

1948 – S.C. Johnson's obituary (Los Angeles Sentinel, April 15, 1948: page 8)

Funeral Services Are Held For Pioneer Citizen of L.A.
Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-); Apr 15, 1948; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Sentinel
pg. 6

Funeral Services Are Held For Pioneer Citizen of L.A.

Final rites for S. C. Johnson, scion of a pioneer Los Angeles family, were held last Thursday at First AME church, Eighth and Towne avenue, at 2 p.m., Rev. Frederick D. Jordan, pastor, officiating.

The order of services included the processional, an organ prelude, a song by the choir, invocation by Presiding Elder F. A. Harris; scripture reading by Rev. J. M. Brown; solo by Mrs. Emma Smith-Mathis; remarks from Percy Buck, representing the Pioneer Club; a tribute by S. P. Johnson; solo by George Bryant; obituary by Attorney Hugh MacBeth; eulogy by Rev. F. D. Jordan.

Active Pallbearers were; George L. Rowland, George Moore, John Majors, Jack Sims, J. L. Edwards and Leroy Sims. Honorary pallbearers were; Alex Person and J. G. Sanford. Conner-Johnson Morticians directed and interment was in **Rosedale Cemetery**.

Johnson had resided in Los Angeles, Calif., for 53 years. He resided at 1156 S. Hobart Blvd., where he had made his home for the past 45 years.

1948 - Entries for Pearl, S.C., and Cornelius Johnson in the *Negro Who's Who in California, 1948*

JOHNSON, PEARL L., Housewife, born in Austin, Texas. Mrs. Johnson came to California in 1891. For many years Mrs. Johnson has been active in the social and civic life of her community, is a member of the Women's Political Study Club, the mother of a fine family, and holds the honor of being chosen Queen for one of the Tournament of Roses Floats, some years ago.

Her hobby is riding.

JOHNSON, SHADERICK CHARLES, Plastering Contractor, born in Raleigh, North Carolina, came to California in 1891, and came to his death in 1948.

Mr. Johnson was one of the first licensed contractors in the construction industry in California.

In 1902 he married Pearl L. Cooper. From this union there was five children--Theodore, Lawrence, Pearl, Ruby and Cornelius.

During his many years of residence in Los Angeles, Mr. Johnson had been active in many organized activities, both church and civic. He had retired from active work and had devoted much of his time to his life time hobby of Hunting. He was a member of the Masonic Lodge.

JOHNSON, CORNELIUS COOPER, High Jumper, born in Los Angeles, California, August 21, 1913; died February 15, 1946, the son of S. C. and Pearl L. Johnson. Educated in the public schools of Los Angeles and the Compton Junior College, Compton, California.

During his high school career, Cornelius was an all-around athlete, and was one of the few three year, all-star lettermen at the Los Angeles High School. In the Olympic Games in 1932, he was the youngest member, and only high school student on the American Olympic team and placed in the High Jump. In the Olympic's of 1936, held in Berlin, Germany, he established a world record in the high jump and won for America, first place. Great honors were bestowed upon him by the nations of the World and he became a hero in the eyesight of every youth throughout the world who aspired to athletic fame.

Cornelius Johnson, was a leader in the YMCA athletic program and will long be remembered for his work and inspiration to the youth of that center.

His great prowess on the field was under the colors of the Amateur Athletic Union (A.A.U.), and his death came as a shock to the world of sports and to his bereaved family. Although, Cornelius Johnson passed on, his name and his great athletic records will live on and continue to be an inspiration to young men the world over.

His hobby was swimming.

(n.d.) S.C. Johnson's death record, showing his mother's maiden name (accessed via Ancestry.com)

Shadrack Johnson	
in the California, U.S., Death Index, 1940-1997	
Detail	Source
Name:	Shadrack Johnson
Gender:	Male
Birth Date:	21 Feb 1869
Birth Place:	North Carolina
Death Date:	4 Apr 1948
Death Place:	Ventura
Mother's Maiden Name:	Hayward
Father's Surname:	Johnson

1949 – Mothers' Day tribute to Pearl Johnson (*California Eagle*, May 5, 1949: 1)



PICO HEIGHTS

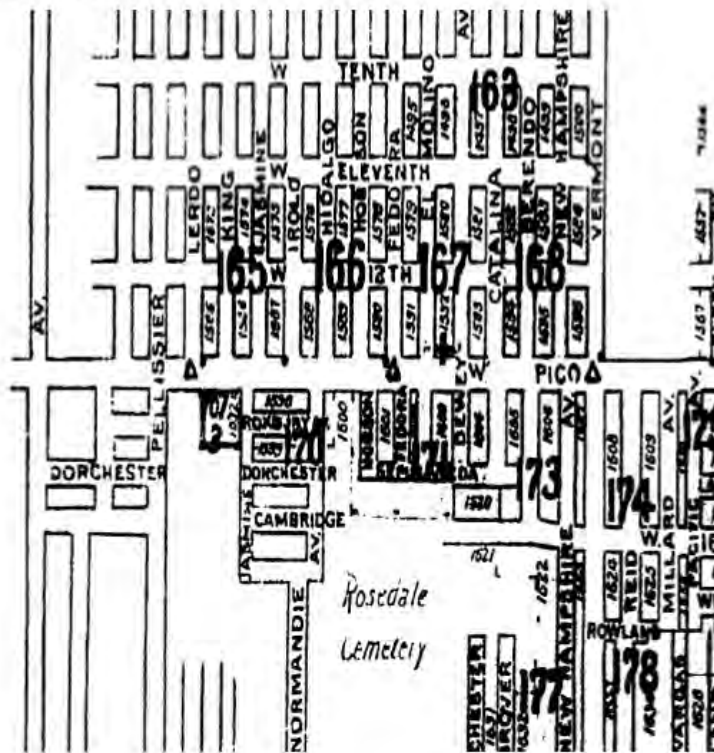
Pico Heights Trolley (Cabinet photo), 1887:



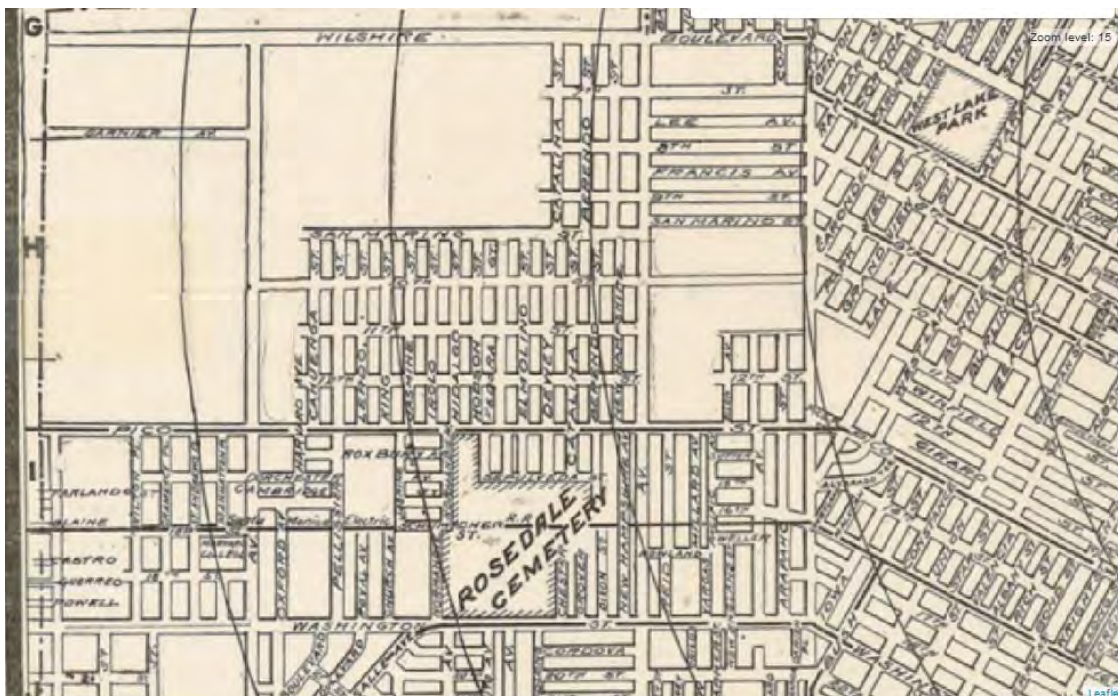
Los Angeles Country Club, Pico and Western Links, 1897:



ProQuest® Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970
 Los Angeles 1894-1900 vol. 4, 1900, Sheet 0



1902 Reuger Map:



Pico Heights and Pellissier Tract – Miscellaneous references

Los Angeles Times, 19 March 1889

Under the "Two Cows" Ordinance
Los Angeles Times (1886-1922): Mar 19, 1889; ProQuest Historical
pg. 1

Under the "Two Cows" Ordinance.

Mrs. Charlotte Robinson was arraigned before Justice Savage yesterday on a charge of maintaining a public nuisance at Pico Heights. The charge was preferred by F. L. Park, who alleges, on behalf of the residents in the neighborhood of Mrs. Robinson's, that since the 15th day of February until the 11th day of March, she has continuously kept for the purpose of a dairy no less than 11 cows in a yard, and that the stench arising therefrom constitutes the offense named. As Mrs. Robinson demanded a jury, her case was set for April 6th, and in the interim she was permitted to carry on the alleged nuisance without being required to put up bonds for her appearance.

Los Angeles Herald, Number 140, 17 February 1899

Ornithological Criminals

The boys in the vicinity of Pico Heights are killing mocking and other song birds. Complaint has been made to the police against the young vandals, and an officer will be detailed to detect them.

Thieves entered the hen house of Mrs. F. M. Burdick of 1153 Pellissier street, Pico Heights, Wednesday night and stole thirty fine birds. The case was reported to the police.

Los Angeles Herald, Number 169, 18 March 1899

STREET WORK RECOMMENDED

Board of Public Works Grinds Out Its Weekly Grist

contract, provided they do the work inside of sixty days. The city engineer is instructed to make an estimate of the cost of improving Pellissier street between Eleventh and Pico and present an ordinance for the work under the bond act. Also that the city engineer be instructed to furnish the city attorney with data for an ordinance of intention to open Burton street from the east line of Calkins' Twenty-third Street tract

Los Angeles Herald, Number 228, 16 May 1899

were adopted. The city engineer likewise caused the adoption of an ordinance or intention for the grading of Pellissier street, from Eleventh to Pico streets, under the bond act at an estimated cost of \$1.44 per front foot.—Frank Oakley.

Los Angeles Herald, Volume XXIX, Number 150, 28 February 1902

For Making Bricks

Henry Jensen of Pellissier street, Pico Heights, was arrested yesterday on complaint of C. G. Berg, who accuses the defendant of maintaining a brickyard in a prohibited district. Police Judge Austin put the matter over until next Tuesday morning, and released Jensen on his own recognizance. The ordinance is to be tested.

Los Angeles Herald, Volume XXX, Number 224, 19 May 1903

Official Council Proceedings

At the regular session of the city council held on Monday, May 18, 1903, the following ordinances of intention were passed: To vacate a portion of Live Oak avenue; to vacate a portion of Hoover street between Sixth street and Wilshire Boulevard; to vacate a

portion of the alley in block 12 of the Highland View tract; to vacate a portion of Navarre street; to condemn lots 1 to 5 of the Stassforth tract and the easterly 200 feet of lot 4 of the Holst tract, for school purposes; to improve Sixteenth street from Magnolia to Pacific avenues; to improve McClintock avenue from Thirty-seventh street to Vermont avenue; to change and establish the grades of the following streets: Savannah street between Second and Fourth streets; Thirty-first street from Vermont to Kansas avenues; Thirty-seventh street from Raymond avenue to Durango street; changing the names of the following thoroughfares: Little Rock avenue between Central avenue and Alameda street to Fifteenth street; Pioneer avenue between Adams and Jefferson streets to La Salle avenue; Royal avenue between Washington street and its northern terminus to Harvard Boulevard; Pellissier street between San Marino and Washington street to Hobart Boulevard; Hobart avenue between Adams and Jefferson streets to Hobart Boulevard; San Pedro street between First and Commercial

Johnson Family Home at 1152 Hobart (next door to Subject property; no longer extant)

(This is the first home purchased by the Johnson, by 1897, on what was then the same parcel as 1156 S. Hobart, described in early directories as sitting on “the northeast corner of Pellissier and 12th Street.” It has been demolished.)

Historic Resources Survey Report -
Wilshire Community Plan Area
Individual Resources – 01/26/15

https://planning.lacity.org/odocument/a4ef4ac0-b50f-4238-a52d-cb6c739765cd/Wilshire_CPA_Individual_Resources_2.pdf



Primary Address: 1152 S HOBART BLVD

Name:

Year built: 1890

Architectural style: Queen Anne

Context 1:

Context:	Residential Development and Suburbanization, 1850-1980
Sub context:	No Sub-context
Theme:	Early Residential Development, 1880-1930
Sub theme:	Early Single-Family Residential Development, 1880-1930
Property type:	Residential
Property sub type:	Single-Family Residence
Criteria:	A/1/1
Status code:	3CS;5S3
Reason:	Significant as representing the earliest pattern of development in the area; a rare remaining example of an intact late 19th century residence in the Wilshire area. Due to alterations, including window replacement, the residence does not retain sufficient integrity for listing in the National Register.

Japanese population in the Uptown District, 1927



Map of the Japanese community in the Uptown area, 1927 (Koyoshi Uono, 130)

From "The Factors Affecting the Geographical Aggregation and Dispersion of the Japanese Residents in the City of Los Angeles," by Koyoshi Uono (Master of Arts thesis, University of Southern California, 1927), page 130.

Population charts of total White and Negro Population, 1850-1930

THE TOTAL WHITE AND NEGRO POPULATION OF LOS ANGELES FROM 1850 TO 1930

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Negro</u>	<u>Percentage of Negro of Total</u>
1850	1,610	1,598	12	0.07
1860	4,385	2,280	65	1.50
1870	5,728	5,349	93	1.60
1880	11,183	10,379	102	0.90
1890	50,395	47,205	1,285	2.50
1900	102,479	98,082	2,131	2.00
1910	319,198	305,307	7,599	2.30
1920	576,673	546,864	15,579	2.70
1930	1,238,048	1,073,584	38,894	3.10

* Data secured from United States Census

From

Bond, J. Max. "The Negro in Los Angeles." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1936.

SECONDARY SUBMISSIONS



2263 SOUTH HARVARD BOULEVARD • HISTORIC WEST ADAMS • LOS ANGELES, CA 90018 • 323-735-WAHA (323-735-9242)

July 28, 2022

RE: CHC-2022-3207-HCM, Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak

Hearing Date: August 4, 2022, Agenda Item No. 6

Dear Cultural Heritage Commission, Commission Staff and the Office of Historic Resources:

Over the past almost 40 years, West Adams Heritage Association (WAHA) has added our expertise as historians and preservation advocates to multiple nominations/applications for Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monuments. At times, we prepare deeply-researched Supplemental Submissions.

For example, WAHA prepared a supplement report on the historic (and then-threatened) murals depicting 300 years of African American history in California that was submitted to support the Los Angeles Conservancy's initial HCM nomination of the Golden State Mutual building in the West Adams District. The WAHA supplement was thereafter included in the final HCM report, and the murals were specifically included in the historic designation (HCM No. 1000).

As another example, WAHA supplemented the initial nomination of the Hauerwass mansion with an additional context statement regarding the community's Japanese American heritage and how it related to the second owners, an important local Japanese American family. The property's official name is the "Hauerwaas-Kusayanagi Residence" (HCM No. 990, 3741 West 27th Street).

We also more recently prepared a Supplemental report for the now-designated Korean Methodist Church in North University Park (HCM No. 1236).

We are not the only organization to do this. The Conservancy's Modern Committee, for instance, prepared supplemental materials for WAHA's nomination of the Glenn Lukens Home and Studio (Raphael Soriano House, HCM No. 866) in Jefferson Park. We welcomed the additions.

These efforts are a good thing. After all, the ultimate public policy purpose of the City's Historic Cultural Monument program is not just to preserve the physical structures as a reminder of the City's architectural past, but also to tell the important stories associated with these buildings. That narrative should be as robust and thorough as possible, and as visible as possible in the City's public records for future scholars, neighbors, community leaders and, of course, future owners, to read.

That is why WAHA is requesting, again, that our Supplemental Significance Statement (submitted on May 26, 2022 and again today, July 28, 2022) for the proposed Historic Cultural Monument, the Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak and Johnson Family Residence - CHC-2022-3207-HCM be included as a part of the file for the Cultural Heritage Commission to consider. The story of this property reveals important legacy history for our community, and of course we support its designation as a City HCM.

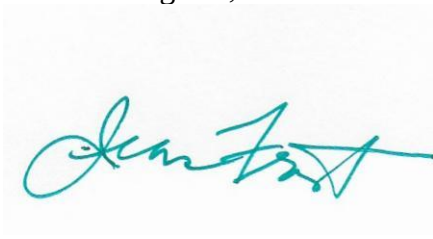
WAHA specifically requests:

- 1). That our supplemental submission of historical background, context statement, supplemental significance statement and supplemental bibliography be adopted by the Cultural Heritage Commission as a part of the nomination application itself;
- 2). That the name of the Historic Cultural Monument be adjusted to be the “Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak and Johnson Family Residence, in recognition of the family that owned the property (for nearly 100 years) on which the residence at 1156 S. Hobart Blvd. was erected in 1905; and
- 3). That the Cultural Heritage Commission give consideration to designating the property not only under Criterion No. 2, recognizing Olympic champion Cornelius Cooper Johnson as a Significant Historic Person; but also under Criterion No. 1, as a property which “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community,” given not just Cornelius Johnson’s role as one of the trailblazing African American athletes at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, and additionally the Johnson family’s pioneering role(s) as early African American settlers in Pico Heights, as described more fully in the Supplemental Significance Statement.

As you are aware, WAHA was asked to set aside the HCM nomination for this property we were working on and instead work with (e.g., supplement) the other applicants. The previously-submitted historical background and context statement, supplemental significance statement, and supplemental bibliography were the result of that effort, and was designed to support the underlying HCM nomination and to be included in the final report for the Commission to consider.

Thank you very much.

With best regards,



Jean Frost
Vice President
West Adams Heritage Association

preservation@westadamsheritage.org



Planning CHC <chc@lacity.org>

Cornelius Johnson Webinar Tuesday Evening Please Watch

1 message

Richard Schave <schavester@gmail.com>
To: Planning CHC <chc@lacity.org>

Mon, Aug 1, 2022 at 6:21 PM

Dear Cultural Heritage Commissioners:

We have a webinar on Tuesday night about the Cornelius Johnson oak:

<https://esotouric.com/event/johnson-oak/>

Please register, you can watch the recording if you can not attend live.

Thanks,

Richard Schave



Planning CHC <chc@lacity.org>

Agenda item 6, Proposed Monument: Cornelius Johnson Residence and Olympic Oak

1 message

linda <lgamero@pacbell.net>
To: chc@lacity.org

Wed, Aug 3, 2022 at 12:26 AM

Hello CHC,

As a lifelong resident of the city of Los Angeles I have witnessed the lack of regard for our city's history far too many times. As the mother of two teens this saddens me.

We presently have the ability to save an important piece of history. That would be vital in instilling worth and belonging to a community especially our youth.

Please vote YES on land marking the Cornelius Johnson Residence and Olympic Oak. By saving this home and having an arborist that specializes in the preservation of old historic trees come and assess the oak tree we would be giving the oak the best chance of survival. It would also be uplifting the residents of this community and beyond.

This tree and home represent beauty and strength in the face of adversity. Once again I ask you to vote YES to landmark the Cornelius Johnson Residence and Olympic Oak.

Best Regards,

Serena Gamero



Planning CHC <chc@lacity.org>

AGENDA ITEM 6, PROPOSED MONUMENT: Cornelius Johnson Residence AND OLYMPIC OAK, CHC-2022-3207-HCM

1 message

Sheree McPeak <ysmcpeak@gmail.com>
To: chc@lacity.org

Wed, Aug 3, 2022 at 9:43 AM

Dear Cultural Heritage Commission:

Please save the 1936 Olympic Oak and Cornelius Johnson Residence. This is very important culturally and historically to Olympic History, Los Angeles History, African-American History and civic pride for their community and contributions to their race, and also pride for all Angelenos.

Please think carefully about this. This is too precious. It is awesome to think the sapling came from Berlin in 1936 and grew to a mighty oak—many metaphors there.

Respectfully,

Yvette Sheree McPeak

DAY OF HEARING SUBMISSIONS

Anna Marie Brooks
1109 4th Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90019
historichmesla@aol.com
310-650-2143

August 3, 2022

TO: Members of the Cultural Heritage Commission
chc@lacity.org

FROM: Anna Marie Brooks, Historian
historichomesla@aol.com

RE: Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak Tree and the Johnson Family Residence
at 1156 S. Hobart Ave.

To the Members of the Cultural Heritage Commission:

I have no doubt that you will vote for HCM status for the Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak Tree and the Johnson Family Residence, for it is historically and culturally important way beyond the City of Los Angeles. I attempted to persuade the current owner of this when he called me hoping to receive aid from me in defending against HCM status. I patiently explained to him that this was possibly one of the earliest surviving residences erected, and continuously lived in by an African American family. I stated in plain English, that that was a big deal. He then asked me about the big tree in the back yard. Could he cut it down? NO, I told him that was important in world history because of Hitler's stance against Blacks. I was astounded that Cornelius Johnson had been granted the Oak seedling on top of his Gold Medal. And that Johnson brought the seedling back to Los Angeles, planted it in the family yard, cared for it, and that his family had continuously cared for it after Johnson's death. I had no idea how many of these seedlings had been planted, grown, and survived as the Johnson tree had. It must continue to be cared for in order to survive from this point forward. He asked what he could do. I advised him to sell the property to someone who would rehabilitate it along with the tree. That was the last time I heard from him.

I recently heard that a foundation has offered to purchase the property. Since it is listed neither on the MLS nor on Loopnet, it remains a rumor in my book. It would be wonderful if it were true and if that foundation is preservation oriented for the residence and more importantly, in the short term, for the Oak tree.

WAHA has expressed concern that the:

Supplemental Submission's Finding [by and from WAHA] that the property as a whole is eligible for designation not only under Criterion No. 2 (association with a Significant Historic Person, Cornelius Johnson), but also under Criterion No. 1, as a property which tells important stories of the history of development in Los Angeles and specifically Pico Heights; the history of the early

Brooks – 2

Black pioneers and middle class; and, of course, the historical significance of the 1936 Olympics, held in Nazi Germany. The tree itself is one the few remaining 130 oak trees awarded to gold medal-winning athletes at the Berlin Olympics, and it is a living representation of Hitler's refusal to acknowledge the accomplishments of America's African American Olympic athletes.

WAHA wishes that their contribution to the nomination be incorporated into the file for this HCM nomination, as at the moment it has not. The document contains additional information and CORRECTIONS to the HCM nomination which are not included in the final Staff Report. It would be a disservice to future researchers and owners if this information is not included among the nomination documents.

Thank you.

Anna Marie Brooks
Historian

cc: preservation@westadamsheritage.org



Planning CHC <chc@lacity.org>

Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak and Johnson Family Residence

1 message

catherine m estrada <simpaticostudiola@gmail.com>
To: chc@lacity.org

Wed, Aug 3, 2022 at 4:38 PM

Cultural Heritage Commission,

As an advocate of historic preservation and a stakeholder in neighboring University Park, I support the designation of the Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak Tree and the Johnson Family Residence as a Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument. Please vote, "yes."

I also ask that it be named:

"Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak and the Johnson Family Resistance."

Additionally, that the "Historical Background, Context, Supplemental Significance Statement and Bibliography" be fully incorporated into the package of materials including the original nomination, staff report, and the photos that the you, the CHC, adopts and include them in your transmission to the City Council as well as the other materials submitted by experts and interested parties to be part of the permanent record for future access for any and all interested parties.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Estrada

LAURA MEYERS

1818 South Gramercy Place • Los Angeles, CA 90019
Tel: 323-868-0854 • Fax: 323-730-0432 • E-mail: lauramink@aol.com

August 3, 2022

Cultural Heritage Commission

RE: CHC-2022-3207, 1156 S. Hobart Blvd.

Proposed Historic Cultural Monument: The Cornelius Olympic Oak and the Johnson Family Residence

Dear Commissioners:

First and foremost, I want to express my full support for the designation of the property at 1156 S. Hobart Blvd., Los Angeles CA 90006 as a Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument. I do hope each of you vote “yes” at the CHC hearing on August 4.

I also ask that you consider renaming it (as above) the “Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak and the Johnson Family Residence,” in order to honor and acknowledge the family – Cornelius’s family – who bought the land in c. 1896, who built the house in 1905 (per the LADBS building permit), who raised a champion, and who lived in the house until c. 1994 – nearly a century of pride and ownership. The Johnsons were regarded by their peers as pioneer Black Angelenos, and we should so honor them today.

I am one of the several West Adams Heritage Association (WAHA) historians and researchers who, at the request of the Office of Historic Resources (OHR), worked with the official applicants, and others, to prepare a deeply-investigated and fact-checked “historical background, context and Supplemental significance statement” detailing the story of the Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak and Johnson Family Residence.” This document was specifically prepared as a supplement to the Applicants’ excellent HCM nomination, and was done in concert with that package of materials; we submitted additional material, and referenced in detail in the supplemental bibliography the sources. We have well over 350 documents, articles and photographs, of which only a small number appear in the supplement.

WAHA submitted this document to OHR in May, with receipt acknowledged; resubmitted it directly to the Commission on May 26, 2022; and submitted a letter regarding it with a link to the document on June 1, 2022. We were unaware that it was not incorporated into the final report until very recently.

As described in WAHA’s June 1 letter, I feel and my colleagues at West Adams Heritage feel that the proposed Monument meets both Criterion 1 and Criterion 2 (per the Cultural Heritage Ordinance, Section 22.171.7). The residence and the tree together tell a multitude of stories that span almost a century and exemplify broad cultural and social themes related to Los Angeles, the United States, and world history.

As we described previously:

- The Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak recalls the spirit of the international Olympic Games and reminds us how politics have always colored their neutrality. It is a tangible artifact of the 1930s, the rise of the Nazis, and the eventual triumph of American freedom over racism and oppression in Europe. At the same time, it reminds us of the challenges faced at home by even the most successful African Americans.

- The Johnson Family Home illuminates the little-known story of early African Americans in Los Angeles and their belief, against considerable obstacles, in the California dream. Cornelius Johnson's two grandmothers, both born in the Deep South during slavery, each came to this city as single mothers, worked in the limited employment opportunities available to them - menial labor and domestic service - and yet were able, in Los Angeles, to buy and build homes, raise families, and take part in creating a vibrant community.
- The Johnson Family Home is an exemplary illustration of how the city of Los Angeles grew westward, with new suburbs that began as outposts and gradually were absorbed into a vast metropolis. In the course of a century, Pico Heights, where the Johnsons settled in c. 1896, was home to farms, homes, real estate speculation, a country club, and ethnic enclaves. The Johnson house, hand-built by Cornelius's father, is an example of thousands of modest homes that are quickly disappearing.
- Specifically, the Cornelius Johnson Olympic Oak is a living memorial to an exceptional home-grown athlete, a world champion whose story deserves to be celebrated.

I also request that the Cultural Heritage Commission specifically include the supplemental document in its Motion and Findings when you vote (as I think you will, and hope you do) to Declare the property a Historic Cultural Monument.

I do not know why staff did not include this Supplemental Significance narrative and all the related materials in their produced work product, nor take its factual information into account in preparing the Staff Recommendation Report. But that is a later discussion. For now, it is important that future researchers, future owners and future community members wishing to learn the history of their neighborhood have all the available materials in one place. It is also important that the City Council receive all available materials in a single transmission.

Another request: Please do consider including this property under Criterion No. 1, "Is identified with important events of national, state, or local history, or exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community," as well as Criterion No. 2, Significant Person. The house and tree, each in their own way, exemplify several historical threads (as described briefly above and in detail in the supplemental narrative). Recognizing the property's place / setting in history in no way detracts from Cornelius Johnson's own incredible story.

Lastly, if possible I would ask that I have just a bit more than the standard one minute to speak during the comment period on this item. And, of course, I will be available to answer any questions the Commissioners may have.

Thank you very much.

Laura Meyers