

Business

After the Japanese Americans vacated the Little Tokyo area in the spring of 1942, the buildings stood empty for a few months as building owners met to decide what to do.

One proposal was to turn the area into a Latin American quarter, housing consulate general offices from Latin America.

Leonard Christmas, an enterprising African American, re-opened the first official business in Bronzeville/Little Tokyo in early 1943 as the Digby Hotel, 506 1/2 East First Street, on the corner of Alameda and First streets.

Christmas, according to the Oct. 8, 1943 Little Tokyo Committee minutes, first started his business by contacting the Santa Fe Railroad workers to see if they needed housing. Finding that they did, he secured a loan from the Security First National Bank. He then approached Little Tokyo building owners and found that the buildings were "practically being given away." From there, Christmas' business prospered as thousands of war workers flocked to the Southland.

Christmas, an active member of the Little Tokyo Committee, was president of the East First Street Chamber of Commerce before helping to organize the Bronzeville Chamber of Commerce in August 1943 (?).

The formation of the Bronzeville Chamber of Commerce received publicity not only in the African American newspapers but in the mainstream press as well. By January 1944, the Bronzeville Chamber of Commerce boasted 125 members, with an office at 111 North San Pedro Street.

The Crown Point Department Store, another early Bronzeville/Little Tokyo business that opened in September 1943, was a cooperative venture among 19 African American women. Clara W. Brown, who headed the group, had run a successful retail store in New Orleans before moving out to Los Angeles. The department store, on the corner of First and Los Angeles streets, sold groceries, meats, dry goods, medication and clothing.

African Americans also formed the Consolidated Hotels Inc., which oversaw seven hotels, including the Civic (formerly the Miyako), Alan, Rossmore, Regal, Royal and U.S.

Progressive groups such as the Los Angeles Workers' School had an office at 212 West Third Street. They offered courses in American history, economics and problems of war. Instructors included progressive thinkers such as Carey McWilliams, John Howard Lawson and Albert Maltz.

AVON HOTEL " 405 S. Hewitt