

## Berkeley Nikkei Landmark Torn Asunder

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BERKELEY — The prewar San Pablo Florist & Nursery building, which until recently was known to neighborhood residents as Auto California, at 1806 San Pablo Ave. was torn down last week.

The building had been identified as a significant structure by the Preserving California's Japantowns project, which was researched and presented by Donna Graves and Jill Shiraki, and mapped and catalogued by cartographer Ben Pease.

According to Dec. 14 article in the Berkeley Daily Planet, the owner of the building, Syed Adeli, plans on building mixed-use retail and condos. The building was actually torn down on Dec. 13, before the Daily Planet article was even published.

By the time Graves heard about the impending demolition and told city officials about the building's historical significance, it was too late to stop the process.

"It remains a challenge in how we can impress upon local cities the importance of its Japanese American immigrant history, and consider the layers of its diverse history," Shiraki told the Hokubei Mainichi. "To look beyond the architecture, to consider the social and cultural history, to include the landscape, requires a new lens and context.

"To find a historic building site obliterated overnight has a jarring impact on how swiftly and completely traces of our Nikkei history can be permanently erased.

"In addition to the building, a grand Japanese pine majestically spanning the open space of the nursery site remained. We had also found brick remnants which may have been from a Japanese garden. Now all of it is gone."

Several buildings and other landmarks have been identified in Berkeley by Preserving California's Japantowns. They can be found on-line at [www.californiajapantowns.org/](http://www.californiajapantowns.org/)



Auto California, formerly the San Pablo Florist and Nursery building, located at 1806 San Pablo Ave. as it appeared before and after its demolition last week.

[berkeley.html](#). The website also has extensive links to past and present Japantowns all over California.

“The San Pablo Nursery is representative of the nearly dozen florists and nurseries in Berkeley and even greater number in Oakland (23), so it tells a particular story of a flourishing Nikkei business,” Shiraki said. “It’s difficult to determine what battles to fight in terms of preservation, but documenting its history remains a battle against time with the age of the historic structures and the Nisei who remember its history.”