

The Following is DRAFT copy of three proposed historical markers at the Teatro Carmen property. The first would replace the existing marker, and the 2nd and 3rd are going to be new markers detailing the history of the Black Elks Lodge and demolished Chinese Market at Simpson and Meyer. The attached drawing depicts the locations we are proposing; the Carmen and Black Elks markers going on the Meyer-facing wall between the two structures and the Chinese Market marker further south on the same wall close to the location of the original building. All markers will be cast bronze, attached to the building by bolt and epoxy. Both markers will include Spanish and English text.

Teatro Carmen Marker

Named for its founder, Carmen Soto Vasquez, and constructed by architect and builder J. B. Rodriguez, this was one of the first theatres in Tucson devoted exclusively to the presentation of dramatic works in Spanish. Opening night, May 20, 1915, featured a performance of “Cerebro Y Corazon” by the Mexican playwright Teresa Farias de Isassi, Teatro Carmen served as an important cultural center for the Hispanic community. Hundreds of performances were staged by local and internationally known companies from Spain and Mexico. After 1922 it became a cinema, meeting hall, ballroom, boxing arena, and garage, and from 1937-1986 the Pilgrim Rest Elks Lodge #601. Teatro Carmen was restored by Stratford Art Works, Inc. and Pima County between 2019-2025.

Elks Lodge Marker

The Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World was established in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1898. Also known as the Black Elks, the IBPOEW was a fraternal organization created by and for African-American men, who were long barred from national fraternal organizations. IBPOEW lodges were places for African-Americans to socialize, celebrate, and provide services to their local communities. In 1925 the Pilgrim Rest Lodge No. 601 of the IBPOEW, was organized which quickly became the city’s most prominent African-American social and service organization. In 1937, Tucson’s Black Elks bought the old Teatro Carmen to use as their clubhouse, and in 1947, they hired the Architectural Firm of Blanton and Cole to design a large addition to the south side of the building. For almost fifty years, the post-WWII Late Moderne clubhouse was an important focus of Tucson’s African-American community, a place to meet, dine, and enjoy live music.

Lee Henry Market Marker

The Southern Pacific Railroad reached Tucson in 1880, dramatically changing the economy of the frontier town and bringing an influx of people seeking jobs and homes. Among the new settlers were Chinese men who had worked to build the railroad, only to face growing anti-Chinese sentiment throughout the West. **Federal immigration laws targeted the Chinese community.** As elsewhere on the frontier, the Chinese settlers of Tucson had to create their own economic niche within this regulatory system, establishing produce farms, restaurants, laundries, and neighborhood grocery stores. In Tucson, the Chinese grocery became a fixture of working-class Mexican-American neighborhoods like the Barrio Histórico. Teatro Carmen was built in 1915 on the site of one early Chinese grocery, and a second Chinese store, Lee Henry Market, stood a few doors south of the theater, at the northwest corner of Meyer Avenue and Simpson Street, for almost fifty years.



1 MEYER AVENUE EAST ELEVATION - HISTORIC MARKER
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

PRELIMINARY
NOT FOR
CONSTRUCTION

TEATRO CARMEN
REHABILITATION OF HISTORIC
THEATER
380 S. MEYER AVE. - TUCSON, AZ 85701

H1 PIMA COUNTY
HISTORIC MARKER

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