

A HISTORY OF THE JAPANESE GARDEN

By Ken Sorrells, edited by Thyra Sorrells

Ken Sorrells was one of the driving forces in the creation of the garden. He was a member of the Arboretum and Botanical Garden Committee and chairman of the Japanese Garden Committee of the Arboretum Foundation. He and his wife, Thyra, were both deeply involved volunteers throughout their lives. This history of the garden is a personal account by Ken of his knowledge and experience.

The story of the Japanese Garden is linked to the history of the Washington Park Arboretum. Most of Washington Park was designated as parkland in 1904, but except for the boulevard and a playfield near Madison Street, much of the park remained undeveloped until the 1930s. In 1924, the Seattle Board of Park Commissioners voted to create a botanical garden and arboretum in association with the University of Washington. The two agencies signed a formal agreement in 1934. At that time, the Seattle Garden Club raised funds to hire the Olmsted brothers of Brookline, Massachusetts, the nation's foremost landscape architecture firm, to design the arboretum.

As early as 1937, the nonprofit Arboretum Foundation felt that a Japanese garden should be part of the city, but the project remained unfulfilled for more than twenty years. In 1957, Mrs. Neil [Emily] Haig became chair of the Arboretum Foundation Special Projects Committee, and two years later the long dormant plans for a Japanese garden were set in motion.

At about that same time, 1958, Mr. Moriwaki of the Tokyo Park Department was visiting America and was seeing the sights of Seattle as the guest of James Fukuda, who at that time was working for Consul Takeno. Mr. Moriwaki was unimpressed by the quality of the small Japanese gardens he had seen in Seattle. But when Jim Fukuda showed him the area where the garden now stands, Mr. Moriwaki told him, "This is a good spot and I would be especially pleased if you would let me and my associates design the garden for you." It was not long after this encounter that Mayor Clinton and Consul Takeno started the program and the Arboretum Foundation, with Mrs. Haig working at high speed, were ready to find funding and accomplish the building of the garden.

A committee was appointed for the work of funding, as well as on the selection of a qualified, experienced designer to supervise the entire project. The person chosen by the committee to direct their special project was eminently qualified for the task. He was Juki Iida, designer and builder of more than 1,000 Japanese gardens worldwide. Working with six other well-known Japanese garden designers, including the famous Mr. K. Inoshita, Mr. Iida produced thirty-six pages of blueprints outlining the plans for the three and a half- acre garden.

On 1 March 1960, Mr. Iida and some of his staff came from Japan to supervise final construction of the garden. He personally selected more than 580 large granite rocks some of them huge boulders, from Bandera in the Cascade Mountains near Snoqualmie Pass. The rocks, ranging in weight from 1,000 pounds to more than eight and a half tons, were carefully placed in designated locations, in keeping with the plans. After the rocks were in place, hundreds of plants selected to represent diverse scenes to be found in Japan were arranged according to Mr. Iida's directions. Included were azaleas and rhododendrons, as well as camellias, evergreens, flowering cherry trees, mosses, and ferns

The generous gift of an Arboretum Foundation member [Prentice Bloedel, at the time an anonymous gift] gave a good start to the funding for the project, while at the same time Seattle's mayor and Japan's consul wrote letters to Japan and elsewhere stating that a garden was going to be built and suggested that items which might be used in the garden would be welcome.

Response to this request was immediate and two enormous granite lanterns were dispatched to Seattle from our sister city, Kobe. The governor of Tokyo Metropolitan District responded by offering the services of his park department designers, and also offered a new teahouse which was about to be seen in a Washington state trade fair, to be held in Hec-Edmondson Pavilion, University of Washington. The teahouse was exquisitely hand-constructed in Japan, then disassembled for shipment. It arrived in Seattle as 1500 pieces packed in fourteen crates. After the trade fair, it was disassembled and erected again at the garden site before our garden construction began.

In April of 1973, the teahouse was destroyed by fire. In 1979, the Arboretum Foundation raised the funds to rebuild the teahouse, using the original plans. Once more, Jim Fukuda came to the rescue, locating Fred Sugita, Hiroshima-born artisan and builder. Fred spoke very little English, but was able to read the plans for the original teahouse which were written in Japanese, (which we fortunately had) and possessed the Japanese tools and expertise to reconstruct the teahouse exactly as it had been before the fire. On a beautiful spring day, 8 March 1981, Dr. Soshitsu Sen, fifteenth Grand Master of the centuries-old Urasenke Foundation of Japan, bestowed upon it the name, Shoseian, "Arbor of the Murmuring Pines."

Requests for funding were answered from all directions. Individuals gave freely, as did all the Arboretum units and many businesses of Seattle. The National Bank of Commerce gave eleven very old granite Japanese lanterns that were purchased in Japan, and paid to have them transported to Seattle.

As mentioned before, in March 1960, Mr. Iida and his assistant, Mr. Kitamura, returned to Seattle to supervise the construction of the garden. Mr. William Yorozu of the Yorozu Construction

Company was given the position of prime contractor, while Ishimitsu Company was to build all the wooden structures except the teahouse. Richard Yamasaki was hired to do the rock work.

I would like to deviate a bit to tell you about the rock selection for the garden. Incidentally, the rock work in our garden is second to none, and one of the most important parts of the Japanese garden. Mr. Iida was especially interested in securing quality rock for the proposed garden, and went with Mr. Yorozu to look over the best available for his future use. After visiting several sites, and rejecting rocks considered "too new," he found what he knew to be ancient granite rock that was sliding down the hillside near Bandera on the Snoqualmie River. At the sound of the rock sliding, he knew at once that it was hard granite, very old, and similar to what he has been using in Japan. Bill Yorozu tells us the Mr. Iida ran up the rockslide, caring little for the danger of further sliding, and checked out the amount of rocks that would be needed. They later came back with the owners of the rocks and purchased 584 large rocks, averaging a little over one-half ton each. When it came time to pay the man, they asked his price and he told them, "Nine dollars a ton." That does not sound like much, but the 600 tons of rock called for \$5,400 for starters.

Mr. Yorozu hired a trucker to haul the stones down the mountain, insisting that each be wrapped in bamboo to prevent scratching and to preserve the moss. The hauler's ten-ton had much trouble determining when there were ten tons or more on his truck. His first trip was stopped at the weighing station for an overload of some three tons. He was fined two cents per pound and allowed to proceed. His second trip was only two tons over and cost him \$80 for the overload. On the third trip he carried the largest stone used in the garden. It weighed eight and one-half tons and eventually landed at the foot of the waterfall. Unfortunately he also had four tons more than his truck was allowed and this time he was cited and asked to appear in court for his carelessness. Bill Yorozu paid the bill and all went well in the delivery of the 584 rocks. All were placed two-thirds underground.

Work on the garden started in the month of March and the finished product was dedicated and opened to the public on 5 June 1960. The night before the opening, we were there to see if the garden was ready. It appeared to us that maybe five to ten more days work might be needed, but the next day, there it was, beautiful and complete in every respect.

For years, the University of Washington managed the Japanese garden as part of the Arboretum. In 1981, management and operation of the garden was transferred to the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation. Since that time, the department has continued the program of maintenance and supervised the continued authenticity of the garden, all for the public's enjoyment.

No story of the history of the Japanese Garden would be complete without mentioning the contributions of Jim Fukuda. He was our savior. He not only set the building program in motion

with R. Moriwaki and later with Juki Iida, he also spoke perfect Japanese and was our full-time interpreter with Mr. Iida during his months of work at the garden.

As you proceed toward the entrance to the garden you will notice a large-leafed tree located over a large granite rock. This is a Paulownia, or Empress tree, the blossom and leaf of which is the symbol of the Ashikaga shoguns including the Momoyama period, the period of our garden. On the rock is a small brass plaque on which is written: "James Fukuda-his help in building this garden was beyond measure."

Jim not only helped Mr. Iida, but he kept us out of trouble in matters of Japanese protocol, culture, and symbolism. One day I received a call from Jim that needed immediate attention. It seems that Mr. Iida needed some spending money. In leaving Japan at that time, a man on business was allowed only \$3.75 for spending money. I asked Jim what Mr. Iida has been using for money all these past days and Jim told me that he had been signing chits for all his expenses at the hotel and dining room. We rushed Jim a check and so far as I know, this was the only money Mr. Iida ever received in this country for expenses and travel. The Japanese government and the city of Tokyo sponsored Mr. Iida and his associates for the project.

There are many tales to tell about Jim Fukuda and his invaluable help in carrying us all through thick and thin until that day on 5 June 1960, when the garden was dedicated and opened to the public.