



The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

400 Yesler Building Seattle, Washington 98104 • (206)625-4501

July 16, 1980

LPB-303/80

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

Name of Property: The Kubota Gardens
9727 Renton Avenue South

Legal Description: So. 115 feet of Tract 7 and all of
Tracts 9, 10, 11, 12 and 17, Rainier
Beach Garden Tracts.

At their July 02, 1980 Public Hearing, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve the designation of the Kubota Gardens as a City of Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following criteria for designation of City Ordinance #106348:

Section 3.01 (3) It is associated in a significant way with a significant aspect of the cultural, political, or economic heritage of the community, city, state or nation; or

Section 3.01 (4) It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or of a method of construction; or

The Kubota Gardens from the cultural criterion represent an interpretation, resulting from 50 years of labor and aesthetic planning by one family, of the Japanese approach (informal) to planning and planting.

Section 3.01 (5) It is an outstanding work of a designer or builder; or

Certainly, this important series of designed open spaces represents an outstanding achievement on the part of its original designer and planner, Mr. Fujitaro Kubota.

Section 3.01 (6) Because of its prominence of spatial location contrasts of siting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of its neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or the city;

The gardens, as they exist now represent a pronounced contrast of siting and treatment in relation to the urban, built-up environment around them, and provide a much needed series of planted open spaces in Southeast Seattle. These aspects, combined with the superior display and disposition of plant materials, provide a site of importance to the entire city and regions.

Features identified for preservation include:

All plantings, garden and structural elements within the core garden area (the exact boundary of which to be determined) as shown on attached drawing.

Issued, July 16, 1980
Earl D. Layman
City Historic Preservation Officer

by:


Roberta Deering
Board Coordinator

RD:dn

Attachment



City of Seattle
Department of Community Development/Office of Urban Conservation

Landmark Nomination Form

Name KUBOTA GARDENS Year Built 1929 and on
(Common, present or historic)

Street and Number Intersection of 55th Avenue South and Rainier Avenue South.

Assessor's File No. _____

Legal Description Plat Name _____ Block _____ Lot _____

Extent of site to be considered for nomination and designation
to be determined.*

Present Owner Tak and Tom Kubota et al Present Use Garden and Nursery (?)
and

Address _____

Original Owner Fujitaro Kubota et al Original Use Gardens, and working gardens

Architect/Designer Fujitaro Kubota Builder same

*See attached staff recommendation.

Description: Present and original (if known) physical appearance and characteristics

A step by step history of the family and the gardens is attached to this nomination form. As the gardens developed through the years they were extremely well maintained and expanded and viewed by distinguished visitors from not only the Orient but from all the world. With the advent of World War II and the removal of the family from the area, the gardens were neglected for four years, and never quite re-achieved their former manicured splendor.

These gardens well complement Japanese gardens at the Arboretum in Seattle, at Washington Park in Portland and at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. Those gardens in each case more exactly and rigidly reproduce the "formal" Japanese garden (not to be confused with formal renaissance gardens of the West). As was customary for centuries with much Japanese architecture, traditional formulae of organization and composition were adhered to. The Kubota gardens make no attempt to follow such precepts, but, rather were designed by a "non-professional not from Japan" and attempted to, and did, make original use of local and Japanese plant material and other landscape elements. This site actually was a demonstration garden much of the time. Slide presentations demonstrate well the dazzling and quite different displays of plant materials and colors in Fall and Spring. At the same time the gardens once located on the periphery of the city, now are a vital breathing space, surrounded by built up neighborhoods, which also present a high degree of aesthetic charm and beauty. (see attached site analysis).

SITE ANALYSIS

A. Soils

- (1) Predominately older clay.
- (2) History of poor drainage.

B. Topography

- (1) Site lies below grade of Renton Avenue South.
- (2) Varies in height throughout the site about 25 feet, 5-15%.
- (3) Largest change in height about 50 feet.
- (4) Ravine part of landslide area.

C. Hydrology

- (1) Pond, stream fed by natural springs.
- (2) Ponds with concrete bulk head, no lining.
- (3) Sulphur spring.
- (4) Waterfall activated by 10 horse 3 phase pump with 2 inch discharge.
- (5) Potential areas to be developed.

D. Vegetation

- (1) Native/exotic.
- (2) Exotic plants for formal garden, for ongoing projects.
- (3) Quantity, type, size.

E. Micro climate

- (1) Shielded from southwest winter winds.
- (2) Cold pocket.

F. Land Use

- (1) Formal garden for exhibit.
- (2) Working garden for on going projects.

G. Circulation

- (1) Easy access by public transportation.
- (2) Site accessible west, north and east at five points by auto.
- (3) Road improvements.
- (4) Pedestrian paths.

H. Structures

- (1) One two-story residence of good quality and two residences of lesser quality.
- (2) Adjacent to the large residence are outbuildings used primarily in conjunction with the Kubota Gardens business.

I. Utilities

- (1) Are available around perimeter of the site, however, development of site for residential use would require considerable expense.

J. Cultural features

- (1) Master Stone
- (2) Kubota Garden Stone
- (3) Memorial Stone

Site Analysis Continue

- (4) Yasakoi Saki stone
- (5) Waterfall
- (6) Bridges
- (7) Water basin
- (8) Lanterns
- (9) Shelter
- (10) Benches

K. Visual Analysis

- (1) Scenic panorama overlooking site and Lake Washington.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

1881 Fujitaro Kubota born in Kochi Prefecture, Shikoku Island.

A farmer in his native Japan, Kubota learned about soils in an agricultural school there and developed an early appreciation of old temples and gardens of Kochi Prefecture.

1906 F. Kubota arrived in San Francisco and migrated up the coast to Seattle.

During the first world war the Kubota family operated the Taft Hotel.

After decline of the first world war, F. Kubota sold the Hotel and apartment house.

1923 F. Kubota began a gardening and landscape business from a hobby.

Moved from maintenance gardening to creative landscaping, pioneering Japanese gardening in the Seattle area.

Landscaped some of the most exclusive properties in the Seattle area: Magnolia, Laurelhurst, and Windemere.

1929 F. Kubota purchased five acres of land and began developing the area.

From its original conception, the development of the Kubota Gardens was never intended to produce an authentic Japanese Garden. Rather, it was conceived to serve as a demonstrative exhibit for clients, and to provide the community with a garden to be proud of.

Development of the Kubota Gardens proceeded slowly, a function of time and/or money available. Much of the initial site work was carried out during the depression years.

In the beginning, a ten foot ditch was excavated to drain an existing swamp. Next, a rock garden was installed along the embankment of Renton Avenue South. A road system was then laid out which enclosed a lawn area featuring a planting bed of annuals. Later the ponds were constructed and the garden expanded to include a rose garden, a garden of lilies, and additional lawn areas then comprising some 3½ acres.

1940 Residence built.

Site Analysis Continue

- 1942 At the commencement of World War two, F. Kubota, his wife and family, compelled to suffer the indignity of being transported from the gardens to an internment camp a thousand miles away, there to remain for the duration of that conflict. During this time no work was completed in the gardens.
- 1945 F. Kubota, his wife and family, return to the gardens.
- During the course of 45 years, Fujitaro Kubota has applied his skill to numerous Seattle homes, companies and institutions: Bloedel, Marmeduke, and Blethyn residences, Rainier Club, the Seattle University campus, the Seattle Times Building, work at the Seattle Center, and as an advisor for the Arboretum Japanese Garden.
- 1968 Fujitaro Kubota's dream: to leave some enduring work, a memorial that will not only beautify the Community, but will promote goodwill and give Americans a better appreciation of the culture of Japan.
- 1972 Japanese Government awarded F. Kubota the fifth class order of The Sacred Yreasure, a decoration for his achievement in his adopted country for introducing and building respect for Japanese Gardening in this area and thus contributing to the community's recognition of his people here.
- 1973 Fujitaro Kubota lived to see much of his dream realized when he died at the age of 92.
- 1980 The property is now held by his two sons, Tak and Tom, and they are now faced with economic realities which force them to consider disposing of this asset.

Statement of significance

The Kubota Gardens are significant:

- * From the historical standpoint, demonstrating 50 years of labor and aesthetic planning by one family.
- * From the cultural standpoint, as an interpretation of the Japanese approach (informal) to planning and planting.
- * From an aesthetic and functional standpoint as an important series of open spaces in the southeast portion of the City, of importance to the entire city and region.


Photographs:

Slides by Kraig Kemper/Kenichi Nakano

Slides by J.M. Neil

Slides by Earl D. Layman

Reference: Senior Project by Kraig Kemper, University of Washington, 1976.

Submitted by: 
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Date 16 May 1980

Reviewed  Date 5/19/80
Historic Preservation Officer