The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

Mailing Address: PO Box 94649 Seattle WA 98124-4649
Street Address: 700 5th Ave Suite 1700

REPORT ON DESIGNATION LPB 365/06

Name and Address of Property: **Seattle Japanese Language School**
1414 S. Weller St.

Legal Description: Hill Tract Addition Supplement, Block 29, Lots 11, 12, 14, 16

At the public meeting held on October 4, 2006, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Seattle Japanese Language School at 1414 S. Weller St. as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25.12.350:

A. It is the location of, or is associated in a significant way with, an historic event with a significant effect upon the community, City, state or nation

C. 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.

DESCRIPTION:

Site, Setting and Context

Kokugo Gakkō, later known as Seattle Japanese Language School, is a complex of three wood frame buildings constructed over a period of seventeen years between 1912 and 1929, as the purposes of this educational institution evolved and expanded. Building 1 and Building 2 are prominently clustered at the southwest corner of South Weller Street and 16th Avenue South. Building 3 is located along the north side of the site, which is further bounded by South King Street. The site slopes steeply downhill to the southwest and toward Rainer Avenue South, a major traffic arterial connecting the Rainier Valley, the International District and First Hill neighborhoods. Most of the site is surrounded by chain link or cedar fencing.

Located in the southwest portion of the Central District neighborhood, the setting of the school complex is dominated by single-family residences and small apartment houses to the north and east, and vacant parcels and low-scale commercial buildings along Rainier Avenue to the west and south. Historically, the immediate neighborhood was the primary residential area for Seattle's immigrant and Japanese American population from the early 1900s through the post WWII era and into the 1950s. Nearby are other vestiges of the Japanese American

community including several churches with predominantly Japanese American congregations.

The school site is located some five blocks to the east of the International District neighborhood and Nihonmachi [Japantown], which remains the center of commercial activity and was the historic core location of businesses owned or operated by and patronized by members of the Japanese-American community.

Current Appearance - Building 1

Building 1 and Building 2 are both approached by way of a concrete stairways leading from S. Weller Street or 16th Avenue South. A low concrete retaining wall and a steep landscaped lawn area separate each building from the roadway and sidewalk area along S. Weller Street.

The initial front portion of Building 1 was constructed in 1912 and the rear wing was added in 1917. Building 1 is a two story, wood frame structure supported by a brick masonry foundation at the front portion and a reinforced concrete perimeter foundation at the rear addition. The building does not include a basement level. The two wings measure approximately 48 x 60 feet and 22 x 72 feet for a total floor area of approximately 8600 square feet. It exhibits a flat roof form accentuated by a simple wooden cornice at the south and east elevations and north and south ends of the west elevation.

The formal entry at the South Weller Street (south) elevation is distinguished by a prominent brick and concrete porch and a pedimented central entry roof. The entry is further accentuated by ornate wooden brackets with acanthus leaves and pilaster details. Double, non-historic solid core entry doors include a covered transom light above. Modern pipe rail handrails and guardrails have been installed at the concrete porch and entry stairway.

The exterior is clad with a horizontal vinyl siding product placed over non-historic asbestos shingles and original rustic dropped wooden siding. The modern siding has a similar exposure and appearance to the concealed original wood cladding. Fenestration consists of tall narrow, double-hung windows that are symmetrically set in individual openings with the exception of the north elevation where the windows are set in groups of six at each of the classrooms at both floor levels. Original wooden window sash has been replaced with aluminum windows throughout. Portions of some window openings have been blocked in at the north elevation.

First Floor (Interior): The interior spaces are organized around a double loaded eight-foot wide corridor. The initial front portion was constructed in 1912 and includes two large classrooms along the east side and an office space, stairwell, faculty room and kitchen along the west side. The 1917 addition at the northern end of the building includes a Boys' and a Girls' restroom beyond which is an interior partition with a doorway and a classroom to each side of a rear stairwell. The corridor is terminated by a set of exit doors.[1]

Second Floor: This floor level exhibits the same general layout as First Floor with classrooms organized along a eight-foot wide double loaded corridor. Four classrooms are located at

[1] Refer to annotated JLS floor plan (2006) attachment that clarifies construction dates/phases.

south end of this floor level and two classrooms are located at the north end addition. Boys' and Girls' restrooms are stacked above those situated on the First Floor level.

One original wooden stairwell with handrails and newel posts is the most distinctive intact feature to remain within the interior. Portions of original fir flooring, window and door trim and some five-panel doors remain in place; however the interior has generally been altered or modernized.

Current Appearance - Building 2

Building 2 was constructed in 1925 and is very similar in exterior appearance to Building 1. It is a two story, wood frame structure supported by a steel reinforced concrete foundation with a smooth concrete stucco finish. A portion of the southwest corner of the building includes a basement level, built to house heating equipment. Building 2 measures approximately 50 x 88 feet and includes a total floor area of approximately 8000 square feet. It exhibits a flat roof form with a simple wooden cornice at the west, south and east elevations.

The formal entry at the South Weller Street (south) elevation closely matches that of Building 1. It is also distinguished by a prominent concrete porch and a pedimented central entry roof, however the wooden brackets are not as ornate and are more rudimentary in construction. It also includes pilasters to each side of a set of modern entry doors with glazed upper and lower panels. Original transom light and sidelights appear to have been covered. The original concrete porch and stairways with pipe rail handrails and guardrails remain in place.

The exterior is also clad with a horizontal vinyl siding product placed over the non-historic asbestos shingles and the original beveled wooden siding. The modern vinyl siding has a similar exposure to the concealed original cladding. Fenestration consists of tall narrow, double-hung windows that are symmetrically set in individual openings and in groups on the east elevation. Original wooden window sash has been replaced with aluminum windows throughout. Several original window openings have been blocked in along the north elevation. The rear (north) elevation is flush with that of Building 1.

First Floor (Interior): The interior spaces are also organized around a double loaded eight-foot wide corridor with an open stairwell near the main entry at the west side of the south end of the corridor. Two original classrooms are located along the west side of corridor and are connected by a deep arched opening. These spaces now serve as museum facility. Building 2 is interconnected to Building 1 via an enclosed breezeway toward the rear of the first floor level. Portions of original cladding are visible within the breezeway, which appears to have been enclosed fairly recently. An unused kitchen and restroom area are located to west side of the north end of this floor level and the corridor is terminated by a second open stairwell. The east side of the first floor level is entirely taken up by a gymnasium/assembly space created by removing the partitions between three former classrooms.

Second Floor: This floor level exhibits the same general layout as First Floor with classrooms organized along a double loaded corridor. Five classrooms are located at this level along with unused restroom and kitchen areas stacked above those situated on the First Floor level.

The two original classrooms that are currently used as the museum facility exhibit the most intact interior features and finishes in the complex including original slate blackboards, dark stained running and standing woodwork and fir floors. The corridors include two intact wooden stairwells with handrails and newel posts as well as original fir flooring, woodwork and five-panel doors. The interior of Building 2 has been generally less altered and modernized than Building 1.

Current Appearance - Building 3

Building 3 was added to the complex in 1929 and is separated from Buildings 1 and 2 by a paved alley. It is a single story, wood frame structure with a post & pier foundation that has been seismically upgraded. It measures approximately 30 x 96 feet with a total floor area of approximately 2880 square feet. It exhibits a low-pitched, hipped roof form with exposed rafter ends that is clad with asphalt shingle roofing. The roof form is penetrated by three narrow brick masonry chimneys and two small gabled roof vents at the center of its east and west slopes.

The exterior is clad with rustic dropped siding and ribbed-plywood skirting around the foundation base. Fenestration consists of tall narrow openings that are set in groups of four at the east elevation and groups of five at the north elevation and west elevation of the north classroom. Original multi-pane (9/9) wooden single hung window sash remains in place throughout.

A formal entry porch is located at the center of the west elevation. A set of double doors provides access to an entry hall. Three individual exterior classroom entry doors with transom lights are also located on the east elevation. Original concrete porches are located at the west and east elevations, however modern wooden handrails, guardrails and stairways have been installed at both entryways. The formal entry porch also leads to an open grass and a rockery to the west side of Building 3.

The interior space within Building 3 is divided between three classrooms, a restroom area, and a teachers' room accessible from the entry hall. A storage area is located within the southernmost classroom space and a small office and copy room added within the central classroom space. Modestly detailed interior spaces, features and finishes are generally intact.

Non-Historic Alterations and Additions

All three buildings are well maintained and in sound structural condition. The buildings are generally well preserved, exhibiting intact building form, exterior design features and fenestration pattern.

Principal alterations to Building 1 and Building 2 include the installation of vinyl horizontal siding over non-historic asbestos shingle siding. Portions of original beveled wooden siding are visible within the breezeway and may be intact under the modern cladding materials,

however overall condition of original cladding is unknown. Original wooden, double hung, window sash with a 2/2 sash configuration were removed and replaced by 1/1 double hung aluminum units c.1990. Miscellaneous window openings on the north elevation of both Building 1 and Building 2 have been blocked out.

The original wooden porch handrails and guard rails at the entry porch of Building 1 has been replaced by modern pipe rail systems. Decorative iron handrails and guardrails at Building 3 have been replaced by current wooden railing and stairway construction. Security grills have been installed at all entry doors within the complex. The courtyard and the breezeway area between Building 1 and Building 2 were both enclosed by wood-frame walls c. 1990.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The Seattle Japanese Language School is the oldest operating Japanese language school in the continental United States. Originally established in 1902 and known as Kokugo Gakkō, it became a major vehicle in the transmission of language and cultural values to the Nisei and Sansei, the primarily American-born children and grandchildren of first generation Japanese immigrants, the Issei. The school initially functioned in temporary quarters until an appropriate school building could be constructed in 1912. Between 1912 and 1929, as the role of this educational institution evolved and the student population expanded the school complex grew to its current configuration.

Kokugo Gakkō was one of approximately 27 similar language schools operating in Washington State during the 1930s and was part of an extensive system of such schools along the Pacific Coast. However, few of these institutions survived beyond the post-World War II era and very few are believed to be as well preserved as the Seattle Japanese Language School complex. Kokugo Gakkō is a particularly unique property type and possesses significant associations with a highly significant aspect of the cultural heritage of the City of Seattle, the State of Washington and the nation. Kokugo Gakkō was listed in the National Register of Historic Places at a *national* level of significance in 1982.

Establishment of Kokugo Gakkō

Japanese immigrants began to arrive and settle in Seattle in the late 1870s. The pattern increased especially after laws were instituted to restrict the number of Chinese that could enter the country. Large scale Japanese immigration to Seattle occurred in the 1890s and continued until 1924. By 1891, Japantown [Nihonmachi] developed along Main Street to the east of the established commercial district and a burgeoning Japanese community operating hotels, laundries, bathhouses and restaurants became established. By1910, the U.S. recorded that Japanese represented Seattle's largest minority population. An important factor in the establishment of the community was that unlike Chinese immigrants, the Japanese were allowed to bring wives and children to settle with them.

By the turn of the nineteenth century Japanese children, both those born in Seattle or brought here from Japan, typically attended public school. As the number Nisei or second-generation

children increased, concerns about their educational needs became apparent. The October 1901 issue of the Japanese Association's newspaper *Nihonjin* included an article focused on the potential need for a separate school for Japanese children in Seattle:

> *The Japanese have no plan to live permanently in the United States and it goes without saying that we recognize the necessity of providing our children with a Japanese style education. We are in another country where we differ in terms of racial background, language, culture, and customs. Consequently, we must carefully evaluate the current situation in which we rely on foreigners to provide elementary school education for our children.*[2]

The following year the Japanese Association established an elementary school that operated in a portion of the Association's space on the second floor of the Baker Building at 2nd Avenue South and Main Street, later known as the Stetson Building. The first instructor was Yoshio Shibayama, who initially taught Japanese language and literature to four students. By 1905, it was apparent that the small space provided by the Association was not suitable for a school. Relocating the school or constructing a new school building began to receive serious consideration.

While the debate as to how best to solve the school problem continued for several years, a pivotal event occurred in July of 1905 when Baron Jutarō Komura stopped by Seattle on his way to Portsmouth, New Hampshire where he was to participate in negotiations to bring a conclusion to the Russo-Japanese War. While in Seattle he met with C.T. (Charles Tetsuo) Takahashi of the Japanese Association and discussed the education of young Japanese in the city. Baron Komura took a special interest in the elementary school and offered to donate $500.00 to support the educational work of the Association. Other members of the Japanese diplomatic mission also contributed money. These donations were the beginning of a fund raising effort that would eventually result in construction of the present Seattle Japanese Language School.

By June 1908, 37 Japanese children attended the Main Street School and 11 attended South School, public grammar schools in the vicinity of Nihonmachi. Of this total, 27 children were also part-time students at the Japanese Association Elementary School. These students were divided into four groups and given two hours of instruction each weekday afternoon, which was a logistical challenge for the teachers and did not produce the best educational results. The location of the school was also considered to be unsatisfactory for multiple reasons. Classes were held in what was essentially a meeting hall with offices and the facilities were not suitable for teaching small children. It was far from both of the public schools and consequently the students were often late for their Japanese classes. There were also many hazards related to walking to 2nd and Main due to dangerous intersections, horses,

[2] Historical facts included in this Statement of Significance are primarily drawn from extensive research and documentation included in a series of articles authored by Scott Edward Harrison and published in *The North American Post*, July-August 2005 and an unpublished manuscript "History of the Japanese Language School" also authored by Mr. Harrison.

and delivery wagons. Furthermore, teachers and parents believed it was important that the educational environment be enjoyable so that lessons could be fully absorbed.

Between 1907 and 1908 the Japanese Association held a series of community meetings to plan for a new school building, the school was renamed and it moved to a new location. In June 1908 members of the Nihonjinkai Kyōikubu [Education Section of the Japanese Association] crafted an education plan for presentation to the community at a Kyōiku Enzetsukai［Town Meeting on Education], which was held later that month for the purpose of encouraging public discussion of the issues. Japanese Consul Tanaka, Takuma Tsubota, and several other influential members of the Japanese community spoke about Japanese language education in Seattle and the critical need for a new school building.

On August 24, 1908 the Japanese Association formed a Gakumu Iinkai [School Affairs Committee] to superintend efforts to establish a new school building. The committee also selected Kokugo Gakkō as the name of the new school. The term Kokugo Gakkō is usually translated as Japanese Language School. However, the word Kokugo means national language, or language of the nation and Gakkō means school. A more literal translation would be National Language School. Many Japanese language schools in North America were called Nihongo Gakkō, meaning literally Japanese Language School, with Nihongo being the word for Japanese language. The name Kokugo Gakkō implies that the Japanese spirit, traditional values, morality, and the nurturing of a sense of identity as a Japanese was an integral part of language instruction. Thus, a Nihongo Gakkō was, at least in theory, a school that concentrated primarily on the teaching of language with somewhat less emphasis on imparting a particular value system.

Kokugo Gakkō was to be independent from the Japanese Association and a new organization called Kokugo Gakkō Ijikai [Language School Board, or Board of Trustees] was formed to administer the school. Financial support for the new school was to be derived totally through membership fees paid by Ijikai members and donations from the community and the previous system of a monthly tuition payment was abolished. Committee members began discussions regarding building costs, fund raising, and construction plans for a new school building. Reportedly, the Kokugo Gakkō then moved to a house located somewhere near Main and Maynard; but due to the Jackson Regrade, the school had to subsequently vacate this property. It was moved to the basement of the Buddhist Church, possibly the former quarters of the Bukkyō Seinenkai [Young Men's Buddhist Association] within the original Buddhist mission building at 624 Main Street.

Planning for acquisition of land and construction of the new school building appears to have been delayed by disagreements in the community about how the funds should be spent, and even if they should be expended on a school building at all. By July 1909 the school had again moved, this time to 1211 Jackson Street. Then again in September 1910 the school was relocated in the basement of the new Seattle Buddhist Church, which had opened in October 1908 at 1020 Main Street, apparently the fifth location to house the school in just over a period of two years.

Construction and Evolution of the School Complex

In late 1911, Edward L. Blaine, a prominent citizen and member of the Seattle City Council from 1911-1913, offered to rent the Association a piece of property where they could build a permanent school building. This idea appealed to the school committee because it would not have to search for an affordable building lot and come up with a large down payment. Consequently, in November 1911 a decision was made to accept Mr. Blaine's offer and the committee moved forward with this plan despite objections from some members. A Kenchiku Iinkai [Building Committee] was selected consisting of Seimei Yoshioka, Yoshinobu Fujii, Kiyoshi Kumamoto, Kōjirō Takeuchi, Juichirō Terusaki (formerly Juichirō Itō), C.T. Takashashi, Masajirō Furuya, Kametarō Hirade, and Toyojirō Tsukuno. Suekichi Shimizu was asked to prepare a set of architectural plans, which he reportedly completed in about two weeks.

While fund raising and accounting efforts went forward and a construction office was set up, serious objections to the use of the Blaine property increased in number and intensity throughout the month of May 1912. Finally, in late June the arrangements to rent the Blaine property were cancelled and the original plan of purchasing a building lot resurfaced. Kiyoshi Kumamoto, C.T. Takahashi, Seimei Yoshioka, Yoshinobu Fujii, and Goichirō Shinohara were appointed to a land selection committee. In early July the committee reported on the availability of a suitable land parcel at 16th Avenue South and Weller Street. Shortly thereafter on July 11, 1912, the Kokugo Gakkō Ijikai was incorporated by filing Articles of Incorporation with the State of Washington and they negotiated a purchase agreement for $3,000 on July 29, 1912.

Mr. Shimizu's drawings were reviewed and the plans were filed with the Department of Buildings on September 4, 1912. The building permit was issued on September 5 and a request for construction bids issued on September 7, 1912. The low bid of $3,915 was submitted by carpenters Yoshitarō Tamai and Gotarō Shibagaki, and plumber Rikichi Teramae and approved by the committee. Construction of the initial portion of Building 1 began on September 17, 1912 under the supervision of Suekichi Shimizu.

The wood frame building, consisting of a principal's office, night watchman's room, and six classrooms, was completed on December 7, 1912 and accepted by the building committee. The total cost of the project came to $10, 282. Between 1905 and 1912 several prominent Japanese had donated significant amounts to the building fund, which also included smaller individual donations ranged from 25 cents to $300. Many organizations in the Japanese community also contributed.

Students moved into Kokugo Gakkō building with its fine view of Mt. Rainer from the second floor in January of 1913. There were 87 pupils in grades 1st through 8th and four faculty members: Kotarō Takabatake, the principal; and teachers; Shige Matsuda, Mitsu Ishida, and Tazuru Okabayashi. The educational program was closely patterned after the Japanese primary school system that was divided into two divisions of four years each: the jinjōka [lower division] and the kōtōka [upper division]. After completion of eight years at the Kokugo Gakkō students could continue for two more years in an advanced section, or post graduate course, called the hoshūka. The basic educational philosophy of Kokugo

Gakkō at this time was to inculcate the students with the Japanese spirit and a sense of identity as Japanese.

The number of Japanese immigrants to the Pacific Coast began to increase markedly after the Russo-Japanese War including an increased number of families who arrived from Japan to join a head of household already settled in Seattle. In 1915 the Kokugo Gakkō Ijikai anticipated future needs and purchased the land to the east of Building 1. By April 1917 school enrollment had increased to 175 and included older advanced students.

The growing student population made it necessary to enlarge the school complex. In November 1917 architect Robert Brown drew up plans for a two-story addition of four classrooms to be attached to the rear, north side of the existing school building (Building 1). In 1917, there were 477 Japanese students enrolled in the public schools of Seattle. As of the 1918 school year 186 students attended the expanded Kokugo Gakkō.

About four years after the 1917 addition was built, the school again became too small to accommodate the increasing number of pupils. In the spring of 1923 a portable classroom located at the John Hay School on Queen Anne Hill was purchased and relocated to the site. The portable was probably installed on the still vacant lot to the east of the Building 1 since the property to the north was not purchased until 1929.

The number of students attending the Kokugo Gakkō continued to increase and it was decided in December of 1923 that the school would have to be enlarged yet again. It took some 29 meetings over the course of two years to accomplish the planning and construction of a second permanent school building.

Based on an examination of archival permit records held in the Microfilm Library of the Seattle Department of Planning and Development and other related materials, the design of the second building has been attributed to Sievert Bergesen, a contractor and builder, whose signature appears on several of the drawings.[3] Research suggests that Bergesen had been approached by the Kokugo Gakkō to design and probably construct Building 2, but died before the building permit application was prepared. After Bergesen's death, the Kokugo Gakko apparently contacted Kichio Allen Arai (1901-1966), known as A.K. Arai, to help with the building permit application.[4] Chris Iverson was awarded the construction contract. Although the design cannot be fully attributed to A.K. Arai, who was a very recent graduate of the School of Architecture at the University of Washington, it appears to have been his earliest professional commission. Available documentation also suggests that he also acted as the Kokugo Gakkō's superintending architect.
The two story, wood frame building was designed to closely match the 1912 building located immediately to the west. It measured the full length of the Building 1 with the 1917 addition. The new building, which came to be known as Building 2, included ten classrooms and was

[3] All information regarding the design and construction of Building 2 was provided to S.E. Harrison by historian David A. Rash.
[4] See Ochsner, Jeffery Karl. ed. Shaping Seattle Architecture: A Historical Guide to the Architects, UW Press, 1994 for biographical information regarding Kichio Allen Arai.

completed in October of 1925. It appears likely that this building displaced the portable that had been relocated from John Hay School.

Indicative of the increased population and success of the Kokugo Gakkō, a shortage of classroom space occurred yet again only three years after the completion of Building 2. School officials investigated the possibility of expanding the school, giving instruction on alternate days, or establishing a branch school at another location. A special meeting was held in January 1929 and it was agreed to add another building to the complex. Lots located to the north and behind Building 1 and Building 2 were purchased and preparations were made for their use. The construction committee concluded a $4,174.00 contract with Mr. Yoshimoto and Mr. Minami to construct a one story, three-classroom building. The construction of Building 3 was finished in time for the new school term and an opening ceremony was held on May 5, 1929.

At the regular general meeting held in March of 1930 it was decided to once again expand the school with eight more new classrooms. On May 19, 1931, Lots 6, 7, and 8 to the west of the Building 1 were purchased and the alley between the Building 1 and the lots was transferred to the school. However, just as the committee was about to issue a request for construction bids, financial disaster struck. The Pacific Commercial Bank was declared insolvent by a federal bank auditor and closed its doors on October 23, 1931. The school's accounts and the building funds were lost along with any possibility of constructing another new building.

The bankruptcy had a devastating effect on the community. Kokugo Gakkō parents suffered financial hardship and the membership fee for the Kokugo Gakkō Kōenkai [Supporters' Group] was reduced by twenty-five cents. In order to accommodate the large number of students who wanted to attend, instruction was held on alternate days and some classes were held on Saturday. In spite of the economic depression, the 1930's were a period of steady enrollment and continued commitment on the part of the school and the community to the education and development of young people in the Japanese community.

In April 1934 a Chūgakubu [middle school division] was established as a continuation for students who had completed their eighth year of regular classes at the school. The new course was four years in length and replaced the previous two-year hoshūka [the advanced section]. By 1934 Kokugo Gakkō enrollment reached a peak of 1,297 students not including students attending evening classes.

The attack on Pearl Harbor and subsequent entry of the United States into World War II brought an end to the burgeoning Japanese community, as well as the Kokugo Gakkō. Three months after the attack, per Executive Order 9066, military commanders began to evacuate any persons of Japanese ancestry to inland relocation camps. Two-thirds of those forced from Seattle were American born and U.S. citizens. The U.S. military took over the Kokugo Gakkō complex and used it for the training of Army Air Force personnel. Evacuees stored a considerable amount of personal belongings in the school buildings when they left Seattle.

Between 1945 and 1957 the school housed returnees from the internment camps. According to *Polk's Seattle City Directory*, the buildings were known as the Hunt Hotel. The Minidoka Relocation Center was located near the town of Hunt, Idaho and was originally called Camp Hunt. Apparently, the name Hunt Hotel was derived from this connection.

In early 1949 a meeting was held at the Seattle Buddhist Church to discuss creating a central organization for Japanese and Japanese Americans in Seattle. A committee of fifty members was elected to work on this project. Since the Issei were not able to form political groups, such as the pre-war Japanese Association, a social service organization was founded instead. This organization came to be called the Shiatoru Nikkeijinkai [Seattle Japanese Community Service].

The major pre-war Japanese political organization in Seattle was the Hokubei Nihonjinkai Shōgyō Kaigisho [Japanese Association of North America, Japanese Chamber of Commerce]. After December 7, 1941, the offices of the Association were searched by government authorities and closed. In the process, many things, including most of the books in the Association's library, were reportedly confiscated.

During the war the Association was dissolved by the Secretary of State for failure to pay license fees. However, the Association's monetary assets remained, and on April 13, 1950, a meeting was held to discuss how to dispose of the $6,300 remaining in the defunct organization's account. On July 10, 1950, it was unanimously decided that the funds should be used to establish a Japanese American civic center on the old Kokugo Gakkō property, and to begin immediate renovation work on the buildings. Any money left over would be entrusted to Seattle Japanese Community Service.

In May of 1956 plans were made for a special committee of the Kokugo Gakkō Kōenkai to meet to discuss the reopening of the school complex. The new school would be called Nihongo Gakkō or Shiatoru Nihongo Gakkō [Seattle Japanese Language School] and it would reopen in September, holding Saturday only classes. A series of meetings subsequently took place to organize and plan for the reopening. The community responded by donating money for building repairs and equipment. Articles of incorporation for the new Seattle Japanese Language School were prepared the Seattle Japanese Language School formally acquired the old Kokugo Gakkō properties.

The exterior appearance of Buildings 1 and 2 was essentially the same as it was in the 1930s, although deferred maintenance had taken a severe toll. Wooden siding and double hung sash windows were still in place. Clear fir woodwork with dark brown stain and varnish typical of the period adorned most rooms. Most classrooms still had the original electric light fixtures, oil stoves for heating, the old-style iron and wood school desks with inkwells and slate blackboards. Volunteers spent many hours cleaning and fixing Building 1 in order to return it to use as a school. Building 2 would serve mainly as a storage facility.

From the 1960's through the early 1980's the Central Area of Seattle experienced a period of social and economic change. Racial conflict, violence, and petty crime were a problem and real estate values declined as the neighborhood gradually deteriorated. Many of the Japanese

American neighbors moved to the south and east of the Central Area. Nonetheless, in 1970 a plan to create a Japanese cultural and community center on the site of the Japanese Language School was considered. A similar proposal was also made in 1973 for a cultural center to be built near the Seattle Buddhist Church. Differences of opinion and a lack of consensus in the community resulted in the abandonment of both proposals.

On May 12, 1976, what is thought to have been a firebomb was thrown through the window of the Seattle Japanese Community Service office located on the first floor of Building 1. The fire completely destroyed the office and its contents. Classrooms on the second floor were also damaged and the building became unusable. Classes were relocated to Building 3 and temporarily moved to St. Peters Episcopal Church on South King Street. The office was subsequently rebuilt and a new stairway to the second floor was constructed to replace the original 1912 staircase. In the process, alterations were also made to the two classrooms at the front of the building on the second floor.

Subsequent enrollment was low and community support for the educational programs was limited to a small but dedicated group of volunteers. Upkeep on the aging buildings was a serious problem and concerns grew about the ability to continue to operate the Japanese Community Service and the Seattle Japanese Language School in the original buildings.

In July 1980, Building 1 was again vandalized during the night causing extensive damage. Approximately thirty windows were broken, desks were damaged and light fixtures broken. A group of volunteers worked to make repairs in order to have the building ready for school in September.

Gradually from 1974 to 1990 the school operations stabilized and enrollment increased. Japan had become a world economic power and interest in Japanese language and culture was gaining. The civil rights movement, combined with the new ethnic awareness, encouraged the Sansei, third generation Japanese Americans, to rediscover their cultural roots and heritage. Improvements were made in the curriculum in response to a renewed interest in learning Japanese and the student body became more diverse. In 1979 there were 140 students enrolled in the school. By September of 1987, the school had about 150 students of all races and ages.

In August 1987 the Budokan Judo Club moved into three classrooms on the east side of the main floor of Building 2. The partitions between three rooms were removed and a large dojo was created for training and practice. The club continues to occupy this space.

In October 1988 the Seattle Japanese Language School bought the small lot to the east of Building 3 from and consolidated ownership of all land immediately adjacent to the school complex.

In 1997 plans were made to renovate a portion of Building 2 for the Northwest Nikkei Museum. With financial contributions from the Japan Expo Foundation, local foundations, businesses, and individuals two classrooms on the west side of the first floor of were

combined and adapted for use as exhibit space. On October 31, 1998 the museum opened to the public.

In 2003, the Lake Washington Girls Middle School approached the Seattle Japanese Language School about the possibility of renting Building 3 and the two parties agreed to a three-year lease. The Language School repaired the side sewer, replaced the roof, and had the exterior professionally painted. Parent volunteers from the Middle School repaired windows, refinished the floors, cleaned and painted the classrooms, and added a small office. A new deck was constructed on the east side of the building. The students created a garden on the adjacent side hill.

The school complex continues to carry on the tradition of teaching Japanese to a wide variety of students. Current educational goals include building bonds of friendship between Japan and the United States, nurturing bilingual international citizens, and creating an awareness of Japanese cultural heritage. As of June 2005 there were seven faculty teaching 61 students enrolled in 7 classes from beginning to advanced with conversation skills being stressed over reading and writing. The school is currently in the process of revising the program for the 2005/2006 school year as the Board, parents, teachers, and interested community members evaluate options for the future and the concept of building a new cultural and community center on the site.

Cultural Role of Kokugo Gakkō and the Seattle Japanese Language School

During the early decades of the 20th century specialized Japanese language schools were established wherever concentrations of Japanese immigrants had settled, particularly in Hawaii, California, Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. By the 1920s some 24 such schools had been established around Puget Sound and elsewhere in Washington. Reportedly, by 1935 there were 15 Japanese language schools operating in the greater Seattle-Tacoma area and 12 schools in the Yakima Valley. Prior to World War II approximately 250 such schools were operating throughout California.

These schools served as stabilizing civic and cultural institutions and were a central part of community life for the first generation of Japanese immigrants, the Issei and their families. The need for such schools grew out of the concerns expressed by the Issei regarding the proper education of their children, the second generation Nisei. Primary among those concerns was the fact that the Issei were considered to be aliens and ineligible for citizenship. Their status in the United States remained questionable and there was some likelihood that they might indeed be required to return to Japan. If Nisei youth had some understanding of the Japanese language, its history and cultural then the possibility of returning to Japan would be more feasible and if they remained in this country they would possess skills to work in Japanese-owned enterprises, if need be. Most Nisei regularly attended public schools and parents were also concerned about the manners and behaviors that their children might acquire.

As elsewhere along the Pacific Coast, the Japanese community in Seattle's Nihonmachi debated whether to create an entirely separate Japanese school in lieu of attendance at the local public schools. However, it was believed the United States possessed the best public

school system in the world and students were already learning basic subjects very well. Thus, there was no need for the Japanese language school to replicate the teaching of basic subjects that were already fully covered in the public schools.

Kokugo Gakkō was the earliest Japanese language school to be established in the nation and it used an approach that became typical elsewhere throughout the region. It functioned as an after-school facility where the Nisei received supplemental lessons in Japanese ethics, history, geography and most importantly, language. Thus, for two hours a day – after the public school day ended – Nisei continued studies focused on their Japanese heritage. However, while the intent was to promote a shared set of cultural norms and values – it appears that contrary to those goals the school also functioned in a way that sparked resistance and reinforced desires to assimilate.[5]

Interestingly, the buildings constructed to permanently house the Kokugo Gakkō were entirely Western in architectural style, design and construction. The decision to construct a building that would not exhibit elements drawn from traditional Japanese architecture, as had been the case for the Japanese Pavilion at the Alaska Yukon Pacific Exposition and the Seattle Buddhist Temple constructed in 1908, may have been based on economic and/or political considerations.

After World War I there was rising public hostility and debate regarding Japanese assimilation and an increased level of concern about the role of the burgeoning language schools. Some citizens regarded foreign language schools and textbooks as an impediment to Americanization. Leaders of the Japanese community recognized the need to join in the Americanization movement and, to some degree, promote cultural assimilation. Community leaders also felt that in certain cases, the Kokugo Gakkō was a source of misguided anti-Japanese sentiment.

Consequently, consideration was given to writing and publishing a set of Japanese language textbooks specifically for use in the Pacific Northwest and more local in scope. It was thought that textbooks produced in the United States rather than Japan would contribute to the goals of Americanization and thus dispel some of the anti-foreign sentiment. In addition, textbooks written for American born Japanese would incorporate material directly relevant to the students' lives, be more interesting for them, and be easier for teachers to use. By 1921, new locally produced textbooks had been compiled and were in use for the most part.

In September 1925, Mr. Yoriaki Nakagawa, an immigrant teacher from the Japanese Language School in Fife moved to Seattle to attend the University of Washington. In 1926, he joined the Kokugo Gakkō as the head teacher and around 1928 he became principal, a position he held until his arrest by the F.B.I. on December 7, 1941. Mr. Nakagawa was the last and longest serving principal of the Kokugo Gakkō.

The principal played a major role in the day-to-day operation of the school. He supervised almost all educational matters in addition to teaching one or more classes. In 1931 the teaching staff consisted of 23 teachers in addition to the principal. There were five men and

[5] See Dubrow, Sento at Sixth and Main for discussion of the cultural significance and legacy of Kokugo Gakko.

eighteen women teachers. Most were graduates of a normal school in Japan and had several years of teaching experience in elementary schools in Japan. The staff also included a janitor and errand boy.

In the late 1920's and 1930's the greatest goal of the school was for students to attain near fluency in both spoken and written Japanese. Due to racial discrimination and worsening economic conditions in the 1930's, employment opportunities for the Nisei were limited. It was thought that competence in Japanese would enable young people to finds jobs with Issei businesses and companies doing business with Japan. Strong bilingual ability was also regarded as the key to finding suitable employment in Japan should good positions prove to be unattainable in the United States. Japan had become a powerful country and held great economic promise in Asia. In addition to the practical benefits, the political and cultural position of Japan during this era also engendered a degree of pride in learning the Japanese language.

For students residing in a home where Japanese was the primary language of communication and who worked seriously at their studies the high goals of the school were attainable. However, the school curriculum was designed to build on a student's existing conversational fluency by adding reading, writing, and advanced conversation and was very challenging.

By the early 1930s, the school year began on the 1st of April and ended on March 31 of the following year. Classes were held from 4:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. Monday through Friday during the winter season. In the spring and fall seasons classes ended at 5:25 PM. During the summer after the public schools had closed for vacation, there was a four-week summer session from 9:00 A.M. to 10:30 A.M. each morning.

Of the seven hours of classroom instruction available each week, four hours were devoted to reading, one and one half hours to composition, one hour to speaking, and one half hour to writing the Japanese characters. During the winter session, which was one half hour shorter than the spring and autumn sessions, less time was devoted to reading and composition. Newspapers and magazines in Japanese and English were also used as instructional material. Japanese-English and English-Japanese translation was also taught. The Kokugo Gakkō also had a library that contained valuable works on education, literature, and art in both Japanese and English.

Music education was also an integral part of the Kokugo Gakkō and two songs were composed especially for the school. One was the school song, *Kokugo Gakkō* with lyrics written in 1930 by Heizaburō Takashima (1865-1946) and music composed by Fumiko Yotsuya (1906-1981). The other song was, *Kokkō kōshinkyoku* [Japanese Language School March] with lyrics by Mr. Nakagawa and music by Yoshinori Matsuyama. Kichiyo Nakagawa was the arranger. Both songs were used throughout the 1930s on field day and at other special events. On Fridays after school, local musician and music teacher Yoshirō (Shisui) Miyashita gave voice lessons to students interested in singing. For a period there was a school orchestra that was also under the direction of Mr. Miyashita. Throughout the 1930's an event called Gakugeikai [Performing Arts Show] was held for families. Students

performed a program consisting of music, dance, skits, and recitations. Calligraphy and artwork were often displayed.

Field day, or undōkai, was the primary social event of the school year. It brought together students, teachers, parents, and friends from the community for a day of picnicking, socializing, exercise, athletic competitions, and the presentation of academic achievement awards. Activities were very similar to school field days in Japan, with students being divided into red and white teams for the athletic events. Undōkai at Kokugo Gakkō dates from as early as 1911 when it was held at Jefferson Park on Beacon Hill. By the 1930s it had become a major event and was customarily held on the last Sunday in May.

A school motto or kōkun, was written in the mid 1930's by a committee of teachers and consisted of three lines:

1. Study Japanese culture and always speak correct Japanese.
2. Have good manners, respect your elders, and wear neat and clean clothes.
3. Be truthful in all things and be good American citizens.

The motto was reproduced on paper measuring approximately 2 x 5 feet and placed above the blackboard at the front of each classroom. Requests for copies of the motto were received from Japanese language schools in Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia.

In 1937 Mr. Nakagawa published a book on Japanese and American manners and polite behavior called *Nichi-Bei sahō no jōshi*ki. The English title was *Etiquette*. This book was widely read in Japanese communities in the Western United States, serving as a basic guide for those interested learning about manners and etiquette.

However, the rigid focus of the school on communication and proper behavior caused many Nisei to become resentful. The strict discipline and the significant time commitment that students had to devote to Kokugo Gakkō meant that they were unable to participate in regular after public school activities, social events or sports leagues. Not all students had the desire to achieve the highest academic goals or could not endure the onerous education process and choose to leave the school before acquiring functional fluency. Despite such conflicts and economic hardships, the school thrived and enrollment remained steady throughout the 1930s and many students succeeded in learning the language and culture of their parents. In fact, the Kokugo Gakkō was highly regarded, both on the West Coast and in Japan, for the quality of instruction and the high level of student achievement.

Immediately after the attacks of December 7, 1941 the FBI searched principal Yoriaki Nakagawa's home and he was arrested. Language school teachers and principals were prominent in Japanese American communities and easily suspected of fostering allegiance to the war enemies. So along with other Issei community leaders, they were the earliest targets for arrest and internment. Any institutions or activities associated with Japanese culture were questioned due to latent hostility and overt anti-Japanese propaganda.

Nakagawa was subsequently held at the Immigration Bureau in Seattle from December 19th to 20th and then sent to an internment camp in Missoula, Montana. Further investigation

proved him innocent of any disloyalty to the United States and he was transferred to the Camp Harmony assembly center at Puyallup. He and his wife were later incarcerated with other Seattle Japanese at Minidoka in Idaho. He received many offers from the U.S. military and various universities in the Midwest and East to leave camp and work as a Japanese language teacher or interpreter, which he declined. Mr. and Mrs. Nakagawa ultimately resettled in Chicago where he was involved in the founding of the local Japanese newspaper; however, he would never again play a major role in Japanese language education.

The internment of people of Japanese decent living along the Pacific Coast brought about an end to most of the former language schools. During the immediate post war era many relocated internees did not return to the communities where they had previously resided. In very few cases did buildings that had previously served as language schools function for that purpose after World War II. The Tacoma Japanese Language School [Nihon Go Gakko] is an obvious local example. It was established and evolved during the same era as the Kokugo Gakkō and served a large and thriving Nihonmachi near downtown Tacoma. It also served as the 'civil control center' where internees from the Tacoma area were required to report, be registered and transferred to camps. After the war, Nihon Go Gakko never reopened as a school.[6] It remained essentially abandoned and unused – for many years storing abandoned items left behind by internees. Despite preservation efforts, the University of Washington had the building demolished in 2004. In some few cases – the Seattle Japanese Language School most prominently - community organizations acquired and reused the old school buildings for social or cultural purposes.

By the early 1950s the circumstances in Seattle's Nihonmachi and attitudes toward Japanese language education had changed significantly in comparison to the 1920s and 1930s. There were many fewer families in which Japanese was still spoken on a daily basis as English had become the predominant language in most Nisei homes. Their Sansei children found little necessity for learning or using Japanese. The economic motivations for learning Japanese in the 1930s no longer existed. Furthermore, Japan's position as a defeated nation did not inspire the study of the language or the cultivation of its heritage.

It was under these circumstances that Mr. Iwao Matsushita became the first principal of the reestablished Seattle Japanese Language School in September 1956. Along with five other teachers they began to teach Japanese language classes to 250 students in a portion of the former Kokugo Gakkō building complex.

Most of the students who came to the reestablished school had little or no foundation in spoken Japanese, so it was taught as a second language. Classes were offered for several hours on Saturday mornings, rather than five days a week as was the case before the war. The pre-war goal of achieving eventual fluency in speaking, reading, and writing was no longer realistic. Instead, the new language school focused on cultural enrichment and basic language skills. It was also recognized that through the study of Japanese, a new generation of Sansei students could gain an understanding and appreciation of their cultural heritage.

[6] Both the Tacoma Nihon Go Gakko and the Seattle Kokugo Gakkō served as temporary housing for returning evacuees and families in the aftermath of the war.

Mr. Matsushita played a significant role in the preservation of the school complex and its historic role while serving as principal until 1974. He was succeeded as principal by Ms.Yasuko Shigaki who had been involved with the school since 1960. Ms. Fumiko Maeshiro, who began teaching at the school in 1978, stepped forward to become the third principal in 1990 and continued until 1995. Ms. Sachiko Murakami, who began teaching at the school in 1977, followed as the fourth principal from 1995 to 1998.

Regular events during the school year included an open house early in the school year, observance of Japanese New Year, Girl's Day, Childrens' Day (the pre-war Boys' Day), and the undōkai with graduation and recognition ceremonies at the end of the year. The school also participated in the Cherry Blossom Festival held annually at the Seattle Center. Ms. Murakami revived the Gakugeikai. There was also a short Japanese language summer camp held at the school. School enrollment for 1996-1997 included 181 students from Kindergarten through Advanced courses.

Ms. Norigiku Horikawa took over as the fifth principal in 1999. She revised the curriculum and made programmatic changes. In August 2000, the school was awarded the Foreign Minister's Commendation – an honor presented by the Japanese government to only four companies or individuals over the course of a year.

Notable major changes had occurred related to Japanese language education in the greater Seattle area. The Megumi Preschool, founded in South Seattle by a former JLS teacher, provided an excellent bilingual environment for small children and had become very popular. Experimental Japanese language programs were initiated at Franklin and Ingraham High Schools in the late 1960s and grew into established academic programs. By 2000, a bilingual Japanese program (K-6) was available at the John Stanford International School at Latona. Several middle schools in Seattle also began to offer beginning Japanese as a foreign language elective and many public and private high schools now offer three years of Japanese as part of their standard world languages curriculum. In addition, there are a number of private Japanese language day care centers, kindergartens and Saturday schools throughout the region.

Of particular note is the school founded in Bellevue in 1971 by the Shunjūkai, an organization of Japanese "company people" working in the Seattle area. It was established for the specific purpose of replicating Japanese core instruction for Japanese children who would be returning to school in Japan with their parents after a two to five year stay in the United States. It was essential that these children maintain their Japanese ability if they were to re-integrate into the Japanese school system after a number of years in American schools. Initially admission to the Shunjūkai school, also referred to as the "Nihonjin Gakkō," was strictly limited to fluent native speakers, preferably Japanese nationals. However, in recent years a growing number of families with one adult native speaker of Japanese sought a more rigorous program than could be provided at the Seattle Japanese Language School and have turned to the Bellevue school. Thus, the school - now called the Shiatoru Nihongo Hoshū Gakkō (Seattle Japanese School) - became somewhat more flexible in its admission policies and accepts permanent U.S. residents of all backgrounds who could pass the entrance examination.

The combination of public schools with Japanese classes offered five days a week and the broad selection of private specialty schools has reduced the role of the Seattle Japanese Language School and impacted enrollment. In 2003 the kindergarten class was cancelled due to low enrollment. In 2003 Ms. Yukiko Clawson, a teacher with many years experience in the classroom, became the current principal.

The school complex continues to carry on the tradition of teaching Japanese to a wide variety of students. Current educational goals include building bonds of friendship between Japan and the United States, nurturing bilingual international citizens, and creating an awareness of Japanese cultural heritage. As of June 2005 there were seven faculty members teaching 61 students enrolled in 7 classes from beginning to advanced with conversation skills being stressed over reading and writing. The school is currently in the process of revising the program for the 2005/2006 school year as the Board, parents, teachers, and interested community members evaluate options for the future and the concept of building a new cultural and community center on the site.

In 2004, the Nikkei Heritage Association of Washington (NHAW), a grassroots organization made up of a broad spectrum of community members began working collaboratively with the Japanese Language School, and is currently a building tenant. The Nikkei Heritage Association was specifically formed to come together in partnership and collaboration to design, construct and operate a modern and self-supporting facility that will preserve and celebrate Japanese and Japanese American culture and activities; and build a stronger sense of community for all generations.

NHAW is working with the Japanese Language School to jointly develop current community programming, offering new and unique heritage projects, educational trainings and cultural projects about the Japanese American community in order to help the Japanese Language School continue to provide the language training to new generations of the community interested in sustaining its cultural heritage.

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The features of the Landmark to be preserved include:

The exteriors of Buildings #1, #2 and #3, and the site

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