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Nitobe Memorial Garden

History and Development

It has been said that a garden in Japan is a representation of the scenery of the country, though it is essentially a Japanese representation. Although it is an interpretation of nature, it is not intended to be a realistic reproduction. The significance of this form of art is best understood by the Japanese who by tradition have inherited an appreciation and enjoyment of nature as expressed not only in the garden but also in their arts and many of their customs.

Was it possible, then, to have a successful Japanese Garden in Canada? This was the question asked by members of a President's Committee formed in 1959 to plan for such a Garden at The University of British Columbia. The committee consisted of interested Faculty members from various University departments, a representative of the Japanese-Canadian community, with Mr. Muneo Tanabe, then Consul for Japan in Vancouver as an ex officio member. All agreed that the secret of success was dependent on two principal factors: engaging a suitable landscape architect in Japan to assure authenticity in design and secondly, but equal in importance, maintaining an academic objective in the entire undertaking.

At this time a fund raising campaign was underway. The University assumed most of the cost of the Garden, but some grants were received from The Canada Council and The Leon and Thea Koerner Foundation. Contact was established with the Japan-Canada Society in Tokyo where over \$21,000 was collected for the project, with the understanding that this amount would be used mainly for purchases of material in Japan for use in the Garden. Mr. Tanabe and Dr. George Ishiwara visited the various Japanese Canadian communities in B.C. and were successful in obtaining over \$7,000. This amount was spent on purchases of plant material, lanterns, etc., mostly in Japan.

John W. Neill, deceased, was the University of British Columbia landscape architect appointed as the university liaison to work with Professor Mori.

Through the good offices of the Consul, who later was appointed Consul-General, the Government of Japan selected Professor Kannosuke Mori from Chiba University to design the Garden. Mr. Mori arrived early in 1959 and was with the University until after the official opening of the Garden in June, 1960.

The University was particularly fortunate in this selection, for Professor Mori understood that he was to design and create a "Japanese Japanese Garden in Canada", not a "Canadian Japanese Garden". Having spent a lifetime in the academic environment, he understood, too, the need to relate his creation to the University community.

The site was selected, a forested area in the northwest section of the campus, along Marine Drive. This 2.2 acre portion of the University was judged to be safe for all time-no danger of intrusion by other buildings and services. It also was conveniently related to International House.

The design phase lasted approximately three months. During this time the Garden was planned in detail. Professor Mori was then persuaded to stay on to supervise its construction. That this was a wise decision became more evident as time went on. He personally directed the placement of each rock and the planting of each tree and shrub.

Stones for the Garden were selected from various sections of the Lower Mainland: large and small, colorful rocks from near Harrison Lake for the waterfall and stream, stones with character from Britannia Beach for the Tea Garden and local boulders for the margin of the lake.

Professor Mori explained his stone work in a letter to the author written a few days before his untimely death, after returning to Japan: "In the Japanese Garden at U.B.C. I was most interested in arranging the rocks. I tried a bold treatment with such monotonous stones as used around the lake, doing my best to arrange them with some freshness. I used my own method of arranging the somewhat colorful stones at the waterfall and streams, hoping that people who see them will understand that some aspect of polychrome can be found in a Japanese Garden. In the Tea Garden I used the river rocks which we brought down from Britannia Beach. They are too light and dry now, but after the trees in this part of the Garden grow to some size, the rocks will improve in appearance. I will be delighted if the beauty of the Garden is understood gradually by the people who see it."

Ten years of weathering and growth of plants in the Tea Garden have combined to enhance this very fine stone arrangement . It is in the opinion of many Mr. Mori's finest achievement.

During the early stages of construction the Garden took shape very quickly. The area of the lake was cleared completely, but a good deal of the natural forest was retained. Excavation from the lake, nearly one half acre in extent, was used to shape up the major "mountain" and the pleasant slopes along the lake. In this operation the balance of nature was retained. No soil was removed from the site and none was brought in. According to custom, one island was retained in the lake, later to be connected with the mainland by a bridge.

Once the contouring was complete the bed of the lake was completely waterproofed, using bonded sheets of asphalt felt. This seal proved to be inadequate, however, and the lake was later drained so that the entire area could be treated with a seal coat. No trouble has since developed.

Fish have since been introduced into the lake. In 1962, 10,000 goldfish arrived by air from Tokyo, and two years later 100 large, colorful carp were shipped over. These were purchased by the Japan-Canada Society in Tokyo. Most of the goldfish became casualties to the birds, but the large carp have survived, offering a colorful attraction to the visitors.

Water is constantly recirculated to the top of the "mountain", where it flows down the rock-lined stream and over the waterfall. Movement of water is from east to west in the traditional manner, excess water escaping through the iris garden to the west. Level of the water is controlled in the iris garden, so that they can be flooded when in bloom, as is customary.

The iris garden was not permanently planted until 1961. Arrangements were made with the Meiji Shrine in Tokyo, during a visit to Japan by Dr. Ishiwara and the author, for a shipment of some of their finest varieties. These are maturing nicely now and are at their best during the month of June.

It is interesting to note that Professor Mori was quite content to use native British Columbia plant materials and other plants that are customarily used in our landscape. His opinion was that our forests are similar and we share with the Japanese people an appreciation of the broad leaved evergreen

shrubs, azaleas and flowering cherries. Retaining some of the natural forest would help to give immediate scale to the garden and an early sense of maturity. He realized, too, that our native pines could be trained in the typical Japanese fashion, so there was no need to import them. Some of the Japanese Maples and Flowering Cherries, most of the azaleas, and a variety of other shrubs were brought over from Japan. Trees and shrubs from local sources included Douglas Fir, Hemlock, Vine Maple, Huckleberry, Salal, False Box, Oregon Grape, Labrador Tea, Kinnickinick collected from various sections of this area. Other plants were obtained from the University nurseries.

The first lantern to be placed and certainly the most impressive lantern in the Garden, was the Nitobe Memorial Lantern. It had been located elsewhere on campus. It was moved to the new location, in a setting of tall trees, a special point of focus and the reason for the name which was given to the Garden.

Most of the other lanterns were from Japan. These include the "snow scene" lantern on the island and two low, very old lanterns near the hand basins in the tea garden. Professor Mori agreed that three of the lanterns offered to the Garden by Miss Florence Fyfe-Smith were acceptable and these were placed, one in the Tea Garden, the other two along the main paths of the Garden. They are of the "Kasuga Shape" type, as is the lantern near the entrance to the Tea Garden. The lantern at the south end of the lake is "Lemon Tree Shape".

These lanterns are architectural ornaments in the Garden. They have been selected to harmonize in scale and character with other features of the landscape, to symbolically light a pathway or, again symbolically, to cast a beam of light across the water. They customarily are not lighted. The "Snow Scene" lantern is said to be best appreciated when covered with snow, as a fresh fall of snow brings a special delight to the Japanese Garden.

A fine, old Seven Storey Pagoda was placed above the path along the north side of the Garden. The Pagoda is Chinese in origin. Its use in the Japanese landscape can be traced back to the earliest Japanese garden development.

While the lanterns and plants were being selected, construction continued and attention was focussed on the bridges. The principal bridge is the gracefully arched "Earth Bridge". It was constructed in the traditional manner with bundles of faggots laid across a timber framework, then covered with

several inches of soil and fine gravel. It is supported by granite pillars. The bridge leading to the island is of the level "Wooden Bracket" type. Most interest, however, is aroused by the "Yatsu-hashii" bridge, leading one through the iris garden in a leisurely zig-zag fashion. The simplest bridge is that over the stream leading from the waterfall. It consists of two level granite slabs placed side by side.

Paths were constructed, following Professor Mori's plan, to lead one through the garden, over the bridges past many viewing points. The visitor to this type of "stroll garden" is encouraged to follow the pathways in his own time, stopping to appreciate the vistas which open up before him as he crosses a bridge or catches a glimpse of the Tea House across the water. Bamboo hoops, similar to those used along the paths of the parks in Tokyo, serve as a polite reminder to the visitor that he should stay on the path.

That the gardens of Tokyo, rather than the ancient temple gardens of Kyoto, served as the principal source of inspiration to Professor Mori is obvious from the extensive areas of lawn in the Garden. All of the slopes leading up from the lake were seeded. The principal grass used was Merion Bluegrass, thought to be similar in texture to Zoysia which is used in Tokyo, but not suitable for Vancouver conditions. This expanse of lawn helps to give scale to the Garden and provides an attractive setting for the cherries and mounds of azaleas when they are in bloom.

A sense of enclosure of the entire Garden was considered by the designer to be of great importance. A hemlock hedge was established along the east side and laurels were planted inside the fence which enclosed the whole Garden. Ten years' growth in this and other plantings both inside and outside the fence have helped immeasurably to take the visitor away from his world into a little bit of Japan.

The fence leading from the entrance gates and around the Tea Garden, one of the features supplied by the Japan-Canada Society in Tokyo, is a "Nightingale Fence." It is constructed of irregular twigs (possibly *Ilex integra*) arranged vertically and held by horizontal cross-pieces of bamboo. At the entrance the fence is all bamboo, arranged vertically and tied together. The gate itself is a traditional "Thatched Roof Gateway".

Materials for the Gateway and the Garden Arbour were shipped over from Japan. The Arbour, overlooking the lake, is intended for resting after strolling

and before entering the Tea Garden. Like the Gateway, the Arbour is rustic in nature, fitting well into the landscape.

The final phase of construction consisted of erecting the Tea House and completing the Tea Garden.

The Tea House was completely prefabricated in Japan, knocked down and re-assembled on the site. Two craftsmen were selected in Japan and sent over for this task. The structure was a contribution from the Society in Tokyo.

The House is a contemporary Tea Ceremony House, constructed according to traditional design as specified by the Landscape Architect. It is used only on special occasions for Tea Ceremony. Although the entrance door is locked when not in use, the shoji, or sliding doors, are kept open during the summer months so that visitors may see the inside detail.

The normal procedure for Tea Ceremony is that guests would stroll through the main Garden, then enter the Tea Garden, going directly into the Tea House, leaving their shoes at the entrance. After some time in the main waiting room where they may look out into the Tea Garden, they leave through the sliding doors, stepping into garden slippers, then along the stepping stone path to a small waiting arbour. When summoned to Tea Ceremony by the hostess, they proceed along the path, dipping their hands in the Water Basin (Tsukubai), then through the small, sliding doorway to the Tea Ceremony Room.

The Tea Garden—a complete garden within a garden—was designed with special emphasis on scale. More attention was paid to detail in the placement of stones, shrubs and small trees, in the skillful use of materials to create miniature vistas and in scaling down the taller elements by pruning. Here there is real unity in design, the house and garden together symbolizing the true spirit of the Tea Ceremony, peaceful contemplation with pleasant associations.

Great tribute was paid to Professor Mori at the official opening of the Nitobe Memorial Garden in May 1960. Many distinguished guests from Japan joined with members of the University community to celebrate the occasion. There was a Tea Ceremony, conducted by Mrs. Hara, an outstanding authority on this art and a demonstration of Ikebana, Japanese Flower

Arrangement, by Mrs. Hiraga, who conducts a school of Ikebana in Tokyo. These two authentic events were arranged for the University by the Canada-Japan Society in Tokyo. The reception was held in International House.

In May, 1962 the University was honored by a visit from Dr. Iyemasa Tokugawa, President of the Japan-Canada Society in Tokyo and Mrs. T. Toko, the Secretary. At this time an anniversary celebration was held. The principal feature was the unveiling of a plaque near the entrance gate recognizing the achievement of Professor Mori. It is worded in English and Japanese as follows:

"This Japanese Garden in Memory of Dr. Inazo Nitobe was designed by Professor Kanosuke Mori of Chiba University, a distinguished Japanese Landscape Architect, and was his last creative achievement. The creation of the Garden was made possible by the help of the Government and people of Japan and the Japanese Canadians of British Columbia."

Ten years have passed since the Garden was officially opened. These have been important formative years during which it has taken on a substantial degree of maturity. The University, encouraged by the academic members most concerned, has accepted the challenge to maintain the Garden in the best Japanese tradition. Mr Roy Sumi, who is responsible for its maintenance, was carefully tutored by Mr. Mori during his fifteen months with the University. He will impart to his successors the knowledge of the special techniques necessary to retain its character.

The Nitobe Memorial Garden is an integral and very important part of The University Botanical Garden. It is used by and serves as a source of inspiration for faculty and students in Asian Studies, Fine Arts, Architecture, Landscape Architecture and other University Departments. It is a favorite spot for relaxation and contemplation for countless students and staff members.

During the first year of operation the Garden had over 40,000 visitors from the general public. In 1969 over 80,000 came to experience "a little bit of Japan" in Canada.

All who knew him regret that Professor Mori did not live to return to Canada to see how his great creative achievement has developed, for it is truly a "*Japanese* Japanese Garden in Canada".