

HISTORY OF THE SHINZEN FRIENDSHIP GARDEN

We welcome you to the beautiful and serene 5-acre Shinzen Friendship Garden located within Woodward Park adjacent to Freeway 41 in the City of Fresno, CA.

In 1967 when Woodward Park was being developed, the idea was proposed to create a Japanese garden complete with stone lanterns and a teahouse to be dedicated to Fresno's Sister City Kochi, Japan, as a symbol of friendship and international brotherhood, and for the promotion of cultural relations between the two cities. A committee was organized to develop plans and to raise the required funding.

Later that year the Fresno City Council approved this concept and allocated the acreage for such a garden. A group led by Ben Nakamura, a Fresno accountant, was formed to enlist the aid of the Japanese-American community. During the next few years, several trips were made to Japan to seek support for the Garden.

In 1972, Paul Saito, a Landscape Architect from Orange County, California, was chosen to design the Garden. He was assisted by a master teahouse designer from Japan, Shiro Nakagawa. The Garden was planned around the four seasons, with distinctive plantings in each area. The plans were completed and approved in 1974.

The ground-breaking ceremony was held in 1975 with Bishop Matsui of the Shinto Church officiating, and Mayor Dan Whitehurst, Councilmember Ted Wills, Ben Nakamura and other members of the Shinzen Friendship Garden Committee present. Construction then began with the addition of 30,000 cubic yards of earth and 600 tons of granite boulders. Stream beds with waterfalls, seven bridges (including the stone double-moon bridge for double good luck), and the Koi Pond were constructed. The plantings of many trees, shrubs and lawn areas in the various sections were begun. Paved pathways lead you through the Spring Section where azaleas, camellias, crabapples, irises, flowering cherries and plums are a viewer's delight. The cooling waters of the Koi Pond are the centerpiece of the Summer Section. Tulip trees, Chinese pistache and tallow trees display their bright fall colors in the Autumn Section. A large waterfall, pines and evergreens dominate the Winter Section.

By Spring 1981, the Garden was developed enough to be open for public viewing. It was dedicated in May with a contingent of forty visitors from Kochi present to witness the planting of a Japanese maple near the entrance (Mon) which was a gift from the citizens of Kochi. Later that year the Shinzen Garden Society was incorporated as a separate entity. The City of Fresno owns the property and is responsible for its upkeep and security, but all additions and improvements are funded by members' dues and private and corporate donations.

In September 1989, a thatched-roofed teahouse, the only authentic teahouse with a thatched roof in the Continental United States, was added to the Garden. It was built in Japan and re-assembled (by four master workers from Japan) in the Spring Garden on the lake shore. It was dedicated the following year. Other additions and improvements to the Garden include: Viewing shelters (Tembo Dai) in the Autumn and Winter Sections. New paving before the Mon and a wrought iron fence have been installed and dedicated to the Japanese American Citizens League for their support and donations. Other additions include a deck overlooking the Koi Pond, the Ronquillo Meditation Vista, and the \$92,000 pathway restoration project.

In 1999, permanent signposts were added to the Garden denoting the areas of the four seasons, and the Alice Levin Standeford open-air shelter was constructed north of the Mon Gate with funds from her estate. It was dedicated in February 2000, and officially named the “Azumaya.” In 2001-2002, the Taira Ume Grove was developed with a waterfall, streambed, pond, two bridges, a tembo dai, and pathways. Future plans for the Garden include a utility/classroom, restrooms, museum/gift shop, and tearoom. Additional plantings and improvements make the Shinzen Friendship Garden an ongoing project.

On April 29, 2006, the 25th Anniversary of the Garden was celebrated with a delegation of twenty-one visitors from Sister-City Kochi, Japan, present. A Cherry tree was planted in the front to the left of the Mon to commemorate this event.

The annual events in the Garden include the Spring Blossom Festival held the weekend nearest the vernal equinox; Spring Artists in the Garden Day; Toro Nagashi (Floating Lantern) Ceremony in August; Membership Meeting and Dinner in September; the Shinzen Run in September; the Fall Artists in the Garden Day; and the Shinzen Cultural Faire held on the first Saturday in November in conjunction with the Fall Color Festival on the first full weekend in November.

Garden hours are from 10:00 a.m. to dusk on Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays. From May 1 through September 30, the Garden is open daily from 5:00 p.m. to dusk. The cost to visit the Garden is \$3 for adults 15 to 62 years, and 50 cents for seniors and children 4 to 14 years of age. Shinzen Garden Members are admitted free of charge. Special Docent-guided group tours can be arranged by calling Fresno City Parks office at 621-2900.

**Source of information: Edith Puckett, Shinzen Garden Historian. (Deceased)
Edwin R. Streit, Member, Shinzen Garden and
Fresno City and County Historical Society. (Deceased)**

**Website: shinzenjapanesegarden.org
E-mail: shinzenjapanesegarden.org**

HISTORY OF THE TAIRA UME GROVE

The Azumaya was built and dedicated in February 2000. In the summer of 2000, the Board of Directors of the Shinzen Friendship Garden undertook the project to develop the Taira Ume Grove. In 1992, the Dr. Taira Family had donated 82 ume (flowering Japanese plum) trees and an authentic Tsuku-bai. The trees were planted by Kodo Matsubara, Landscape Designer, in an undeveloped ½ acre area that appends the Westside of the Garden, just west of the parking lot.

Since that time, the trees have grown to maturity, and when in bloom during the months of January and February are a focal point in the Garden. Their blooms appear in colors of white, pink, red and magenta, and give off a most delightful aroma. When the blossoms fall to the ground (because of inclement weather) they cover the grove like a patchwork quilt, with many local artists trying to capture this unusual sight on canvas or camera. Heretofore, the grove could only be viewed from the chain-link fence in the parking lot, or from the walkway in the Spring Section of the Garden.

Paul Saito, Designer of the Shinzen Garden, donated his services and presented a plan to be approved by the City of Fresno, This plan encompassed a walkway system around and through the grove, a large waterfall, streambed, koi pond, and shelter. Work commenced in the summer of 2000.

Over 300 cubic yards of soil were used to create the mounds, and 80 tons of boulders for the waterfall, streambed, and koi pond were imported to construct the basic grove. The Shinzen Garden Landscape and Maintenance Committee coordinated the implementation of the Ume Grove Master Site Plan. Architect Irv Miyamoto donated his time for the design of the Grove Entrance Gate and the Garden Shelter. Linda Priaulx, Irrigation Designer, donated her time to prepare the irrigation plan, and Fred Biglione, Jr. (Shinzen Garden President at that time) donated his time to coordinate the construction of the Garden pathway system and Garden structures.

The Local Conservation Corps provided free labor and some of the funds for materials used on this project. Steve Gilbank, Landscape Contractor representing Talons Landscape Development, Inc. provided the supervision for the waterfall, streambed and koi pond. Basic funding for the construction of the Grove was provided by the Fresno Regional Foundation Grants. Donation for the Garden Shelter was provided by the family of Terry Hinkley, a deceased member; and donation for the Entrance Gate was provided by the family of Kaoru Kamikawa.

Credit must be given to the Japanese American Citizens League; the Bertha and John Garabedian Charitable Foundation; and many individual members of the Shinzen Garden's donations, for their annual gifts and grants to the Garden. This money is used for operating expenses. All the above could not have been accomplished without the cooperation and assistance from the City of Fresno.

History of the 'Big' Lantern



As a symbol of goodwill and friendship, a Japanese stone lantern was given to the City of Fresno by the Japanese business association in August, 1939. Community business leaders from the Japanese Young Men's Association (Japanese Y.M.A.) stood proudly with the stone lantern in front of the lake at Roeding Park for its original dedication, as shown in the photo. Ironically, after World War II when the community inquired about the whereabouts of the stone lantern, the city staff claimed that it had been discarded during the war. Nearly 60 years later, the lantern was recovered from the backyard of an estate and has since been re-dedicated in the Shinzen Japanese Friendship Garden at Woodard Park in Fresno

The 11 ft, 3 ton lantern that stands in the autumn section of the Shinzen Friendship Garden, kitty-corner to the double-moon bridge is known as the "Big Lantern." It was originally installed on the island in Washington Lake in Roeding Park as a gift from the Fresno County Japanese Young Men's Association to the City of Fresno on September 12, 1939. It stood as a symbol of pride, courage and friendship.

Time passed and the lantern's beauty enhanced the Japanese Garden in Roeding Park. Unfortunately, peaceful times turned into memories, as did this special lantern. There was no accounting of what had become of this art treasure.

Our own Board member, Art Munger remembered this lantern and made inquiries of its fate. Through his efforts and those of Roy Oto, who was one of the original Japanese Young Men's Association members, the lantern was discovered in someone's back yard. Somehow, it was returned to its rightful owner, the City of Fresno.

On the warm morning of August 7, 2001, the lantern was re-dedicated in a ceremony presided by the then Mayor Alan Autry, and sits in its permanent home, the Shinzen Friendship Garden. In attendance were the sons and daughters of the original donors and the last living member of the Japanese Young Men's Association, Roy Oto, who also was the Garden's first Landscape and Maintenance Director.

Once again, the lantern stands as a symbol of pride, courage and friendship.

The Rest of the story

As related by Art Munger, a long-time resident of the Fresno area and Board member of the Garden

In regards to the big lantern, there was much publicity some years ago when we searched for it. Off the top of my head here is some information that I remember. Far back in the late 40s, I and friends used to fish and turtle hunt in Roeding Park and used to meet with Curley Blocker the 1st zoo keeper (who gave us a real live baby Crocodile), but that's another story. While "messing around" Lake Washington in the park, we would climb the (very steep) wood moon bridge to the island in the lake. The island is just south of the Story Land today. The multistory wood pagoda had disappeared from the island by this time. However Shinzen's big lantern **was there** and as kids we used to climb to the top and play Tarzan. There also was a red Tory "gate" structure in the lake just to the SW of the island. It soon rotted, fell over and floated away. I know because we used to "sail wild cats" on some of the timbers, they loved the ride!

Skip to the late 40s or early 50s. On one of my bike trips to the lake, I saw the bridge and lantern gone, but saw/found the carved granite **top of the lantern in the mud** at the side of the lake. I recognized it and the fact that my father liked Japanese Gardens also. So....I tried to get it up and out of the mud and onto the back of my bike. It was heavy and I almost made it. But after many tries it flopped back in the mud at the side of the lake. I sometimes wished I could had taken it home and could have produced it when the City placed the wooden one on top.

Skip to sometime about 10-15 years ago. With my interest in Shinzen I thought it would be great to have that lantern back to the people of Fresno in Shinzen. So the inquires began...where did it go? Well, people started giving us information and with police captain Ranes and his Japanese ancestry wife interested also...names and locations popped up. I and Roy Otto (who I think is the man on bottom row just to left of the lantern) took my truck and went to many homes around Fresno, where he would jump out run up to a house and peer over the fence to see if he could see it. Also John Roehl (bonsai person) remembered seeing it over the fence in his neighborhood. (*I even got a phone call saying "be careful it's possible to have kneecaps broken"*). Someone on our Board at that time (long gone now) gave that information!! All these leads, however, did not pan out.....until I think, Captain Ranes and maybe using a police helicopter found our lantern in someones's backyard!!! I think by using a crane over the fence, the lantern was retrieved! I have photos of most of the pieces laying in the back police yard near Marks ave. The top was not there. The Bee picked up the story sometime along the line and I think said that the person who had it....said that if the police had knocked on his door, he would have given it to them...BUT since they trespassed...he would sue the City. I think he did sue and the City did settle for a large amount which was not revealed. (I think the "grapevine" said \$50,000 or more!) The person who had it also told the Bee that past Mayor Dunn getting a haircut in the same barber shop...gave the lantern to him since the City had no use for it. But no paperwork could be found.

Skip a few more years. Someone in the City had the entire antique lantern sandblasted and Beer Monuments and had the carved lettering placed back onto the lantern. I attained a blown up photo of the original photo... of just the top. I think Beer Monuments sent the measurements and photo to somewhere in South Carolina to have it remade. What came back was something looked like a big lollipop and I heard the city may have wasted something like \$4000. So, the City had carved a wood top to be placed on the lantern when it was dedicated by Mayor Autry. I attended the dedication and got to see Mr. Roy Otto for the last time. He was very happy to see the lantern back where it belonged.

Last skip ahead. Our Landscape Committee sent top measurements with photos to the gentleman that the garden purchased our new carved lanterns from. I think he sent materials to China, where the current top was carved. I think it looks good and what also looks good is that algae, fungi, and some lichens are now beginning to add an antique patina back on our lantern, but it may take another hundred years to get the original look back!!.