



PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT For Immediate Release

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Community Meetings to be held for the Issei Commemorative Garden Project

San Francisco (July 1, 2016) – Two community meetings will be held to discuss the creation of a Japanese Zen rock garden at the historic Cottage Row Mini-Park to commemorate the Issei, first generation of Japanese in America, who first established Japantown. This is a program of the 110th Anniversary of San Francisco's Japantown being celebrated throughout this year. The first meeting will be held Thursday, July 7 at 4:00 p.m. and the second on Thursday, August 11 at 6:00 p.m., both at the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California (JCCCNC) at 1840 Sutter Street in San Francisco.

The goals of the Issei Commemorative Garden Project are 1) to create the first permanent public recognition of the Issei generation that established Japantown in the Western Addition in 1906; 2) to instill a sense of Japanese cultural heritage in the park that will connect the neighborhood to the history and spirit of the Japantown community; and 3) to create the first Japanese streetscape garden that will become an educational and cultural destination point in Japantown for locals and tourists.



The Cottage Row Mini-Park is located on Sutter Street between Webster and Fillmore Street. The Bush Street-Cottage Row Historic District, which includes the mini-park was nominated and became part of the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. The proposed location of the Issei garden would be the front of the park facing Sutter Street (approx. 30' x 25'). Having the Issei garden situated in front can also best reflect the historic designation of the park on the National Register. The garden will also draw locals and tourists alike to the park and become a photo and social media site for Japantown.

Shigeru Namba is one of the foremost Japanese landscape gardeners in the United States and will be the Principal Landscaper for the project. One of his projects includes the private estate of Larry Ellison, which is one of the largest Japanese gardens in North America. Namba also collaborated with landscape gardener Isao Ogura to create the Tanforan Memorial Garden located at the Tanforan Shopping Center in San Bruno, the former site of the Tanforan Assembly Center where Japanese Americans from Japantown were first evacuated to at the start of WWII, prior to being sent to concentration camps. Together, they also partnered on the Garden of Remembrance located at San Francisco State University that recognizes the 19 Nisei students forced out of the school and 120,000 Japanese Americans forced into concentration camps. Namba and Ogura are members of the Professional Gardeners Federation of Northern California.

This year 2016, marks the 110th anniversary of Japantown in the Western Addition. In May of 1906, just one month following the devastating San Francisco Earthquake, the Issei sought to identify a neighborhood in which to create a Japanese community. Within a matter of months hotels, restaurants, grocery and other retail stores started to spring up in the Western Addition or Fillmore District as it was also referred to back then. Over the decades, the Japantown community flourished in the Western Addition encompassing thirty square blocks and over two hundred small businesses. The Nisei, or second generation of Japanese Americans, were born around the 1920's. In order to address the growing family needs, the Issei built community institutions including language schools, churches, temples and community facilities such as the Japanese YMCA (today the Buchanan YMCA), Japanese YWCA (Nihonmachi Little Friends) and the Japanese Salvation Army building, (now the Chinese Consulate).

Japantown continued to thrive until WWII when President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which forced all Japanese Americans living on the west coast to concentration camps. In a matter of a couple of months, what was once a thriving Japantown community became a ghost town. Houses became abandoned, businesses boarded-up and churches and temples stood empty. In 1945, as the war came to an end, Japanese Americans were allowed to leave the camps and return to their homes and community. In San Francisco just as the Japantown community started to re-establish itself, in 1948 the City began plans to condemn Japantown and the Western Addition. This plan would force homeowners and businesses to sell their property to the Redevelopment Agency (RDA) for demolition and redevelopment. Over 60% of Japanese Americans living and conducting business in Japantown lost their property and were forced to leave the community again. For many in the community, this was viewed as the second evacuation of Japantown.

In the 1960's and 70's Redevelopment Agency not only demolished almost every home and business in Japantown; they also uprooted every tree and plant in the community. The Cottage Row Mini-Park is the only remaining open green space left in Japantown making it the ideal location for a garden to commemorate the Issei who established Japantown 110 years ago.

The timeliness of this project is imperative. Not only is it the 110th anniversary of Japantown this year, but more importantly, the Nisei, or second generation of Japanese Americans, are well into their late eighties and nineties with a substantial percentage of them having already passed away. Being able to dedicate the garden in the place they once lived and played would be of great significance before they pass away.

For more information about the Issei Commemorative Garden Project, or the community meetings held July 7 and August 11, visit www.jcccnc.org or contact Aya Ino at (415) 567-5505 or email aino@jcccnc.org.

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About the 110th Anniversary of San Francisco's Japantown

San Francisco was the first entry point for Japanese to America. Beginning in 1860 with the arrival of the Kanrin Maru ship with a diplomatic embassy delegation to formally establish relations between the United States and Japan, San Francisco soon became home to the first Japantown including the establishment of the first Japanese Consulate in America. It also became the birthplace of the first Japanese American community organizations including the first Boy Scout Troop, baseball club, YBA, YMCA, YWCA, Salvation Army, Buddhist temple and Christian Church in America. San Francisco's Japantown, or Nihonmachi, is one of only three Japantowns that remain in the United States, the other two being in Los Angeles and San Jose. The year 2016 is San Francisco Japantown's 110th Anniversary celebration in the Western Addition.