



Garden Legacy

Trees change and grow and amaze us with their grandeur. They are the living tissue that binds us to the thoughts, ideas and creative will of those who came before us. Someone planted this tree; someone dug into the earth and spread the roots in the soil. Someone planted the seed, watched as the tiny sprout emerged. We can put our hands on the trunk, now wider than any of us can reach around. By celebrating these trees, we are holding this legacy in our hands for future generations. I invite you to explore with me the layers of history and meaning that grow on this campus.

SU landscape history

In 1931, Raymond Nichols S.J. came to what was then known as Seattle College. He was one of four Jesuits known as “The Four Horsemen of Loyola”, charged with the task of revitalizing the college and bolstering flagging enrollment. This was the year that the college separated itself from Seattle Preparatory School and returned to its original site, the Garrard building, which had been abandoned for 11 years.

Fr “Greengrass”, as Nichols later became known, brought with him a love of landscape in the grand European style that he had explored while studying in Belgium. He came to a campus that consisted of a few small rundown buildings scattered amongst an urban grid work of streets. His vision was to unite the campus with large majestic trees and great sweeps of lawn. This vision began taking shape as the Administration building was completed in 1941. During the early 1940’s, Fr Nichols designed and installed the lawn, rose garden, and stairway up to the Madison and Broadway corner, west of the Administration building. This garden was used for the Rosary Walk, a tradition for many years at Seattle University. Today, the stairway and rose garden are gone and the lawn provides a counterpoint to the many mature conifers that create a protective bowl around this contemplative space. The statue of Mary in the southwest corner is a reminder of the garden’s early use.

In the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, Fr Nichols began working with Fugitaro Kubota. Kubota had emigrated from Japan in 1907, bringing his own vision of landscapes and gardens and how they inspire humankind, quiet the mind, and enrich the spirit. His genius was in his use of texture, color, and form to weave a tapestry; layer upon layer of foliage, tree trunks, limbs, moss, and rock.

Fugitaro Kubota established the Kubota Gardening Company in 1923. By 1927, he had purchased five acres in the Rainier Beach neighborhood of Seattle where he established his display gardens, family home and nursery. The seeds from the many revered trees that he had gathered when leaving his homeland in Japan finally had a place to grow and mature.

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The Kubota family suffered internment at Camp Minidoka in Idaho during WWII. The business and gardens were abandoned for four years until 1947 when the family returned and began to put their lives back together.

With Fr Nichols' support and collaboration, Kubota designed and installed landscapes that would unify the grounds, knitting together the varied architectural styles of this newly emerging campus. Many of the large pines that grace the campus today are grown from seed that Kubota brought in his pockets from Japan. He also brought in large trees that he salvaged from construction sites throughout the region. The distinctive Granite and Basalt stones that presently anchor the gardens on campus were selected and brought from the Cascade Mountains by Kubota. He worked with his sons Tommy and Tak and later with his grandson, Allen. Together they created a family legacy on the Seattle University campus that we walk and breathe amongst today.

When visitors come to campus, when parents walk through for the first time with their students, they marvel at "the trees!". They are trees And they are so much more.

To find a brief description and location of the remaining Kubota gardens on campus, please visit the Grounds website and follow links to Campus Gardens.

