

THE HANNAH CARTER JAPANESE GARDEN: A HIDDEN L.A. TREASURE

by Lanna Pian

UCLA's Hannah Carter Japanese Garden at 10610 Bellagio Road, Bel-Air, is imported, Japanese-built, with the traditional Japanese tile roof and white painted solid walls, located on 1.5-acre hillside lot.

This site was first developed as a Hawaiian garden in 1927 by A.E. Hanson, on the Harry Calandar Estate. Photos depict a wooden patio observation deck, waterfall with lush ferns around it. A.E. Hanson (1893-1986) also designed gardens for Harold Lloyd in Beverly Hills, Archibald Young in Pasadena, La Toscana in Montecito, Doheny Library at USC, and gardens in Palos Verdes. Remnants of the Hanson's original estate design, including its 20-foot waterfall, remain on the west side slope.

It was originally created by Mr. and Mrs. Gordon G. Guiberson, who made two trips to Japan to study famous gardens. It was dedicated to the memory of Mr. Guiberson's mother, Ethel L. Guiberson, organizer of the Beverly Hills Garden Club, in the early 1930s.

The Guibersons had commissioned renowned landscape architect, Nagao Sakurai of Tokyo and garden designer Kazuo Nakamura of Kyoto, to create their garden, built between 1959 and 1961. It carries on the rich Japanese tradition of naturalistic placing of stones, water and evergreen plants in a subtle yet symbolic setting. Many of the rocks, water basins, stone lanterns, carved stones, and pagoda were selected by the Guibersons in Japan and shipped to California. All the trees and plants belong to species that grow in Japan, except the California live oaks that predated the Japanese Garden. Much of it was built in Japan, disassembled, and reassembled on site by Japanese and local craftsmen.

Through a series of written agreements starting in 1964, Edward Carter, Chairman of the Regents of University of California, and his wife, Hannah Locke Carter, titled the garden and adjoining Carter residence to UC, with survivor lifetime tenancy of the home and an agreement by UCLA to keep the Japanese Garden and maintain it in perpetuity. In 1965 UCLA took title to the property.

In 1969 heavy rains and resulting landslides damaged the garden. UCLA Professor of Art and campus architect, Koichi Kawana, rehabilitated it, funded by friends of the UCLA gardens.

In 1982 it was officially renamed the UCLA Hannah Carter Japanese Garden. At the same time, establishment of an endowment via eventual sale of the donated residence was proposed by the donors in order to maintain the Japanese Garden indefinitely.

Owned by UC since 1965 and managed and maintained by UCLA, it has been open until recently for public tours on a limited basis, due largely to lack of parking in the residential neighborhood.

When the University of California fell on hard times, UCLA and the university's regents decided in 2009 to put on the market the garden and the Carter residence. There was opposition from UCLA students and other supporters, but in September, 2010 a judge agreed with UCLA's reasoning, that it was not being used for UCLA's primary mission of teaching and research, and citing rising maintenance costs, deferred maintenance and lack of visitors due to limited parking, to release UCLA from the "perpetuity" agreement to maintain the Japanese Garden and cleared the way for the sale of both the garden and residence. In November, 2011, UCLA announced plans to sell. On March 3, 2012 following removal of valuable art objects from the garden by UCLA to the main campus in January of 2012, UCLA listed the property for sale. Separate bids are being accepted for the adjoining residence.

APPROACHING 2012 OLYMPIC GAMES

As we approach July 27, Opening Ceremonies for the 2012 Olympic Games in London, it is good to remember that the Modern Olympic Games, under the auspices of the International Olympic Committee, started in 1896 in Athens in the Panathenaic stadium. They featured 14 nations, 241 athletes, 43 events. Records indicate that the original games were held in 776 B.C., with one event, a foot race of about 200 yards outside the town of Olympia in Greece. Things do change sometimes.