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THE  
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COVER PHOTO: Kōyasan, a village of mountain temples in Wakayama Prefecture, has been a Shingon Buddhist center for 1200 years. After studying in China, Kūkai first established it as the headquarters of his esoteric Buddhist sect. Today temple inns offer lodging for Buddhist practitioners as well as tourists. Buddhist vegetarian cuisine (*shojin-ryori*) is prepared with seasonal ingredients and remains popular. *Michael Sewell*

OPPOSITE: The Milton Toole, Jr. garden. (Mackinac Island, IL). *Mackinac State Historical Parks*

CONTRIBUTOR'S PAGES (next):  
Detail of Sugigoke. *Ellen Altfest*

Dear readers,

Having reached a numerical milestone in this, the 10th issue of the NAJGA Journal, I hope you will discover continuity in the strength of its content, welcome new precedents in its aesthetic layout and material design, and allow perhaps one transgression—the first non-North American garden to be featured on the cover. A recently introduced highlight is a photo essay, where a professional photographer's images grace both our cover and, new this year, the centerfold. Michael Sewell's images of Japanese gardens capture what so inspires us in their creation and cultivation in North America, so we thought it appropriate to feature one occasionally.

Delving within this issue you will find two rich, extended discussions: Devanney Haruta's first NAJGA contribution, a fascinating exploration of sound (and/or its absence) in gardens, and Andrew R. Deane's latest in his series of deeply researched analyses, here on the design principle of *mitate-mono*. Maryann Lewis offers us expert instruction on the art of pruning. And we also include two essays, each drawn from recent books, the first by Beth Cody and the other by Takeshi Moro, that highlight the contributions of Japanese Americans to North American gardens and bonsai respectively. Our final full-length piece is painter Ellen Altfest's meditation on the moss at Enri'an, executed on the page in prose and on the canvas as well. The issue concludes with a review of Cody's book by Christian Tagsold and a remembrance for our friend, Martin J. Mosko.

Two years ago, I accepted the daunting role as editor of the NAJGA Journal because it provided the opportunity to enhance its content, presentation, and production process. Given the visual nature of the medium, I wanted to emphasize images, printing edge-to-edge and across the gutter, soliciting a photo essay for every issue, and developing a representative design aesthetic for the layout. While we made some progress with the layout last year, the printing and binding of the 2022 Journal did not meet our standards. So we turned to Matt Miali and the staff at B+B Printing in Portland, OR. This year I was able to hand-select the weight and finish of our paper stock; invest in offset printing to ensure excellent print contrast and color separation; and institute a series of final proof and print checks before production and distribution. These checks have not yet occurred at the time of writing—I must submit this essay first! But I have every confidence that, thanks to Rachel Beckwith's design and B+B's integrity and expertise, this year's Journal will set the standard for years to come.

Looking ahead, we once again invite the submission of full-length articles, book reviews, and photo essays (collaborations, as between professional photographers and poets, are welcome). We hope you enjoy this issue.

DAN HIRSHBERG, Ph.D., Editor

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The Journal is published annually by the North American Japanese Garden Association (NAJGA).

We welcome feedback from readers. You may e-mail [info@najga.org](mailto:info@najga.org).

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NORTH AMERICAN  
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# RECOVERING THE WORKS OF T.R. OTSUKA

*by Beth Cody*







FIGURE 1 (previous): A Japanese-style garden built around 1930 for Mrs. E.L. McColm, a wealthy resident of Muscatine, Iowa, along the Mississippi River. This 1930s photo shows garden features markedly similar to those in a number of credited Otsuka projects, such as the simplified concrete lanterns, twig bridge, and the conspicuous porous rock placed behind the rustic torii gate. *Muscatine Art Center*

FIGURE 2 (previous inset): T.R. Otsuka in the 1920s. *Preservation Partners of the Fox Valley*

FIGURES 3 & 4: Two postcard photos likely from around 1920 show the garden of Colonel George and Nelle Fabyan in Geneva, Illinois (west of Chicago). The steeply arched bridge and large concrete lantern were built before Otsuka began work on this garden. He added rock arrangements, artificial hills, waterfalls, the zig-zag bridge seen in the left photo, a tea house, and the planting of evergreens, irises and sumac shrubs that appeared in a number of his gardens. *PPFV*



As a Midwestern garden historian with limited knowledge of Japanese gardens, I never expected to write an entire book about a pre-World War II Japanese garden builder. But in 2021, the Muscatine (Iowa) Art Center asked me to look into the history of their circa-1930 Japanese-style garden (in connection with a planned restoration taking place this year) after I included a section about it in my Iowa garden history book, published the previous year. I discovered that the museum's garden was almost certainly built by an Issei garden builder living in Chicago during the early 20th century: T. R. Otsuka (1868–c. 1940s).

Suspecting that he had built their garden, I located photos of the dozen or so projects credited to him in historic publications and compared those gardens' features with those in the early photos of the Muscatine garden. I found many similar and near-identical garden features.

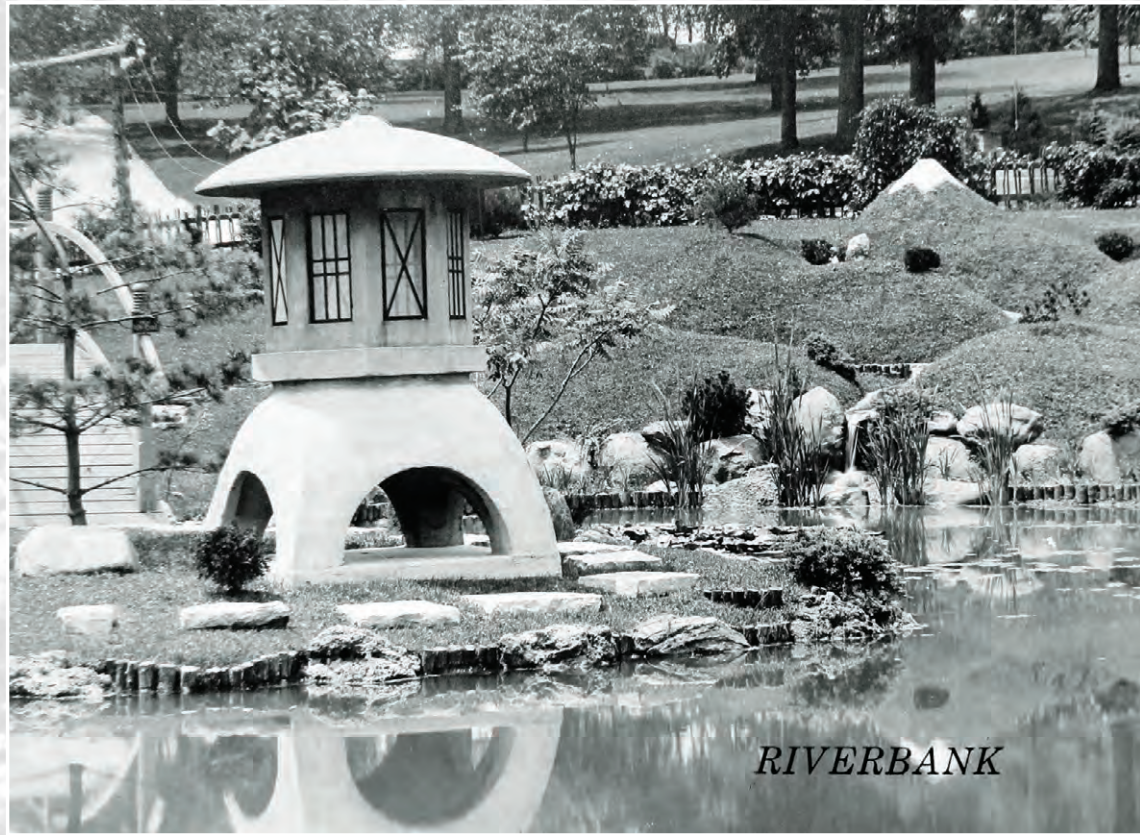
However, when trying to find out more about Otsuka, I was surprised that hardly anything seemed to be known about him. Only a paragraph or two had been written about him in studies of two gardens he built: the Fabyan Japanese Garden (c. 1910) in Geneva, Illinois

and the Stan Hywet Japanese Garden (1916) in Akron, Ohio; together with a mention of his advertisements in Clay Lancaster's *The Japanese Influence in America* (1963) and a few sentences in Kendall H. Brown's articles.

Since I had already begun the process of locating his projects, I decided that it was up to me to write a study of his work. For a year and a half, I followed clues and hints about possible gardens; I searched online newspapers, magazines and photo archives; I hired a researcher in Japan to help me find out about Otsuka's origins; and I made numerous surmises about his life and work. In April 2023, I published my findings in my book: *T. R. Otsuka: Japanese Landscape Artist in the American Midwest* (profuse thanks are due to Professor Brown for sharing with me his knowledge, suggestions and encouragement during this period and for contributing his thoughtful and perceptive Foreword to my book.)

I discovered that Otsuka probably built 50–100 Japanese-style gardens and rock gardens, mostly in the Midwest, over the period of three decades between 1905 and 1935—likely more than any other Japanese garden builder in the US to this day. And as the most





*RIVERBANK*

widely advertised Japanese gardener of the period, he played a key role in introducing Japanese garden style to Midwesterners.

According to his passport record, Tarō Ōtsuka was born in 1868 in the city of Kochi, Japan, and his father, Katsunobu Otsuka, was of the samurai class. Kochi Otepia Library holds a copy of his father's samurai lineage stretching back to the 1500s, as well as maps showing the Otsuka family residence near Kochi Castle dating nearly as far back. After the Meiji Restoration his father lost his 200 *koku* fief, and likely engaged in mining ventures. Taro Otsuka, who was well-educated and had connections to liberal Kochi politicians Kenkichi Kataoka and Shojiro Goto, probably joined his father's mining concern.

It was while working in mining during his 20s that Otsuka became interested in rockwork and began to build rock arrangements, shoreline stonework and garden ponds, according to Japanese landscape professor Keiji Uehara (1889–1981), who met him while traveling in the US around 1920.

Uehara called Otsuka's gardens "unique Japanese gardens." Otsuka likely wanted to innovate artistically

using the traditional materials of rocks, water and plants in his own style of garden rather than traditional Japanese garden styles. He included unusual porous limestone rocks in at least 75 percent of his known and most probable projects. This might have been inspired by the rocks in classical Chinese gardens, which often include prominently displayed Taihu stones from Lake Tai in Suzhou, with their large, almost fantastical holes and cavities.

After marrying his wife, Yoneko, around 1897, Otsuka emigrated to the US in December 1897 and at first worked as a translator for newly arrived Japanese railroad employees in Tacoma, Washington, and then in western Montana.

He probably met Japanese fair entrepreneurs Yumindo Kushibiki and Saburo Arai during this period. Visual analysis of the rockwork (figs. 5-7) in the gardens created by the duo for their Fair Japan concessions at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York (1901) and Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis (1904) suggests that Otsuka likely helped them build those gardens, as well as the Imperial Japanese Garden at the 1904 event. He may have learned how







to build tea houses, bridges and other traditional Japanese garden features from Kushibiki and Arai's quick-and-dirty construction methods, which often relied on local American labor with a few Japanese-style modifications.

After the 1904 World's Fair, Otsuka and his wife moved to Chicago, where he operated a tea import shop from 1905 to 1908. Photos of several pond gardens built of porous rocks and dating from before 1910 have been found in the Chicago area, and he likely began working on the garden of Milton Tootle, Jr., a Missouri banker and bonsai enthusiast, at his summer house on Mackinac Island, Michigan before 1910.

Otsuka probably began promoting his garden business by calling on nurseries, landscapers and real estate companies to introduce himself and show them photos of his projects. By 1911, he had moved on to paid advertising in national magazines such as *Country Life*, *House Beautiful* and *The Garden* to let potential clients know about his garden services.

The 1910s were likely Otsuka's busiest period, when he built probably at least a dozen Japanese-style gardens, plus an unknown number of rock gardens. Around 1910, he began working on the garden of Colonel George and Nelle Fabyan on their estate in Geneva, Illinois (figs. 3-4), a project he continued to add to for at least a decade. His most prominent project may have been his work with landscape architect Warren H. Manning in the garden of F.A. Seiberling (founder of the Goodyear Tire Company) and his wife, Gertrude, at their large estate, Stan Hywet (Akron, Ohio), in 1916 and 1917 (fig. 14).

During the 1910s, Otsuka built Japanese-style gardens for Mr. and Mrs. Louis F. Swift in Lake Forest, IL;

Comparison of Otsuka's unusual rockwork at three sites. He used porous limestone in at least 75 percent of the projects attributable to him.

FIGURE 5 (left): Milton Tootle, Jr. garden in Mackinac Island, MI. *Mackinac State Historic Parks*

FIGURE 6 (top right): Fair Japan Garden (1901). *Arnold, Official Views of Pan-American Exposition/Wikimedia Commons*

FIGURE 7 (bottom right): Imperial Japanese Garden (1904 World's Fair). *St. Louis Public Library*









Mrs. Clarence LeBus at her horse farm, Hinata, in Lexington, KY; Mr. and Mrs. E.L. King at their summer home in Homer, MN (fig. 12); the immensely wealthy art collector Mrs. Edward Morris in Chicago (fig. 13); and Joy Morton in Lisle, IL (now the Morton Arboretum). In 1918, he built a public Japanese-style garden and rock garden in Peoria's Laura Bradley Park.

In 1915, he probably worked on an extension of the well-known Sonnenberg Japanese Garden of Mary Clark Thompson in Canandaigua, NY.

After 1920, Japanese-style gardens began to fall out of vogue in the US (although this was less so in the Midwest where they had taken longer to become accepted). During that period Otsuka likely built far more rock gardens, which were increasing in popularity. He did build a Japanese-style pond garden at the French Lick Springs Hotel in Indiana around 1920, and probable projects in Oklahoma and Florida (the Otsukas began wintering in Miami in the 1920s). Otsuka's last projects in the 1930s probably included the McColm garden in Muscatine, IA and the finishing of Ethel Buell's garden in Muskogee, OK. He certainly built the gardens around the official Japanese pavilion at the 1933 Century of Progress World's Fair in Chicago; and he likely helped build the Osaka garden in Chicago's Jackson Park in 1935.

After the death of his wife in Miami in 1937, Otsuka visited California for a short time and returned to Japan. According to Uehara, Otsuka "returned to Japan

alone and later went to China, but his whereabouts disappeared afterwards." No record of his death or burial can be found—he likely died in Japan or China, during or after World War II.

Because Otsuka did not learn to build gardens through apprenticeship in Japan, his projects did not always look like traditional Japanese gardens. His preferred artistic style was likely the rock-edged ponds and waterfalls that he began building in Japan; he may not have built "Japanese-style" gardens with lanterns and bridges until he came to the US, for his US clients, and may have learned the design of those features from his likely work with Kushibiki and Arai.

This probable connection with World's Fair Japanese gardens almost certainly influenced the gardens he built for his American clients. Those highly public gardens (with their prominent bronze crane statues, numerous bridges and lanterns, and the porous rockwork that Otsuka likely contributed himself) influenced what Midwesterners thought "Japanese gardens" looked like. Otsuka then built what his clients wanted, because it allowed him to create the arrangements of rocks, water and plants that he wanted to make, within those gardens.

Otsuka, despite his artistic leanings, was a practical entrepreneur; he could quickly build gardens in a number of flexible styles for his numerous clients: rock gardens of several types, Japanese-style gardens inspired by World's Fair Japanese gardens, and more authentic Japanese-style gardens, either miniature or full-scale in size. He likely did not do much physical labor himself in building gardens but almost certainly supervised local laborers provided by the client.

Otsuka's Japanese-style gardens often contained the following features, in identifiably similar designs and arrangements:

- Porous limestone rocks, sometimes used as single ornamental rocks (such as in the McColm garden), sometimes in fluid arrangements that looked almost "knitted together" (as in the Tootle garden, fig. 4)
- Concrete lanterns cast in a modern simplified style, unless the client already possessed genuine imported Japanese stone lanterns



FIGURE 8 (top): T. R. Otsuka's work for 1933 Century of Progress World's Fair (Chicago, IL). *Ryerson and Burnham Art and Architecture Archive*

FIGURE 9 (far left): Otsuka's work in Laura Bradley Park (Peoria, IL). *Peoria Historical Society*

FIGURE 10 (left): The Swift garden (Lake Forest, IL). *House Beautiful*, March 1919



- Rock-edged concrete ponds with waterfalls (water often exited ponds through concrete water channels)
- Planting that emphasized irises and evergreen trees and shrubs
- Artificial hills and miniature Mt. Fuji replicas
- Gently arched wooden or rustic stick bridges, or zig-zag bridges (unlike Kushibiki and Arai, Otsuka never built high-arched “drum” bridges)
- Tea houses with flared roofs and wood-roofed umbrella resting houses

At least four of Otsuka’s gardens have survived in rebuilt condition: the Fabyan garden (Geneva, IL); the Stan Hywet Japanese garden (Akron, OH); the probable McColm garden (Muscatine, IA); a private garden in Joliet, IL; and elements of the Laura Bradley Park garden (Peoria, IL). Additionally, a beautiful stacked limestone waterfall garden on the Dominican University campus (River Forest, IL), probably his work, has survived intact.

Otsuka is virtually unknown today, despite building numerous gardens throughout the Midwest and his widespread advertising. This is unfortunate; Prof. Brown has pointed out Otsuka’s “diverse skills, impressive adaptability, and gritty persistence... how tenuous, optimistic and even daring was Otsuka’s career,” not least his decision to establish himself in the Midwest when most states in the region had fewer than one-hundred Japanese-born residents.

I hope that the publication of my book will allow Otsuka to emerge from this near-century of obscurity. It is long past time that T. R. Otsuka is recognized as the accomplished and prolific Midwestern landscape artist that he was—a master in the arrangement of beautiful compositions of rocks, water and plants.

Researching Otsuka’s life and work has given me a new appreciation for the beauty of Japanese gardens, and a profound respect for the unequalled skill of Japanese garden builders in the artistic arrangement of rocks, inspired by the traditional Japanese love and reverence for rocks—an adoration ardently shared by landscape artist T. R. Otsuka.

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FIGURE 11 (top): The Imperial Japanese Garden at the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis, seen by 20 million Fair visitors, greatly influenced what Americans thought “Japanese gardens” looked like. Designed by Hayato Fukuba (1856-1921), this garden’s rockwork was likely contributed by Otsuka (see Goto 2007). *St. Louis Public Library*

FIGURE 12 (bottom left): A cleft-like waterfall between two rocks, with a miniature Mt. Fuji at top, in the garden of E.L. King in Homer, MN. Dancers dressed as fairies for a 1916 silent motion picture filmed on the King estate were photographed by filmmaker Ben Huntley in this magical image. *Minnesota Digital Library*

FIGURE 13: (bottom center): The garden pond of Mrs. Morris in Chicago. A cleft waterfall flowed from an artificial hill, transformed into a mountain by a porous peak rock at top. A bridge of rustic sticks crossed the pond, edged with rocks, evergreens and irises, and the water exited the pond through a concrete water channel at bottom. A genuine Japanese stone lantern ornamented the wealthy Mrs. Morris’ garden; Otsuka made inexpensive cast concrete lanterns for many of his clients. *Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago*

FIGURE 14 (bottom right): Gertrude Seiberling in her garden at the Stan Hywet estate, Akron, Ohio. Waterfalls in several different styles were one of Otsuka’s specialties. *Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens*





